

Volume 15

Winter 1998

Number 1

The Journal of Christian Reconstruction



Symposium on
Politics

A CHALCEDON PUBLICATION

COPYRIGHT

The Journal of Christian Reconstruction

Volume 15

Winter 1998

Symposium on Politics

Andrew Sandlin, Editor

ISSN 0360-1420.

A CHALCEDON MINISTRY

Electronic Version 1.0 / 2012.

Copyright © 1978 Chalcedon Foundation. All rights reserved.

Usage: Copies of this file may be made for personal use by the original purchaser of this electronic document. It may be printed by the same on a desktop printer for personal study. Quotations may be used for the purpose of review, comment, or scholarship. However, this publication may not be duplicated or reproduced in whole or in part in any electronic or printed form by any means, uploaded to a web site, or copied to a CD-ROM, without written permission of the publisher.

Chalcedon Foundation

P.O. Box 158

Vallecito, CA, 95251

U.S.A.

To contact via email and for other information:

www.chalcedon.edu

Chalcedon depends on the contributions of its readers,
and all gifts to Chalcedon are tax-deductible.

Opinions expressed in this journal do not necessarily reflect the views of Chalcedon. It has provided a forum for views in accord with a relevant, active, historic Christianity, though those views may have on occasion differed somewhat from Chalcedon's and from each other.

THE JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN RECONSTRUCTION

This journal is dedicated to the fulfillment of the cultural mandate of Genesis 1:28 and 9:1—to subdue the earth to the glory of God. It is published by the Chalcedon Foundation, an independent Christian educational organization (see inside back cover). The perspective of the journal is that of orthodox Christianity. It affirms the verbal, plenary inspiration of the original manuscripts (autographs) of the Bible and the full divinity and full humanity of Jesus Christ—two natures in union (but without intermixture) in one person.

The editors are convinced that the Christian world is in need of a serious publication that bridges the gap between the newsletter-magazine and the scholarly academic journal. The editors are committed to Christian scholarship, but the journal is aimed at intelligent laymen, working pastors, and others who are interested in the reconstruction of all spheres of human existence in terms of the standards of the Old and New Testaments. It is not intended to be another outlet for professors to professors, but rather a forum for serious discussion within Christian circles.

The Marxists have been absolutely correct in their claim that theory must be united with practice, and for this reason they have been successful in their attempt to erode the foundations of the non-communist world. The editors agree with the Marxists on this point, but instead of seeing in revolution the means of fusing theory and practice, we see the fusion in personal regeneration through God's grace in Jesus Christ and in the extension of God's kingdom. Good principles should be followed by good practice; eliminate either, and the movement falters. In the long run, it is the kingdom of God, not Marx's "kingdom of freedom," which shall reign triumphant. Christianity will emerge victorious, for only in Christ and His revelation can men find both the principles of conduct and the means of subduing the earth—the principles of biblical law.

The Journal of Christian Reconstruction is published twice a year, summer and winter. Each issue costs \$5.00, and a full year costs \$9.00. *Subscription office and editorial office:* P.O. Box 158, Vallecito, CA 95251. Copyright by Chalcedon, 1980.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: Editor's Introduction

Rev. Andrew Sandlin 1.

Eschatology

Rousas John Rushdoony 8.

Eschatological Options: A Survey and a Reduction of the Field

Joseph P. Braswell 12.

The Dispensational Hermeneutic

Kenneth L. Gentry Jr. 81.

The Latter Day Triumph of Christ's Kingdom: A Biblical and Theological Exposition of Isaiah 2:2-4

William O. Einwechter 107.

Reconstructing Postmillennialism

Martin G. Selbrede 146.

The Eschatological A Priori of the New Testament: A Critique of Hyper-Preterism

Vern Crisler 225.

The Eschatology of Materialistic Darwinism

Mark Ludwig 257.

How the Church Undermined the Faith: A Review Article of Frederick Beiser's The Sovereignty of Reason

Rev. Andrew Sandlin 261.

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Rev. Andrew Sandlin

*“The truth of eschatology is not a theoretical proposition to be rediscovered scientifically and put on our desks in the form of a book. It is an ever-threatening event to be reconquered on and by faith.”—Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, *The Christian Future* (70)*

A striking development in the history of the church is the extent to which eschatology has occupied the attention of modern Christians. By eschatology, I refer to the biblical teaching regarding the last things. (That dimension of eschatology to which this symposium refers is not individual eschatology, which pertains to the individual's future resurrection to either eternal life or eternal judgment; it pertains, rather, to corporate eschatology, God's comprehensive dealing with the world and its inhabitants in the future and in eternity) Several factors have contributed to this preoccupation with eschatology over the last 150 years or so.

The Dispensational School

The first is the emergence of the doctrine, probably invented and certainly popularized by J. N. D. Darby and his Plymouth Brethren movement, that has come to be called Scofieldism or Dispensationalism. Breaking with over 1800 years of Christian theology, Dispensationalism ruptures the continuity between the Old Testament people of God, ethnic Israel, and the New Testament people of God, the multinational church. Christian theology had always asserted that the New Testament church superseded Old Testament Israel, without necessarily denying a future for a redeemed ethnic Israel *within* the New Testament church. In God's redemptive, ecclesiological and eschatological dealings, the church is the True Israel (Rom. 2:25–29). By contrast,

dispensationalists concluded that the church of the New Testament (they usually mistakenly denied the existence of a church in the Old Testament) was essentially a “parenthesis” in God’s program for man. Ethnic Israel (and gentiles united to ethnic Israel) had been his true covenant people, and when they rejected Christ, he {2} devised an *additional* plan by which he could bless the gentiles. He intends in the future, however, to resume his dealings with ethnic Israel after the New Testament church is removed from the earth.

How is this? This is the point at which Dispensationalism becomes obsessed with eschatology. In order to maintain this distinction in God’s dealings between ethnic Israel and the New Testament church, Dispensationalism posits a “pretribulation rapture.” The translation of the saints spoken of in 1 Thessalonians 4 is to occur not at the Second advent, as Christian theology has usually held, but about 1,007 years before it: That is, God will “rapture” the New Testament church saints before he turns the world over to a shadowy, evil figure known as the Antichrist, a world dictator inspired by Satan who will wreak havoc on the world, especially on ethnic Israel. At the conclusion of seven years of tribulation, over which Satan in the form of Antichrist dominates, Christ will return in power and glory and set up a local, physical kingdom in Jerusalem that will last 1,000 years or so. This is the millennium (Rev. 20). Only at the conclusion of the millennium will there be the final judgment, the final resurrection (of the unconverted, the converted having been resurrected at the *beginning* of the millennium), and the eternal state.

Dispensationalists are convinced that God has predestined the world to become increasingly evil and godless before the rapture and the tribulation era. In fact, the evils of the present world will intensify in preparation for the culmination of evil during the Great Tribulation under the malevolent dictatorship of the Antichrist. This complex and tortuous eschatology tends to inspire an obsession with the immediate future and particularly the “rapture,” the next great event on God’s time calendar. Dispensationalists are continually observing and underscoring what they perceive to be the “signs of the times,” that is, the signs of the impending rapture and tribulation. They usually identify intense or pervasive evil in the world as a validation of this eschatological scheme.

The Consistent Eschatology School

A second principal factor in the modern preoccupation with eschatology is the so-called Consistent Eschatology School.¹ This is a radically heretical view of eschatology which sees Christian {3} dogma as a concession to the dashed hopes of the early church. According to this view, Christ and all the early apostles taught and expected an immediate first century *parousia*, or second advent, initiating the end of the world. The entire Christian community was fundamentally “eschatological.” This expectation, it is held, governed virtually every aspect of their actions as Christians. When the *parousia* did not materialize, however, the church was forced to rethink its basic premises. This rethinking culminated in the Christian orthodoxy of the first four centuries of the church which the church passed on as an inheritance to Christians for all time.² For the Consistent Eschatology School, “primitive” Christianity is intensely eschatological, and Christian orthodoxy constitutes a pollution of pure, undiluted, primitive Christianity. The preoccupation with eschatology is driven by the premise that it was the primitive church’s preoccupation.

The Assault on Biblical Eschatology

Both Dispensationalism and the Consistent Eschatology School assault historic, biblical Christianity: the first in sundering God’s redemptive plan with man, and the second in making liars of Jesus Christ and the apostolic community (not to mention discrediting the anchor of Christian orthodoxy). When we examine the theology, sermons and liturgy of the church before the nineteenth century, whether patristic, East, West, Reformational or post-Reformational, we discover nothing of this preoccupation with eschatology. There is a good reason for this. *The church had never understood eschatology to be anything more than the culmination of God’s redemptive purposes presently at work in the world.* This is the second striking contrast between the eschatology of the modern church and the eschatology of the church for the previous

1. Millard Erickson, *Contemporary Options In Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, MI: 1977), 27.

2. Martin Werner, *The Formation of Christian Dogma* (Boston, 1957).

eighteen centuries. For the great majority of Christians historically, the *parousia* is simply the logical conclusion of God's redemptive purposes in history. It does not signal a novel and dramatic shift in God's program for man on earth. This, I repeat, is the prime reason the church historically has not been occupied with eschatology. Beyond an affirmation of a cluster of the miraculous events of the *parousia*—the final resurrection, the final judgment and the entrance into the eternal state—the church historically has been {4} little engaged in eschatological speculation. This is a fundamental point: The future of both the redeemed and the unredeemed is in essence an enhancement of forces presently at work in history. The evil that wicked men suffer in the present is simply the down payment on Hell, just as the good which righteous men enjoy in the present is a down payment on Heaven. Similarly, the only Hell that the righteous will ever experience is the temporal evil which they suffer in history, while the only Heaven that the unrighteous will experience is the temporal good which they enjoy in history.

The Postmillennial School

The eschatological scheme that most *consistently* takes this orthodox Christian view into account is what we today term postmillennialism.³ This is the view that the biblical promises of the worldwide expansion of righteousness and the success of the Gospel as a result of the divine forces at work in the present age will precede (and not follow) the second advent and the end of the age. Postmillennialism sees the Great Commission not only as the marching orders of the church, but also as the pledge of her earthly success. It affirms the fulfillment of the covenant of Abraham and the church and the subordination of all of God's enemies (except death itself) in time and history before Christ returns to earth (1 Cor. 15). This was the view of most of the English and American Puritans, significant sectors of the Reformed church, and a main segment of the great nineteenth century missionary movement.⁴

Chalcedon, under the leadership of R. J. Rushdoony,⁵ has

3. Erickson, *op. cit.*, 55–72.

4. Greg Bahnsen, "The Prima Facie Acceptability of Postmillennialism," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, Vol. 3, No. 2 [winter, 1976–77], 68104.

5. R. J. Rushdoony, *God's Plan for Victory* (Fairfax, VA, 1980).

spearheaded a resurgence of postmillennialism in the modern era. The Chalcedon foundation is the principal institutional expression of postmillennialism in the Western world. Contrary to the charges of many of its critics, postmillennialism does not presuppose the notion of an earthly utopia preceding the second advent. Nor does it imply universalism—that every single individual will be converted. Rather, it holds that the knowledge of the LORD will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea (Isa. 11:9); the law will go forth out of Zion and the nations will flow into the latter (Isa. 2:2–3); and the preaching of the gospel, accompanied by the energizing power of the Holy Spirit, will be hugely successful, with men willingly submitting to the authority of the entire law-word of God. {5}

Many postmillennialists assume that the church may yet be in her infancy, that by far the greatest days of the church are ahead. Not only Rushdoony and others influenced by Chalcedon, but twentieth century Reformed luminaries like Loraine Boettner⁶ and Marcellus Kik⁷ have ringingly endorsed the postmillennial viewpoint. Postmillennialism is, of course, an eschatological scheme. However, it is the antithesis of eschatological preoccupation because it asserts that God's plan for man and the earth and the future is generated by the forces presently at work in the world: the church of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the law-word of God, and the covenant people of God. For the postmillennialist, it is not the second coming (vital though it is), but the *First* Coming of Christ which secures the success of God's redemptive purposes in the earth. The second coming is the culmination of those redemptive purposes. Christ's death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and present session at the right hand of God suffice to guarantee the earthly victory of the gospel: the second advent concludes that victory in its final reaches.

Modern Anemia and Irrelevance

The anemia and irrelevance of the modern church springs largely from the disposal of this world-conquering, postmillennial vision that fueled Christian culture in this country through much

6. Loraine Boettner, *The Millennium* (no loc., 1957).

7. Marcellus Kik, *An Eschatology of Victory* (Phillipsburg, NJ, 1971).

of the nineteenth century. The modern retreatist has reduced the Christian Faith to an existential panacea, the church to a psychotherapeutic clinic, and the Christian to a self-absorbed religious consumer. Evangelism is limited to tract distribution and rescue-mission work, mere soul-saving. Christians nearly swoon when public figures mention the term “God” in a reverential tone or when a celebrity uses the word “Jesus” other than in cursing. All the while, government schools inculcate blatant atheism and immorality, politicians legislate God-denying law, Hollywood vomits vile antinomian filth, and churches embrace every mystical, New Age heresy imaginable. We observe today the provincialization and, therefore, utter irrelevance of historic Christianity. It has lost its faith in the sovereign Triune God, in the absolute and infallible authority of Holy Scripture, and the world-conquering and world-transforming Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is no wonder that the {6} covenant people of God cower before the Canaanites of the present generation.

However, the church *will*, recover its world-conquering vision. Chalcedon prays that it will recover this vision sooner rather than later. The message of Chalcedon is the message of a full-orbed, historic, biblical Christianity applied to every aspect of life in the modern world. That is the focus of this symposium of *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*.

R. J. Rushdoony, central figure in the revival of the postmillennial vision in this century, initiates this symposium with his article showing that eschatology is not just about last things, but first things—the dominant matters of life. He briefly evinces that postmillennialism is the only major eschatological position that affords biblical meaning to history.

Joseph Braswell, one of the leading Van Tillian philosopher-theologians of our time, lays out a general approach to eschatology, including a summary of the leading modern eschatological options, and presents a devastating refutation of all alternatives to postmillennialism.

Kenneth Gentry is well known for his pioneering work in various eschatological topics. His *Before Jerusalem Fell* presents a compelling case for the early dating of Revelation. In the present symposium, he discusses and refutes the interpretative methodology of the principal eschatological system of our time,

dispensational premillennialism. In addition, he shows how that school of thought is itself progressing and is by no means a static theological phenomenon.

Next, William Einwechter, editor of the *Christian Statesman*, marshals exegetical and theological evidence for an optimistic eschatology—that Christ's church is not predestined to defeat in time and history, but can expect, by means of the power of the Holy Spirit, a gloriously successful future.

All humanistic systems of thought contain an eschatology, implicit or otherwise. Mark Ludwig, scientist and technologist, outlines the eschatology of materialistic Darwinism and shows how the church has compromised with this popular but pernicious view. **Martin Selbrede**, himself a postmillennialist, questions some traditional postmillennial exegetical assumptions and argues that {7} we should take even more seriously the glorious promises that the entire earth will be filled with the LORD's glory before Christ's second advent.

The most recent eschatological heresy is the so-called "consistent preterism," which asserts that all (or virtually all) biblical prophecy has been fulfilled, including the second advent, the final resurrection, and the final judgment. Theological author Vern **Crisler** deftly defines and repudiates this heresy, which eviscerates every vestige of a biblical eschatology.

We conclude with Andrew Sandlin's review of Frederick Beiser's *The Sovereignty of Reason*, notable in that it demonstrates how the rationalism that assaulted and overcame Western Christendom in the eighteenth century began inside—not outside—the church. This key work serves as a warning to all churches and believers that our Faith must be suspended on the Bible alone, and not reason. {8}

ESCHATOLOGY

Rousas John Rushdoony

Eschatology is a word derived from the Greek *eschatos*, last or end, and *logos*, word. It refers to the doctrine of last things. It is thus about purpose, God's purpose, in history, and it is therefore of great importance. Some individuals and some churches discourage interest in eschatology because examples of eschatological thinking have at times been bizarre. However, this is a very dangerous view that outdoes the strange examples of "prophetic" thinking in that it is logically a way of saying that the future, or our goal in time and history, does not matter. We must say that to become indifferent to goals is not biblical, nor is it tenable on any grounds. To deny eschatology is in effect to deny meaning to history. It is a form of religious existentialism, of living for the moment only. It can also be a form of religious selfishness, a way of saying, "Since I am saved and will go to heaven, the world and the future can go to hell." Indifference to eschatology is not morally sound. Normally, eschatology is summed up in three schools of thought: premillennialism, amillennialism, and postmillennialism. Such a limitation warps the discussion because it omits at the onset two very important areas: Jewish millennialism and biblical millennialism.

Jewish millennialism has a long and varied history. It is a perspective often easily and readily caricatured because of some of the extravagant expectations common to some views. Its essentials are what *we* must consider instead. The Messianic age is a kingdom age with a splendid political status and nature. No other kingdom or power will rule over Israel nor threaten it. The alien nations will retain their identity even if and when they become proselytes. Jeremiah 3:17 will be fulfilled, and all nations will be gathered to David's throne and power in a literal sense. Sacrifices and rituals shall be restored, and, of course, the law. The temple

and the priesthood will be central. Fertility and productivity will so increase that one grape will contain more than thirty kegs of wine.¹

Biblical eschatology is neither political nor ecclesiastical, but rather religious (God-centered and kingdom of God oriented). It [9] presents history as a long struggle by ungodly men in revolt against God, seeking to establish themselves as their own god and an independent source of law and morality (Gen. 3:5). History shows man at war against God and seeking to be his own god. In that warfare, the enemy forces will bruise the heel of God's appointed seed, the Messiah, but he shall bruise or crush the tempter's head (Gen. 3:15). Psalm 110, often cited in the New Testament, celebrates the triumph of the Messianic kingdom. Every area of life and thought will be brought under the sway of Christ, not by political imposition from above, but by the conversion of all men and things to Christ and his service. Zechariah 14:20–21 celebrates this total holiness.

Premillennialism is perhaps the earliest form of eschatology in the church because the apostles and the early Christians were largely Jewish. The apostles began with Jewish eschatology (Acts 1:6), but this was in time discarded (1 Cor. 15:23–28). Premillennialism was for centuries covenantal, and a late expression of this was D. H. Kromminga's thought.² After c.1800, classical premillennialism gave way to dispensational forms in the main. Premillennialism began as a continuation of the Jewish hope and, in the hands of men like C. I. Scofield, became only more so, believing in the restoration of the Temple and its sacrifices while strongly antinomian with regard to the "church age." Premillennialism strongly affirms the literal Jewish messianic kingdom and thus feels a close kinship to the modern state of Israel.

Although pietism tends to slight the kingdom of God, millennial thinking stresses it, as does the entire Bible. It can be, as with premillennialism, the literal thousand-year reign of Christ upon this earth. With amillennial thinking, the reign is a spiritual one

1. See Joseph Klausner, *The Messianic Idea in Israel* (London, England, 1952), and Abba Hillel Silver, *A History of Messianic Speculation in Israel* (New York, NY, 1927).

2. D. H. Kromminga, *The Millennium* (Grand Rapids, MI: 1948).

and the church is the kingdom of God. For post-millennialism, the kingdom of God includes every area of life and thought, including church and state, and the reign is a spiritual one.

Amillennialism began with the thinking of St. Augustine, who in some respects is the father of Roman Catholicism and also of Protestantism. Amillennialism despairs of or negates a triumph in history. The City of Man will prevail politically and socially, and thus both the state and the rest of the world outside of Christ will become increasingly apostate and anti-Christ. However hopeful {10} amillennialists may be concerning the future of the church,³ they are pessimistic concerning the world. In time, this essential defeatism carries over into their thinking about the church's future.

A very serious consequence of amillennialism is that its pessimism concerning the world creates an over-emphasis on the church as the only hope in man's future. In this respect, Augustine was the father of the Roman Catholic Church because amillennial thinking sees no hope outside the church. It alone in history provides an avenue of escape from the great floods of evil and it becomes the ark of salvation. Thus, logically, amillennialism leads to centralizing man's hope and efforts on the church.

Whether in Roman Catholic thought or Protestant versions of amillennialism, such thinking leads to a concentration on the church, and the results in any and every communion are ecclesiologies which make the church the kingdom and lead to a very high doctrine of the powers of the church. Protestants wrongly assume that the exaltation of the church is exclusively a Roman Catholic doctrine. Rather, it develops wherever amillennial thinking has a long sway because it centers hopes concerning the future on the church.

Some communions decry all thinking about eschatology and frown on interest in Revelation. To exclude any part of the Bible from study is certainly to limit God's word and must be offensive in his sight.

Postmillennialism has a long but neglected history. Since it has waned in influence in the Darwinian era and its growing gloom,

3. A. G. Hevert, *The Throne of David* (New York, NY, 1941); Martin J. Wyngaardin, *The Future of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, MI: 1955); W. Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors* (Grand Rapids, MI: (1939) 1940).

it is less well known than other eschatologies. Loraine Boettner's works have been the most influential in the twentieth century. The interpretations of biblical texts by scholars such as A. A. Alexander, J. Marcellus Kik, and others, are exceptionally good. The weakness is either an inadequate stress, or a lack of any emphasis, on the instrument of Christ's victory.

How does the victory come about? For premillennial thinking, it is a result of an apocalyptic return by Jesus Christ to "rapture" his saints and then to rule the world. For amillennialism, the church's victory is to save souls out of a perishing world. This same emphasis is present in many postmillennialists. Now evangelization is a necessary part of all eschatologies and it does build up the church, but this does not solve the problems in politics, economics, {11} education, science, work, art, agriculture, and so on. How are all the world's problems addressed? If the world, as for the premillennialists, is going to hell, all that is needed is to save souls from this hell-bound world. The same is the tune of the amillennialists. But postmillennialism sees a continuing world order that serves the Triune God and Christ the King until the last enemy, death, is destroyed with Christ's return (1 Cor. 15:23–28). How is the world brought under Christ's dominion? Evangelization makes of the fallen man a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15). What then is the mandate for this new man? Is it not the original creation mandate of Genesis 1:26–28, and the requirement to apply God's law-word to every area of life and thought? Unless we take God's law seriously as the way of holiness and the way of dominion, we will lose ourselves in vague spiritualizing and impotent gestures.

Eschatology is about final goals, about the purpose of history. It requires, of necessity, specific and concrete means to gain the end, and this the law provides to redeemed man. Instead of a blind fumbling, it gives us the means whereby we and our societies can serve God's purpose.

Gideon was not asked to take an army against the enemy of Israel with only blind faith but with a disciplined and purposeful dedication. Spirituality has been associated for too long with vague aspirations, whereas in the Bible it is closely tied to the life of faith in obedience to the law. Eschatology is inseparable from purpose, purpose in history. The goal of the enemy is the Kingdom of Man. The goal of Christ's people must be the Kingdom of God, ruled

by God's law-word. Eschatology is not only about ends, but also means to the given goal. This is why theonomy, God's law and its rule, is inseparable from God's kingdom.¹ {12}

ESCHATOLOGICAL OPTIONS: A SURVEY AND A REDUCTION OF THE FIELD

Joseph P. Braswell

A Survey of the Field

Defining Eschatology

Eschatology is the doctrine of the last things. This area of theological study has traditionally been concerned with the final state, with the consummation of God's purposes. As such, it has traditionally focused upon matters such as the day of the Lord, the return of Christ in glory, the resurrection of the dead, last judgment and eternal destinies, the glorification of the saints, and the creation of a new heavens and earth. It is especially concerned with what we might refer to as the final state of the kingdom of God, realities belonging to the age to come, and the eternal order of glory. Nevertheless, such a focus involves eschatology with things pertaining to the end times, with events associated with the close of history, and with events immediately preceding the coming of Christ. Along with the last day, the great and terrible day of the Lord, and the new order that day ushers in, the last days are also considered to fall within the traditional scope of eschatology. That is, events accompanying the end of this present age and climaxing history, as well as events belonging to the new age that the second coming ushers in, are considered as eschatological. Eschatology, as a consummate fulfillment of God's purposes, deals with both the close of this age of history and the introduction of the new and eternal state of affairs.

It is perhaps more accurate to emphasize that eschatology

deals with the consummation and fulfillment of what God has been doing in history. Eschatology focuses on the goal of history: that toward which history, as the arena of God's purposes with his creation, has been infallibly moving under God's sovereign direction. Eschatology focuses on the realization of God's intention for the world, his perfecting of his work. More specifically, {13} eschatology is concerned with the kingdom of God. It is concerned with the final and decisive victory of God's kingdom over all opposing and hostile forces so that he eternally reigns supreme and uncontested as the universally acknowledged, rightful King over his creation; and creation—his domain—enjoys the fullness of the blessings of peace and righteousness under his rule. The kingdom of God in its final triumph and eternal establishment is the consummate state of God's work of creation, bringing all things to glorious completion and perfect rest. It is the goal of all God's works.

Defining Millennial Positions

Often eschatological systems are classified and labeled according to their millennial positions. We thus frequently confront the division of the eschatological field into the camps of premillennialism, postmillennialism, and amillennialism. It is, however, instructive and illuminating to utilize other categories of classification alongside this traditional scheme that will serve to highlight continuities and discontinuities among these diverse viewpoints, that will frame issues differently and so enrich our understanding. Indeed, we will reduce the tripartite delineation to a basic contrast of two mutually exclusive positions. But we will do this multi-perspectively, emphasizing that these bipartite contrasts are merely contextually basic (relative, not absolute) and that these diverse ways of framing the millennial question are complementary perspectives of equal validity.

One important justification for this approach is that the traditional tripartite scheme is a case of mixing apples and oranges. There is a categorical mistake involved in the traditional tripartite division that is due to a shift of meaning in the common root-word "millennium" to which we attach our prefixes in developing the three types of millennial positions. As our other perspectives will

show, the three types are not truly on the same level. One of the three reduces to a subset of one of the remaining two, producing a bipartite distinction. Thus, we can contrast millennialism to amillennialism or premillennialism to postmillennialism. In the former contrast, what is traditionally labeled “postmillennialism” either becomes but a species of millennialism (in contrast to {14} amillennialism), or simply a variety of amillennialism (in contrast to millennialism). While in the latter opposition, what is traditionally termed “amillennialism” falls into a subset of postmillennialism in its contrast to premillennialism. Again, these contrasts emphasize different sets of continuities and discontinuities that, taken together, prove mutually illuminating.

Amillennial vs. Millennial

We begin with the contrast of millennialism and amillennialism. Since the root-word “millennium” means “a thousand years” and refers to the five-fold mention of a thousand-year period in Revelation 20:3–7, the traditional tripartite classification scheme misleadingly presents amillennialism as apparently contradicting this passage, as seeming to deny that there is a thousand-year period (irrespective of whatever the nature of that period is, whatever the passage intends by it, and whether it is intended to be taken literally or figuratively). “Amillennialism” literally would seem to denote a position that categorically asserts that there is no millennium and stands over against millennialism whether of a pre- or postmillennial variety.

Now, obviously, any biblically based eschatology must take Revelation 20:3–7 into account and squarely come to grips with its repeated mention of a thousand years. To deny that there is (or will be) this period (whether taken literally or figuratively) would be to gainsay the text, to assert that its witness is false, and to attempt to excise the text as spurious, perhaps by denying that the book of Revelation is canonical Scripture. Yet, we must recognize that traditional amillennialists most assuredly do not do this. They are not amillennialists in such an unbelieving sense. They are Bible-believing and earnestly strive, whether successfully or not, for a biblically based eschatology, one that must deal with this mention of a millennium and explain what it means and to what it refers.

How do they then oppose millennialism?

Amillennialism versus Pre- and Postmillennialism

“Millennium” literally means “a thousand years,” but it can be used as a figure of speech as well. The term has certain connotations beyond its literal sense. Even in our wider and secularized culture, {15} a new millennium suggests a milestone, a turning point, the beginning of a new era. The new millennium is approached with a combination of fear and hope in the expectation of significant changes—a vastly new and different situation. Somehow, going into the new millennium is felt to be qualitatively different than a change from one day to the next or one year to the next. There is a qualitative (and, often, an almost superstitious) significance attached to the idea of a millennium that goes well beyond a unit of time-measurement. It is not surprising that individuals and groups well outside the pale of the Christian church ascribe apocalyptic dimensions to the hopes and fears associated with the dawn of a new millennium.

In Christian circles the term “millennium” often means more than just the quantity of time involved in a millennium-long period. There is clearly a qualitative sense as well as the quantitative sense of a thousand-year period. Obviously, when someone in Christian circles mentions the millennium, we realize that not just any thousand-year period is being referred to, but something more specific: a very definite period with a unique character that sets it apart from other time-periods (even millennia) as of special significance. It is an extraordinary period of time. It is the millennium.

In this usage, the term has a specialized sense; it is a type of technical terminology. The label is applied to signify and convey more than the time-quantity involved. It refers to something more than a thousand-year age, even among those who take the term literally and expect the millennium to last exactly one thousand years. Even among the most ardent literalist the term is used to convey more than the etymology contains. The term as commonly used in Christian discussions—as theological jargon—clearly means more than a thousand years, and that particular feature of duration is often not even uppermost in the minds of those who are

discussing the millennium. Even among the most literally minded, often what is in the foreground of the discussion is the nature of the millennium, certain characteristic features of the period so labeled other than length of time. The term is suggestively rich, evoking all sorts of associations—even associations that are not derived from the text of Revelation chapter 20. Thus, we can say {16} that the associations that cluster around this thousand-year period are not merely biblical, as in the sense of being exclusively derived immediately and directly from the explicit statements of the millennial text itself. They may involve assumptions concerning the appropriateness of associating other biblical passages (e.g., Isaiah chaps. 2, 11, 32, 65) with the this period and considering them as relevant data, as also referring to the millennium and therefore in need of being imported into the framework of Revelation 20:3–7 to synthesize the theological concept of the millennium. Accordingly, we cannot simply say: “The millennium refers to the specific thousand-year age mentioned in Revelation 20:3–7 and is the period in which the events mentioned in that text take place,” because in our discussion of the millennium we may be discussing Israel’s role in the millennium, though Israel is not mentioned in Revelation 20:3–7. Clearly the term has a theological meaning that goes beyond its biblical meaning (which is restricted to the details of Revelation 20:3–7) to allow an importing of data from other, extra-textual sources (e.g., the OT prophets) and so expand the narrow biblical meaning into a richer and more comprehensive concept, connoting more than just what we can derive from Revelation 20 itself.

In such usage, the term often suggests something like a golden age, a long period of peace and prosperity on earth in a pre-consummate age, such as a time before the creation of a new heavens and earth—a period preceding the final and eternal order. Both premillennialists and postmillennialists, though each in their own way, subscribe to something along these lines, expecting a long and glorious period of righteousness and peace on earth before the eternal age.¹ It is just this sort of pre-consummate

1. However, an important qualification needs to be observed regarding postmillennialism and a “golden age.” Sometimes postmils tend to talk as though the millennium is restricted to the future, mature stage of the development of this age. The “golden age” is a very visible and notable, glorious manifestation

“golden age on earth”—a feature common to both pre- and postmillennialists, despite their many significant differences—that the amillennialist denies in his rejection of millennialism. He does not believe in such a period of overflowing supernatural blessings in which righteousness is the dominant feature, in which the dominion of Christ is so visibly and palpably manifest as to characterize the age in such a defining manner. He is rejecting a specific kind of interpretation of the nature of the millennium mentioned in Revelation 20, understanding that passage in such a way that it {17} does not require anything like the millennium. From this perspective, nonmillennialism (= amillennialism) is the opposite of millennialism (= pre- and postmillennialism).

Amillennialism vs. (Pre-)Millennialism

In the early church, the controversy would have to be framed as millennialism versus nonmillennialism. The millennialists (or chiliasts) were exclusively premillennial, and it would be anachronistic to attempt to differentiate between post- and amillennialists in these early centuries. In the early church those whom we label, from our perspective, postmillennialists would be considered nonmillennial, along with those whom we now dub amillennialists. Both post- and amillennialists represent a later subdivision within the camp of nonmillennialism that would

of the fruit of gospel success. It is measured in quality and quantity by both the overwhelmingly dominant place godliness and righteousness hold as constitutively characterizing the period (and impacting every sphere of life, including the cultural, socio-political, and economic), and by the large numbers (in both a relative and an absolute sense) of those credibly professing Christian faith as disciples. Obviously, if we are playing on the “golden age” connotations of the terminology, this usage is warranted in some contexts, but it should not be taken to imply any abrupt discontinuity between the present and this future that is effected by a singular and punctiliar event—a sudden, radical change. The postmillennialist believes that the entire age between the two advents is the millennial period. He is a realized-millennialist who believes that the interadvental period as a whole is an age of inaugurated eschatology, the age of the enthroned Christ and his kingdom, the age of the Spirit. The future portion of this age (the so-called golden age) is the result of a long process of growth and the result of forces at work from the beginning of this age. It stands in continuity with work in the present such that the entire period, viewed from the end, manifests gospel success. The postmil does not look upon the past or present of the church as a failure relative to the final, future portion of this age, but instead views the past and present as a foundation upon which that more glorious future is built.

distinguish subsets of this original antichiliasm (the rejection of the peculiar eschatological tenets of chiliasm).

Chiliasm ascribes a weight and import to Revelation 20 that is absent in anti-chiliasm. Chiliasm made Revelation 20 central to its eschatology, placing it at the very beginning of its framework, making it foundational to its system, while antichiliasm did not. This feature of marginalizing Revelation 20 remains common to both post- and amillennialism in contrast to premillennialism.

To understand this point we might, as a thought-experiment, momentarily bracket out Revelation 20 as though it did not exist as a scriptural text. We might imagine, for the sake of argument, that Revelation 20 was not in the Bible and thus exclude it from consideration in developing an eschatological system. This move would not significantly affect either amillennialism or postmillennialism, for their systems are not built on this passage. It is not a cornerstone of their respective eschatological edifices. Both ascribe very little weight to it, and neither derives much of anything positive by way of literal details from this text. Indeed, it often seems that they only deal with it as an afterthought, simply because it is in the canon. They address it “reluctantly,” merely for the sake of harmonizing it with the systems they have erected from other portions of Scripture. It is clearly not regarded as central and necessary, but stands on the periphery and is only synthesized into their framework at the end. For both it is more a problem-^{18} text rather than a key passage, and its interpretation is not even constitutive for understanding the differences between postmillennialism and amillennialism.

The absence of Revelation 20 would, however, substantially affect premillennialism. It is a critical text, a passage that is essential to premillennialism. Premillennialists require it to provide a time-frame for their view of eschatological fulfillment. Without it they could not posit a preconsummate age after the second coming into which they can fit the fulfillment of many OT prophecies. Without the thousand years mentioned exclusively in Revelation 20:3–7 they would have to refer the OT eschatological passages either to the interadvental period, before the second advent, or to the eternal age, which is what post- and amillennialists do. It is difficult to imagine how there could be premillennialists without Revelation 20.

Thus, both post- and amillennialists are united in rejecting the idea of the millennium as a distinct age situated after Christ returns but before the new creation. Both views understand the millennial period of Revelation 20 to be a symbol (the thousand years having the figurative sense of a very long period) denoting the present interadvental period. Although both admit that the thousand years of Revelation 20:3–7 has to be taken into account, neither allow the millennial period mentioned in Revelation 20 to have a constitutive role in their eschatologies. In this sense they stand together over against premillennialism and can be regarded as nonmillennialists who deny that there is a literal millennium of the sort premillennialists affirm. From this perspective, nonmillennialism (= both post- and amillennialism) is the opposite of millennialism (= premillennialism).

Postmillennialism vs. Premillennialism

This bipartite classification groups amillennialists with those whom we more commonly regard as postmillennialists in a more specific sense. The issue that determines this manner of delineation is the timing or order of events: specifically, the when of the millennial period mentioned in Revelation 20:3–7 relative to the second coming. That is, it classifies in terms of whether one locates the thousand years before or after the return of Christ. Accordingly, [19] a premillennialist is one who believes that the second advent occurs before the thousand years begins, while a postmillennialist is one who believes that the second advent follows the thousand years, occurring after its conclusion. It is in this sense of eschatological sequence that amillennialists are but a subtype of postmillennialists. From this perspective, postmillennialism (= both post- and amillennialism) is the opposite of premillennialism.

Realized- vs. Nonrealized-Millennialism

Yet another way of classifying positions would be to divide the field into realized- and nonrealized-millennialists. A realized-millennialist is one who believes that, whatever Revelation 20:3–7 means, the time of the thousand years it mentions is now, that we are already in that millennial period, and that the events that occur

in that period have been realized in the present age whether in heaven or on earth. Nonrealized-millennialists, on the other hand, do not see this age as the time to which Revelation 20:3–7 refers. They await a future millennium. Both post- and amillennialists are realized-millennialists, while premillennialists are nonrealized-millennialists.

“Optimillennialism” vs. “Pessimillennialism”

This is still another way we might divide the field. The terms are set in quotation marks because, as sometimes used, they do not denote strictly millennial positions. Often, the emphasis is rather upon one’s philosophy of history and, specifically, whether one’s eschatology is optimistic or pessimistic in a penultimate sense.² Given this definition, only amillennialists would be “pessimillennialists,” for premillennialism, strictly speaking, are “optimillennialists” in their positing the (preconsummate) millennium. However, if we wish to be more precise in the application of our terms, then, in order to do some justice to the root-word “millennium” contained in these categories and so provide insight into millennial positions, we might wish to insist that, strictly speaking, only realized-millennialists can be categorized as “optimillennialists” and “pessimillennialists.” Nevertheless, in a loose sense, we might simply say that, instead of the pre-consummate period (and ignoring the idea of an optimistic {20} or pessimistic view of the thousand years of Revelation 20), the attitudes of optimism and pessimism refer to the interadvental period, the time before the second coming. In that case, only postmillennialists are “optimillennialists,” for both pre- and amillennialists have a dim view of the character of this present age and upon what note it will end.³ They do not share the

2. Ultimately, of course, all Christian eschatology is optimistic in that the eternal state represents the final triumph of God’s kingdom. The consummation of history is the ultimate victory of righteousness. Thus, the differentiation of optimistic and pessimistic eschatologies is intended to refer only to the preconsummate period, to the course of history toward its eschatological climax.

3. Later, we shall have to qualify this blanket judgment. There are some optimistic amillennialists, and there is no necessary reason why even premillennialists must view interadvental history in terms of gloom and doom (though as a general rule they do).

postmillennialists' optimism regarding the widespread success of the gospel in converting the world.

Summary

Let us now seek to bring all of this together into coherent statements about pre-, post-, and amillennialists.

Premillennialism

Premillennialists are millennialists in every sense of the word. They are obviously millennialists in that sense which contrasts with amillennialism, since they, along with postmillennialists, understand Revelation 20 to be speaking about an earthly reign of the saints before the creation of a new heavens and earth. They are millennialists in the sense that the millennium—a preconsummate stage of the kingdom of God—is realized and visibly manifested on earth as a righteous reign of him who is the ruler of the kings of the earth. However, in contrast with both the postmillennialist and amillennialist views, they expect Christ to establish a theocratic kingdom that—like old covenant Israel—is geopolitical in nature. It is also in contrast to post- and amillennialism as the preconsummate kingdom comes only after Christ returns and is bodily present on earth.

Revelation 20:3–7 is a key passage to the premillennial system. It is foundational to, and constitutive of, premillennialism. Premillennialists are nonrealized-millennialists, believing that the period to which the thousand years mentioned in Revelation 20 refers is yet future. They also are generally pessimistic about the prospects of the interadvental age.

Postmillennialism

Postmillennialists are a qualified type of millennialists. They do not hold to the same type of millennium as the premillennialists, {21} differing with premils over the nature of the millennium. However, they do see it as manifested on earth, though in their view its blessings are the result of the gospel, not the bodily presence of Christ. It is thus a reign of righteousness and peace effected by persuasion (i.e., spiritual conversion) and the

regenerative power of the Spirit, not by Christ's imposing his will by law in an overwhelming and compelling display of brute force as a king who is simply like other political rulers only of greater power. In this sense, it is a "grassroots" or "from-the-bottom-up" submission to the reign of Christ, rather than an imposition of that reign from the top down. Further, the material blessings of the millennium flow out of a changed spiritual state and are the fruit of genuine obedience, not merely external compliance. Since postmillennialists believe that this blessed prospect for manifest peace and righteousness belongs to the present or interadvental age and results from forces set in motion by the first advent, (including the sending of the Spirit and the giving of the Great Commission), they are realized-millennialists and, quite obviously, "optimillennialists." They believe that Christ will return only after the millennium and will then usher in the eternal kingdom.

Amillennialism

Amillennialists do not believe in either the millennium posited by the premillennialists or that posited by the postmillennialists. They are realized-millennialists and, as such, postmillennial as far as the temporal order in which they relate the thousand years of Revelation 20 to the second coming. However, they do not expect a "golden age" on earth in the preconsummate order and in general remain quite pessimistic about the course of the present age and the gospel's prospects therein.

Premillennialism

There are two types of premillennialism: dispensational and nondispensational premillennialism. To understand the difference, we must understand what dispensationalism is.

Dispensationalism

Dispensationalism is a form of biblical theology. Biblical {22} theology is an approach to understanding the teaching of Scripture in terms of the process of revelation. It thus emphasizes the various stages and organs of revelation that build up into that whole and completed product we call Scripture, emphasizing the diversity that

comprises the final unity and how the word of God that came at many different times and in many different periods through many different human agents and utilizing diverse perspectives forms one process of a progressively unfolding revelation in history from earlier stages to later. biblical theology thus concerns itself with the history of revelation, concentrating on, for example, Paul's (or John's, or Matthew's, etc.) unique contribution and distinctive witness, or on the OT period in contrast to the NT period, or, in further divisions on the post-exilic period, or the period of the united monarchy, the period of the divided monarchy, the period of the Judges, etc.; and thus appreciating how the diverse parts contribute to the whole that interprets the history of special revelation in terms of various economies or dispensations. These dispensations are the ways God governs the recipients of his revelation in different historical periods, making man responsible in stewardship to the content of what he has revealed for a given period, for example the period of the patriarchs, or the time of the law of Moses, or the time after Christ has come and established the new covenant. Now obviously, any attempt at formulating a biblical theology will distinguish such epochs of revelation and note differences in the content of revelation at its various stages in the progression to the fullness of revelation, the completion of the process of special revelation. Every new revelation in the long history of revelation supplements the earlier and provides new information and new perspectives—additional aspects of the whole counsel of God. Dispensationalism is hardly unique in this respect. However, traditionally, this process was viewed in terms of a singular purpose, in a single history of redemptive accomplishment. God was involved in fulfilling the promises of the covenant of redemption (often referred to as the covenant of grace) to those with whom he had established this covenant (his chosen people), and the various historical covenants mentioned in Scripture (e.g., that made with Abraham) were to be seen as progressive statements of the one overarching covenant that promised salvation. {23}

The point at issue between dispensationalists and nondispensationalists is whether the various epochs of special revelation—the dispensations—truly reflect diverse programs being pursued by God (dispensationalism) or whether instead these

epochs are but stages in a single purpose that God is pursuing in post-fall history to accomplish redemption and thereby reestablish his kingdom (nondispensationalism). Dispensationalists do not look at the historical covenants in terms of such an alleged unity of substance. They instead insist that these epochs are truly diverse covenantal arrangements involving distinct divine purposes for different peoples.

Over against covenant theology (dispensationalism's arch-rival in biblical-theological interpretation), dispensationalism emphatically maintains that the various dispensations are not (and ought not to be viewed as being) merely various ways of administering the single covenant of redemption on the way to its ultimate accomplishment in history and for the purpose of bringing it to pass. They insist that the purpose of the dispensations is not merely to serve such a singularly defined goal of redemptive-historical accomplishment that creates one redeemed people of God—the chosen recipient-people of covenantal application. In other words, the dispensations are not simply intended to reveal progressively this one covenant, prepare the way for it, and apply its benefits anticipatively (under shadow-ordinances and types) in the time before it is definitively established as historical reality in the fullness of time. Accordingly, they do not speak of the one people of God that includes in its company all the redeemed throughout history. The peoples of God are called for different purposes, receive different sets of promises, and retain their separate identities throughout eternity. Specifically, Israel, as the people of God, has a distinct destiny from that of the church. The church does not include the redeemed of Israel (the OT saints) and does not fulfill the calling, or inherit the promises of Israel. God has different programs for each, and these must not be confused.

Since dispensationalists sharply distinguish between Israel (the earthly people of God) and the church (the heavenly people of God) they must read the portions of the NT dealing with the time after Pentecost as discontinuous with the OT's projection of {24} eschatological expectation and that trajectory toward fulfillment of the OT prophetic promises (the hope of Israel) that Christ initially announced when he began preaching the gospel of the kingdom. Whereas the church has traditionally read the Bible in terms of a continuity between the two Testaments, understood as a relation

of promise and fulfillment, dispensationalists understand the two Testaments in terms of a discontinuity. They maintain that the OT period is not the period of preparation for what in fact occurs in the NT. The church is, in their view, a radically new thing—a mystery unforeseen by the OT prophets. It is not related to the fulfillment of Israel's eschatological hope, to God's promises to the Jews, but represents instead a discontinuous intercalation that has been parenthetically inserted into the history of God's dealings with Israel. The church age interrupts and temporarily suspends God's program with Israel, postponing the fulfillment of the OT promises for the time in which God pursues this new and different program with a new and different people. The church age is said to be a parenthesis-age. The two Testaments need to be read in terms of a promise/postponement scheme that projects fulfillment into a future dispensation (the millennium) when God once again turns to deal with Israel, having completed his distinct church-age program (the present dispensation) and removing the church out of history (the rapture).

Nondispensational Premillennialism

Nondispensational premillennialism is therefore a form of premillennialism that does not subscribe to the distinctives of dispensational theology. It does not share dispensationalism's view that OT Israel and the church are altogether distinct entities. Instead they believe that the church indeed fulfills Israel's destiny, inheriting the OT promises. It believes that God is pursuing one program of salvation throughout the history of redemptive revelation and that this purpose is Christocentric, not Judeocentric. In other words, it rejects the idea that the church age is a "parenthesis" and that there is more than one people of God.

It is not clear what purpose the millennium serves in nondispensational premillennialism. Dispensationalism projects the presently postponed fulfillment of the OT hope into the {25} millennium, leapfrogging from prophetic "mountain peak" to "mountain peak" over the parenthetical gap that is the church age to that time when God once more resumes the history of the covenant with Abraham in order to apply at last the promised fulfillment of the OT eschatological prophecies to a redeemed

Israel. However, nondispensational premillennialists cannot justify their posited millennial age in this way, and such a future millennium seems out of place in the eschatology of the church (an eschatological destiny of new creation). In nondispensational thought, the millennium seems to be a parenthesis-age. All that these nondispensational premillennialists possess in justification of their millennial belief is Revelation 20:3–7. They do not have a whole biblical-theologically formulated philosophy of history like what has been elaborately developed by the dispensationalists.⁴ Dispensationalism allegedly provides a consistently premillennial principle of interpretation so that all of Scripture seems to be building to the millennium. The whole of Scripture is read as having a premillennial trajectory whereby the rest of the Bible anticipated Revelation 20. Nondispensational premillennialism can make no such claim.

Obviously, there are nondispensational premillennialists. This is simply a matter of fact. That this is true can easily be factually established simply by pointing out instances of nondispensational premillennialists, e.g., George Eldon Ladd, J. Barton Payne.

However, it may prove to be the case, despite this fact, that nondispensational premillennialism is an anomaly. In principle it cannot be consistently sustained as a coherent position. It cannot, in terms of the logical implications of its rejection of dispensationalism, make sense of premillennial faith. If this should indeed prove to be the case, then we can dismiss it as a viable eschatological option and reduce premillennialism to dispensationalism. It is to that task we now turn.

Perhaps the single greatest problem that must be faced by nondispensational premillennialists is the question of just who it is who populates the millennium. Dispensationalists have no such problem, given their multiple peoples and multiple judgments, but nondispensational premillennialists must deliver a people alive into this period, and seemingly insuperable difficulties confront them {26} in this task All those who were saved prior to Christ's

4. Indeed, the success of J. N. Darby at the Niagara Prophecy Conferences (which were premillennial, but not originally dispensational, in outlook) is attributable to the basis his dispensational theology provided for premillennialism. Dispensationalism became accepted mainly in the service of premillennialism, as a way of warranting it from a global reading of Scripture.

return—whether those who have died and are resurrected at the second advent, or those believers who are alive when Christ comes again—are glorified at this time, possessing immortal, heavenly, spiritual bodies—new-creation bodies like Christ’s resurrection-body. They are no longer earthy, flesh-and-blood beings who marry or are given in marriage, but for them redemption is consummated in glorification. Supposedly, they will rule with Christ in the millennium, but over whom will they rule? It can only be the case that not all unbelievers are judged and consigned to their eternal destiny at the judgment Christ holds upon his return (Matt. 25:31–46; :13:39–43). Some unbelievers are not destroyed but survive to populate the millennium. On what basis are they spared in the judgment (a judgment according to works), if it is not justification by grace through faith in Christ? Why are they sheep and not goats? In other words, do they enter the millennium as unrepentant unbelievers or are they converted at this time? Furthermore, can anyone (whether from the original population or of their offspring) ever be saved in the millennium—during the entire thousand-year period and all its generations? If so, these saved individuals would necessarily constitute a separate redeemed people of God, a people distinct from the church. The church is completed—its full number filled up—at Christ’s coming. The Bride is ready and the marriage of the Lamb takes place at the second coming. The body of Christ is complete and glorified and these millennium saints cannot be included therein, but must eternally constitute another company of saints outside the church in Christ. This positing of distinct peoples brings us to a form of dispensationalism with a redeemed people who bear a relation to Christ different from that of the premillennial saints. Nondispensational premillennialism is thus demonstrated to be a contradiction in terms. Premillennialists are necessarily dispensationalists.

However, premillennialism as such is contradicted by Scripture. According to 1 Corinthians 15:20–55, Christ is to remain seated at the right hand of God (where he now is) until all his enemies are put under his feet. He does not come again until this subjugation is completely accomplished. The last enemy is death, and it is subjected to him and swallowed up in victory when {27} mortality puts on immortality. This occurs when the saints are raised or

translated, when they are made alive with eternal life, glorified, and given heavenly-spiritual—incorruptible—bodies, becoming like Christ. This occurs when he appears (1 John 3:2), and this time of the manifestation of the sons of God is the time of the new-creational liberation of all creation (Rom. 8:19–21). The day of the LORD is the time of the creation of a new heavens and earth wherein dwells eternal righteousness (2 Pet. 3:10–13). At the time of Christ’s return and the glorification of the saints and, with them, the entire cosmos, Christ does not set up a preconsummate millennium, but rather delivers the consummate kingdom over to the Father in the inauguration of the eternal state. With the coming of this day of the LORD⁵ the old creation with its bondage under sin and to the curse has passed away and all things are made new. A millennium between the return of Christ and the eternal state finds no place in this eschatological framework.

Obviously, if premillennialism as such fails the test of Scripture, dispensational premillennialism falls to the ground alongside nondispensational premillennialism. Thus, the above argument can be applied to overturn every variety of premillennialism, whether nondispensational or dispensational. Nevertheless, it will prove profitable to examine the distinctively dispensational case in order to demonstrate conclusively that it also provides no warrant for premillennial faith. It is to this task we now turn.

Dispensational Premillennialism

The dispensationalist believes he lays a more secure foundation for premillennialism than the nondispensationalist premil. He finds the basis of premillennial faith in the covenant made with Abraham and traces it through the Davidic covenant into the OT eschatological prophecies of Israel’s latter-day glory in the

5. It is difficult to see any justification for the common dispensational distinction between the Day of the Lord and the Day of Christ. The terminology is not so easily pigeon-holed into neat categories when one bears in mind that, interchangeable with “the Day of Christ” are but variant ways of referring to the same event are “the Day of Jesus Christ,” “the Day of the Lord Jesus Christ,” or “the Day of the Lord Jesus.” Since Jesus is Lord, these are but different ways of speaking about what the OT referred to as “the Day of the Lord,” and NT uses of “the Day of the Lord” should be classed with the other expressions, all referring alike to the second advent.

messianic kingdom. He appeals to the promises made to Abraham's descendants, to the land-grant, and to the earthly character of the prophecies of the kingdom-age. These, he says, can only be fulfilled in a future millennium.

The problem with this line of reasoning is that it does not take seriously enough (literally) that the promises speak of an everlasting covenant, of a future fulfillment that lasts forever. In other words, {28} a thousand years simply will not do; it cannot be the extent of the future fulfillment involved. A thousand years, though admittedly a considerably long period of time, does not literally last forever. Any everlasting fulfillment must involve the eternal state, the new-creational consummation of the kingdom of God in the eternal age to come. While any so-called fulfillment restricted to just a millennial period (as opposed to extending beyond a mere thousand years into ages of ages without end) falls short of a genuine fulfillment of the everlasting covenant and the promised never-ending kingdom.

However, it does the dispensationalist no good to reply that the fulfillment extends beyond the millennium, that the millennium blends into the eternal order such that there is a continuation of the relevant state of affairs (those fulfillment-realities established in the millennium) which never ceases, but lasts forever. Aside from the fact that this "blurring" would seem to denigrate the significant discontinuity between old and new creation and the abrupt suddenness of this radical change (2 Pet. 3:10-13), this "solution" quite misses the point. If the millennium is not a sufficient condition for fulfillment of the covenants, if the eternal age is also a necessary condition of fulfillment, then how can one argue that the millennium is necessary as fulfillment?

Might not the eternal age be the sole sufficient condition? If so, no detail of the OT covenants of promise that requires an everlasting fulfillment can be appealed to as requiring a millennial fulfillment. One cannot prove that there will be—and must be—a millennium by adducing any promise which cannot be sufficiently satisfied by a mere millennial duration. This fact makes the millennium extraneous to the fulfillment of the promises dispensationalists appeal to in making their case for premillennialism. Infinity minus a thousand remains infinity. Eternity is similarly unchanged by either the addition or subtraction of a millennium. Accordingly,

we can say that the millennium is found to be rather unfulfilling and therefore unnecessary. Contrary to what is frequently asserted by its proponents, we must conclude that dispensationalism does not necessitate premillennialism, and one could conceivably be a dispensational amillennialist.⁶ {29}

Revelation's Millennium

At this point it seems in order to say something about Revelation 20:1–7, an admittedly difficult passage that certainly seems to be premillennial in its eschatological outlook. However, we must recognize that the book of Revelation is full of cryptic symbols⁷—visions wherein some vividly described imagery actually stands for something else, wherein that which is said to be seen by John is not to be taken at face value, but symbolizes (i.e., means) something else.⁸ Given such an esoteric text, we

6. One cannot appeal, as dispensationalists nevertheless often do, to the earthly character of the fulfillment envisioned in the promises to make a case for the millennium. Aside from the fact that this does not resolve the problem of eternal duration (without conceding continuation beyond the millennium into the eternal order), it neglects the Biblical exception of a new heavens and earth. If, to avoid the problem of eternal duration, the dispensationalist appeals to the new earth, he loses the force of his argument from earthly fulfillment to the necessity of the millennium. An amillennialist can speak of earthly fulfillment in the eternal age.

7. Texts such as the book of Revelation and the second part of Daniel (also Mark 13 and parallels) are examples of the apocalyptic literary genre. As apocalypses in form, they utilize the literary conventions of this genre, writing in symbol-laden language that employs vivid and fantastic imagery, etc. To interpret such texts, we must be familiar with the conventions, the rules, governing writing in this particular genre and not attempt to read it in the same way we would read a newspaper or history book. Just as we would not read poetry the same way we read prose writing.

8. When Revelation tells us that John saw a beast rise out of the sea, no one—however literal he imagines himself to be—actually expects that a real beast—a creature exactly and literally corresponding to John's description—will come in the last days as the fulfillment of the prophetic vision. Everyone recognizes that this is a symbol, that a distinction must be made between what is seen and described and what that depiction means and stands for. The beast-image is not to be taken at face-value (i.e., beast means beast); it symbolizes something else, whether the intended referent is a person, an institution, an empire, or some other historical agent, existing either in the past or in the future. It represents something that, in some significant way can be compared to a beast. The beast John sees is to be understood as a metaphor, not as the literal historical fulfillment. Similarly, the whore does not refer to a literal woman but is again a

should bear in mind that sound interpretive policy requires us to interpret the unclear by that which is clear. Accordingly, we must acknowledge that, unless we are to posit the possibility that Revelation contradicts the witness of other Scripture, Revelation 20 cannot intend to teach premillennialism (as per the data we have gleaned from 1 Cor. 15, Rom.; 8; et al.). We therefore must look for an alternative interpretation. However, Revelation itself gives us the key to unlocking its mysteries when the angel tells John that the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy (Rev. 19:10). In other words, the key to prophecy is the gospel, the proclamation that bears witness to, and declares, that which God has definitively accomplished in Christ and interprets what that Christ-event means in its saving significance as the righteousness of God manifested. What is seen must be understood in relation to God's action in Christ as it is announced and explained in the gospel, for the everlasting gospel proclaims the fulfillment of all of God's promises.

The book of Revelation is addressed to seven actual, historical churches in first-century Asia Minor. This fact can provide us with a key to how the original readers might have understood John's point. We are given, either by explicit statement or by implication, a scenario in which there occurs a first and second death and a first and second resurrection. The first resurrection answers to the second death as preempting it, precluding it, and immunizing against it. The second death is eternal death—an eschatological fullness of spiritual death in its ultimate finality as end-state, an everlasting state of death unto God in the age to come. The first resurrection thus involves eternal life, spiritual life that has an eschatological quality as never-ending life unto God and with God (enjoyed in {30} his presence) in the age to come. Similarly, the second resurrection addresses the first death; it is the bodily raising up of those who have physically died, a reversal of the first death. Accordingly, the second resurrection overturns for those sealed with the Spirit-earnest (Rom. 8:9–11) the fact that in the

symbolic representation or metaphor of something that in some way is analogous to a harlot (something that figuratively prostitutes itself). However, if we grant this, why then, when John sees a resurrection, do we assume that this vision refers to, and is to be fulfilled by, an actual, literal resurrection, rather than also being a metaphor?

first Adam all die (1 Cor. 15:22), that the body is dead because of sin. This second resurrection, however, does not in itself constitute the victory of life over death unto immortality; many will be raised in that last day to eternal condemnation (Dan. 12:2; John 5:29; Rev. 20:11–15). The wages of sin remain death (second death), but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus (Rom. 6:23), the last Adam who is life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45), and the Spirit is life because of righteousness. The bodies of those who have the Spirit of Christ dwelling in them will be raised up by God unto final salvation, but they already possess the gift of eternal life (John 6:47), having been regenerated by the Spirit unto new life, spiritual life, and now possess the Spirit as seal and earnest (Eph. 1:13–14).⁹

These churches could quite easily have understood this on the basis of Paul's epistle to the Ephesians, a document available to and most likely possessed by them. This letter (whether written to the church at Ephesus or Laodicea or some other church in the region of Asia Minor) was obviously intended to be a circular letter, making its rounds to other churches in the region. It speaks directly to the matter of the saints already being raised up in Christ and seated with Christ in heavenly places (Eph. 2:1–6). It speaks of their being made alive and translated from a state of being dead in trespasses and sins (spiritual death) by the resurrection-power of life in Christ.

Moreover, there is also some close connection between Revelation and the writings of John, both the gospel and epistles.¹⁰

9. Essentially, Christ's resurrection is the first resurrection. He is the first fruits of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:23), the firstborn from the dead (*Col.* 1:18; *Rev* 1:5). In baptism we are given to die and rise with him, to participate in his death and resurrection as those united to him and found in him. Thus, his resurrection—representing the eschatological resurrection-event and signaling the actual beginning of that end-time raising of the dead—applies to us and includes us, so that in one sense we are already raised and live now in resurrection life.

10. If there is not a common authorship of Revelation and the Johannine Gospel and Epistles, there is at least a historical community connection (the Johannine community) and certain quite evident, shared aspects of the distinctive and characteristic theological perspective—the tradition, the symbolic universe and vocabulary—of that community (what we might call family resemblances). What we have in this relatedness, this family resemblance, might be likened to the difference between siblings and cousins. That is, what the seven churches who are the intended recipients of the Apocalypse have in common with the churches

Clearly, the fourth gospel emphasizes the present possession of eternal life, asserting that those who believe not only will live again after death, but shall never die, having already passed from death into life (John 11:25–26; 5:24–25; 8:51). The sting of death is removed. The decisive victory over death and the grave is had, by now having eternal life and thus reigning in life, unable to be separated from the love of God in Christ but being made more than conquerors through him who loved us. {31}

Thus, on the basis of this background knowledge and theological framework, the imagery used in Revelation 20 of a first resurrection could easily have been understood by the original readers (and can so be understood by us) to mean regeneration, the raising up in and with Christ of those who believe and their being presently enthroned with Christ in heaven. It is part of the new reality introduced because Christ has come (first advent) and redemption is now accomplished. It is the new redemptive-historical fact that the eschatological resurrection-event has, in and with Christ's resurrection, already commenced, the whole being represented and anticipated in this "first fruits" portion of the first begotten from the dead who has conquered death for all the servants of God. The first resurrection is that participation of the saints in Christ's resurrection that they have by virtue of the baptismal union with Christ, being made alive to God. The second resurrection in this depiction is then significant of the resurrection on the last day that is referred to in passages such as John 5:28–29.

What the seer is therefore saying is that, because of the reign of life established by Christ's first advent, even the (first) death of the saints in martyrdom is not a defeat (a real or ultimate death—cf. Matt.10:28–32), but is still a victorious reign with him in life—a gain rather than a loss (cf. Phil. 1:20–23; 3:7–14; Mark 8:34–38)—that can best be summed up by Paul's statement of confidence expressed in Romans 8:35–39. Thus, the souls who were formerly confined to a place under the altar (Rev. 6:9–11) now, because of

bound together by the Johannine tradition reflected in the fourth gospel and the three Johannine epistles goes beyond the common tradition that defines all apostolic churches. The Johannine churches share with Matthean and Pauline communities a unity amidst diversity. They evidence a common source in a more specific strand of tradition (the diversity amidst unity that differentiates Johannine theology from Pauline, *et al.*).

the salvation-historical coming of eternal life in Christ (1 John 1:12; 5:20) and its grant as a present reality of accomplishment to those in Christ, are transferred into that blessed state referred to in Revelation 14:13. Wherein, on the basis of the first resurrection, even the first death does not affect their possession of life and their continuing to live in and reign with Christ.

Revelation 20:4–7 is a message of hope and comfort to the church which will grow from the seed of martyrs' blood, that those who suffer persecution and die for the Faith, if they remain faithful unto death, will not lose out in the reign of life enjoyed by the saints. There will be no interruption in that life. It dramatically depicts the meaning of overcoming (Rev. 2:7, 11, 26–28; 3:5, 12, 21; cf. 1 John 5:4–5) by presenting the dead martyrs as living {32} conquerors (Rev. 15:2) over whom death has no power. The meaning of this first resurrection to those who likely face martyrdom in the time of persecution is the assurance that, in this time of the millennial reign when Satan is bound (cf. Matt. 12:29) and the gospel moves out to the formerly blinded and enslaved nations, those saints who along the way are put to death for their testimony in no way miss out on the action. They, though removed from the earthly scene, still have a part in the victory as it is directed from heaven. It is just the sort of encouragement and comforting assurance that inspired men such as Ignatius and Polycarp as they were led away to the slaughter because of their faithful testimony to Jesus.

Dispensationalism

We have seen that dispensationalism does not really justify premillennialism. We now turn to consider whether dispensationalism provides the way we ought to understand the message of Scripture. Our concern here is whether we ought to see Israel as the center of prophecy or whether we can apply to the church those promises that dispensationalists assert must refer to Israel.

The debate between dispensationalists and nondispensationalists most often focuses upon the meaning of the seed of Abraham that is the referent of the promises. Dispensationalists argue that this must mean the descendants of Abraham according to the flesh—the Jewish people or nation of Israel—and it is a promise of the

land of Canaan and (by later additions) a kingdom centered in Jerusalem where the Son of David bodily sits enthroned as king. We are told that only this view of matters constitutes a literal fulfillment of the promises of which the seed of Abraham is made heir.

It ought to be clear that the NT does not consider unbelieving Jews to be numbered among the seed of Abraham (Luke 3:8). In their unbelief their circumcision has become uncircumcision (Rom. 2:25; cf. Gen. 17:14). God demands circumcision of the heart in order for one to be a true Jew and heir of the Abrahamic Covenant (Rom. 2.28–29). The one who does not believe and heed the “Prophet like unto Moses” that God will raise up in the last days will be cut off from the people (Acts 3:22–23). Although one may {33} physically be of Abrahamic lineage, one has not God for his father unless one proves to be a true son of Abraham by doing as faithful Abraham did (John 8:33–42). Clearly, what God intends by being of the seed of Abraham is not merely, nor primarily, physical descent, but is covenantal in character, being determined by Abraham-like faith (Luke 19:9; John 1:47; Gal. 3:6–9), while in God’s reckoning many who claim to be Jews are not (Rev. 2:9). The many were called, but few are chosen.

In all the NT, it is the Apostle Paul who most fully confronts the question as to just who it is who constitute the true seed of Abraham and as such are heirs of the promise of Abrahamic blessing. The seed is first and foremost one—the singular Seed, Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:16). The law-seed (physically circumcised Jews) are not the seed of the promise (Gal. 3:17–18). But only those—and all those, both Jews and Gentiles—who are of faith in Christ are, by virtue of being found in Christ, (having put on Christ in baptism and thus united to him), sons of Abraham and heirs of the promise (Gal. 3:26–29; cf. vv. 6–9,14). All believers in Christ—even gentiles—are accounted as circumcised with the inward circumcision that truly counts (Rom. 2:26–29; Phil. 3:3; Col. 2:11,12). On the other hand, not all who are from Israel are Israel; not all who are physically descended from Abraham are the children of God and heirs of the promise (Rom. 9:6–8). Relative to the total number of Israelites, it is only a remnant, a tiny fraction of the whole, who will be saved (Rom. 9:27).

The NT is quite united in this testimony. Many gentiles will

come from the four corners of the earth to sit with Abraham in the kingdom, while many Jews will be excluded (Matt. 8:11–12). Gentiles, who formerly were aliens to the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise are brought near in Christ and made fellow-citizens (Eph. 2:11–19). They are as branches grafted into the unity of the one olive tree of the people of God that stems from Abraham, connecting OT Israel and NT church within one single salvation-historical purpose (Rom. 11:16–17). Moreover, the judgment upon Jerusalem in A. D. 70 is depicted in Jesus' sayings as having a certain eschatological finality as the "last straw." It is the ultimate visitation of God's wrath in fullness of measure upon a chronically disobedient people who have at last {34} filled the cup of wrath to the uttermost and have fully stumbled into reprobation and destruction (Matt. 21:19, 40–44; 23:30–36). The divorce is final. The kingdom has been taken away from them and their place given to others.

None of this weighs against literal fulfillment. It is the seed of Abraham that is heir of the promises, but that seed is one physical descendant of Abraham: Christ, who is truly and literally of Abrahamic lineage according to the flesh (Heb. 1:16). The seed-line of the promise has progressively narrowed (cf. Rom. 9:8–13), coming down to just this one son of Isaac (Gal. 3:16) and then expanding from that focal-point as a "nation" created out of his seed (cf. Isa. 53:10; Heb. 2:13), embracing those who are his *brethren* (Heb. 2:10–13; cf. Mark 3:33–35), those who are baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:26–29). Christ is the Son of David (Rom. 1:3) and has ascended to the throne of David (Acts 2:25–36) to bestow the blessings of the "sure mercies of David" (Acts 13:34) upon those of his house (Heb. 4:6). So too, the promise of the land is not overturned or abrogated. It is expanded and enlarged, and the boundaries of the land are extended beyond merely the borders of Canaan to encompass the whole world in its scope (Ps. 72:8; Rom. 4:13), including Canaan. Indeed, according to Hebrews, the promise (and the faith-understanding of Abraham in hope) always looked beyond any earthly horizon to a heavenly city (Heb. 11:9–10, 15–16), even the Jerusalem above as the true Zion (Heb. 12:22; Gal. 4:26) which is the substance of the promise that was merely typified by Canaan. Far from Christians being a distinct people unrelated to Israel, Hebrews tells us that Christians (i.e., those

who constitute the NT church) complete and perfect the company of OT (Israelite) saints and that only together with the NT saints do the OT saints receive the things promised (Heb. 11:39–40).

Dispensationalists go to extraordinary—and absurd—lengths to safeguard their all-important Israel/church distinction, their view that the church age is a postponing parenthesis between promise and fulfillment. In the interests of consistency with their theory some have gone so far as to say that there are two new covenants: the one prophesied in Jeremiah 31:31–34 which will be established with Israel and the one made by Christ with the church which, despite the quotation of Jer. 31:31–34 in Heb. 8, does not fulfill {35} the OT promise. Many, flying in the face of the plain language of Acts 2:16–21, categorically deny that the Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit on the church was a “last days” event that fulfilled the prophecy of Joel. There are simply too many instances of scriptural data which contradict the dictates of dispensational theory and thus necessitate a good deal of special pleading. We are thus warranted in asking whether dispensationalism really offers a truly coherent interpretation of the scriptural story.

We must bear in the mind that what is at issue is not whether there are dispensations or not. Dispensationalists often caricature covenant theology as a monolithic flattening or leveling of the biblical narrative that would de-historicize it by reducing all flow and movement—all progress—into the timeless categories of eternity. They assert that covenant theology does not do justice to the idea of a progress of revelation in history, that it minimizes the diversity of the epochs in the unfolding drama. This charge is altogether baseless. The only salient issue involves the respective understandings of the meaning of those different epochs, the purpose or purposes that the dispensations serve.

Obviously, there are two very marked, epochally significant, pivotal events referred to in Scripture that stand constitutively at the very center of the biblical story. They signal fundamental changes in the God/man relationship and initiate the most radical changes of conomy imaginable: to wit, the historical transition from grace to wrath and the reverse transition from wrath to grace—or from covenant-keeping to covenant-breaking and from covenant-breaking to covenant-keeping. The first of these two pivotal events is that radical transition from the pre-fall to the post-fall situation,

the entry of sin into the world through Adam's transgression. The second is the dramatic shift brought about by the coming of Christ and the accomplishment of redemption whereby God in principle reverses the effects of the fall and restores creation, reconciling the world to himself. There are obviously other turning points, other critical junctures and transitions, but these two events involve a far more radical and qualitative change and are far more decisive in their momentous significance and impact than any other change of economy in covenant-history. Adam and Christ, the historical personages whose actions bring about these {36} epochal events, are the two men who serve as hinges upon which everything turns (Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:45–49). All else in the biblical drama is relativized to, and meaningful only in terms of, Adam's and Christ's historically defining actions. They alone create thoroughly new situations in covenant-history. They are the real hinge-events of biblical theology.

Thus, for example, the period of the law (while surely involving an important advance in God's program, since Paul can divide pre-Christian redemptive history into the time between Adam and Moses and the time after the law has entered upon the scene, (Rom. 5:13–14, 20) still operates in terms of the tragic fact that sin has come and that the world is in a post-fall situation, and it only imperfectly looks forward to the time when God will fully accomplish redemption by sending the long-promised Messiah. The law, for all its discontinuity with the previous period and its newness as a genuine advance in revelation-history, does not effectively overcome sin and bring the eschatological fullness of salvation under a new covenant and a new, second and last Adam. Instead, it actually aggravates the Adamic situation by increasing the offenses and so working wrath in those who remain in Adamic flesh, thus standing in essential continuity with the whole OT period in its cry for deliverance (see Rom. 7:7–25). The Adam-event in the world apart from the law, i.e., both before the period of the law and outside the sphere of the law, stands at the heart of the "damnation-history" recounted by Paul in Romans 1:18–32. However, it is paralleled by the history of the law-people in Romans 2:1–3:20. Paul's juxtaposition of the degenerative course of the gentiles, and the failure of the Jews under the old covenant, establishes that all—gentile and Jew, the entire race of Adam—

have sinned and failed as sons of Adam without difference (Rom. 3:23). Only with Christ's having come in manifestation of the righteousness of God (Rom. 3:21, 26; 8:1) has the situation been effectively altered and a truly new economy established that abruptly breaks with the Adamic order. Thus, the giving of the law pales in significance beside the radical discontinuities introduced by Adam and Christ, for it does not address the Jews' solidarity with the gentiles as participants together in the lot of Adamic flesh under the dominion of sin. {37} The problem with a dispensational scheme is that it essentially places other covenant-historical transitions on the same level with the fall and the coming of Christ as though they are all equally significant transitions. In order to underscore the very real discontinuities that exist between the time before Noah and the time after, the time before Abraham and the time after, or the time before the law of Moses and the time after, dispensationalism virtually disparages the special and qualitatively greater significance of the transition from pre-fall to post-fall and the transition from before Christ to after Christ. On the other hand, covenant theology recognizes that the Noahic, Abrahamic, and Mosaic covenants are decisive moments in salvation-history and that the differences between these economies must be respected. But it subordinates these critical junctures to the covenant that Christ establishes, insisting that the former are significant and meaningful only relative to the full and definitive accomplishment of redemption in the Christ-event, that they are steps forward toward Christ as a center of history. They derive their importance in covenant-history only when interpreted as preliminary and preparatory stages toward that all-significant and decisive moment of God's act in Christ that fulfills them. In other words, the former are merely anticipations of a significantly greater event, typifying or foreshadowing it, and finding their fulfillment in it. They are not new economies in the same sense that the fall was something new or the Christ-event was new. Whatever discontinuities each of the subordinate transitions introduce, there still are present the continuities with an order in which sin reigns and redemption is not yet realized. We must not allow this basic distinction to be blurred in the manner in which dispensationalism tends to blur it with its leveling delineation-scheme.

How then does covenant theology propose that we deal with the

different periods in the history of revelation? What story does it tell in explaining the meaning of the events narrated in the Bible? What sort of biblical-theological alternative does it offer in place of dispensationalism? It is to these questions we now turn in order to understand how covenant theology traces the trajectory of the scriptural narrative and what it sees as the central and unifying theme of the biblical story of creation, the fall, and redemption. {38}

From Adam to Noah

After Adam and Eve fell, God gave a promise about the seed of the woman crushing the seed of the serpent. This is a seminal announcement of God's intention at some future date to overturn what the serpent had wrought, to destroy the work of the devil, and so redeem and restore creation as the kingdom of God. It is, in seed-form, the promise of a new covenant that is sealed to Adam and Eve by God's graciously clothing their nakedness through the shedding of blood, providing the skins of slain animals, animals that died for their benefit. God does not immediately execute the sentence of death upon Adam and Eve, but gives them hope. He allows history to continue so that the seed of the woman may come. Despite sin's entrance into the world, many sons of Adam, through Seth, walk righteously before God by faith in what God has promised.

From Noah to Abraham

Even when wickedness reaches critical mass and explodes into an outbreak of depravity that provokes the revelation of God's wrath in the deluge-judgment, God spares the race through Noah, covenanting to Noah that the still-fallen human race that descends from Noah will not be utterly destroyed and that the world and history will continue despite sin. Noah becomes a new Adam-figure, a new beginning for the race on a cleansed and renewed earth. Yet that cleansing and renewing is only partial, is only a superficial purging and regenerating to ameliorate the problem and prefigure the greater cleansing and renewing to come. The old order under the reign of sin and death continues with the curse upon the ground. In other words, Noah, in his role as an Adam-

figure, is not the second Adam and the true new beginning (the promised seed of the woman); but he does prefigure the New Man. Further, the deliverance of the race that God accomplished in the ark of Noah typifies and anticipates that great deliverance to come through the seed of promise. He does prepare the way for the future accomplishment of redemption and renews hope in the promise's eventual fulfillment in the face of the reality of a world still cursed and a human race that is still under sin. Meanwhile, the mandate of the original covenant of creation is essentially renewed to this {39} "new Adam." His seed is to fill the earth and he is given a promise that there will be no further cursing of the ground.

To restrain sin sufficiently so that fallen man does not destroy himself by his violence, so that a semblance of external (i.e., social) order can be maintained and history can proceed as the backdrop for God's future redemptive actions, God establishes the institution of the state (civil order) with its sanctions (specifically, the death-penalty for murder) as a means of enforcing public peace. We can agree with the dispensationalist that, in a fallen and sinful situation, individual self-governance (conscience and self-restraint) is not sufficient to curb the socially disruptive tendencies of sin, and the additional external authority of the state is necessary if the race is to survive and history, including the history of redemption, is to proceed.

Thus, the Noahic covenant will serve all that follows in the unfolding drama of redemption. History continues under God's common grace, awaiting God's redemptive action of reestablishing the City of God as a visible community in history.

The state is divinely ordained as a minister of God's justice, having been given authority to execute God's judgments on overt wickedness and thereby restrain the wrath of man. Of course, in a fallen world, the state itself often becomes the tool of the city of man, the society of antitheistic, humanistic rebellion against the kingdom of God. It acts lawlessly, arrogating powers to itself that reach far beyond its legitimate but limited sphere of authority under God. It deifies and exalts itself idolatrously as the absolute expression of sinful human autonomy and thus pursues ungodly ends as the messianic means of human salvation, a salvation defined in humanistic terms. This is clearly expressed in the Tower of Babel, the symbol of human defiance and arrogance. God crushes

this willful act, destroying the dream of a unified civil government of the united city of man. This scattering of the nations is the anti-Pentecost that further curbs human wickedness and allows God to separate a people for his name from among these nations, a people through whom he will work out the accomplishment of his redemptive-historical purpose. The scattering of the city of man makes room for the work of the gathering of the city of God in history to begin in earnest. The city of man will not be gathered again until the end of history, when Satan is permitted to so gather {40} it unto final judgment. The anti-Pentecost sets the stage for the next step forward, the call of Abraham out of heathendom.

From Abraham to Moses

At this juncture, God begins the next stage of his redemptive program, restricting his actions to one nation, a nation created from the seed of Abraham. Abraham now becomes the new Adam-figure, a new beginning in a new Eden (Canaan as land of promise); but again this merely foreshadows and prepares the way for the last Adam who is yet to come through the Abrahamic line. The Abrahamic covenant gives a fuller expression to the promise, specifying additional redemptive-revelational details. The Abrahamic covenant gave the conditions for applying the blessings of the covenant of redemption, the faith of Abraham, thereby promising a share in the covenant to those of Abrahamic faith. However, it also called forth a people whose very existence as a people was determined by a special role they were to play: a vocation of service to the world as those who would receive and be entrusted with God's word and those through whom the blessing of all nations would be fulfilled. Salvation would be of the Jews, for out of this people would come the seed of the woman/seed of Abraham—the seed of the promise. These people would prepare the way of the LORD and bear witness to redemption in the midst of the world. In this way, by this transition, the stage is set for further revelation of God's redemptive purpose in a progressive unfolding of the promise-theme. The history of this people is simply the history of a progressive preparation for redemptive accomplishment.

From Moses to Christ

The Sinai covenant certainly marks a new phase in the existence of the Hebrew people. At Sinai they are assembled in holy convocation before the LORD and bound together as one nation, having a national identity created by the covenant that constitutes them as the people of God. This gathering together of the twelve tribes into a holy kingdom of priests, the theocratic nation of Israel, constitutes God's first move of reversing the anti-Pentecostal scattering at Babel. Israel rightly celebrates the Feast of Pentecost as the day commemorating the giving of the law at Sinai. Israel is {41} thus corporately God's new beginning, a new Adam-figure in a typological sense that again foreshadows and anticipates the true Son of Man. Israel corporately is God's son, prefiguring the true Son of God who would come out of this people.

The law of Moses was given to Israel to facilitate the fulfillment of the redemptive promises set forth in the Abrahamic covenant, and further, to prepare the way for the coming of the seed of Abraham in whom the nations would be blessed. It established a special identity and boundary for this people to set them off as a chosen nation in distinction from other nations with an exclusive cultic holiness as the specially called and consecrated servant of the LORD. Israel's divinely appointed role as a chosen vessel unto honor in the drama of redemption is fulfilled and exhausted in the coming of the seed of promise. The reason for her existence—the reason why she was created as a holy nation distinct from other nations—was altogether for the sake of preparing his way and bringing him into the world. With that task fulfilled her task is fully accomplished, her redemptive-historical servant-role terminated. When Christ has at last come in the fullness of time, she is but another nation among nations, having no special status or privilege, no peculiar holiness.

It is important that we understand Israel's election correctly for it is here that dispensationalists especially err. Individually, Israelites could be eternally saved by exercising faith in the Abrahamic promise, having Abraham-like faith. Various ceremonies and rituals prescribed by the law of Moses, such as sacrifices, typified the true Passover and Day of Atonement that would come and thus sealed salvation in hope to the individual Jew. As such, the

period under the Mosaic law was a dispensation of the covenant of redemption, applying the benefits of that gracious covenant (the new covenant) in anticipation of Christ's coming and his accomplishment of redemption in the fullness of time. Thus, individually, Jews by faith could be sons of God and heirs of the promise, partaking of that eternal election in Christ unto an eternal inheritance. These believing Jews (doers of the law, not hearers only) within the nation would then constitute members of the true Israel of God—spiritual Israel or eschatological Israel. They would be what Paul means by his reference in Romans 2:28-[\[42\]](#) 29 to the true Jews who are Jews inwardly by the circumcision of the heart which fulfills the fleshly rite of circumcision. Such believing Jews would be numbered among the eternally elect vessels of mercy as seed of Abraham in the true seed, Christ, but in the period of preparation, before Christ, they were as underage children under the pedagogical governance of the law awaiting the time of their majority and adoption as sons.

However, Israel as a corporate entity (the nation) is corporately elect, and all its members (the fleshly descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who are physically circumcised and included in the Sinai assembly under the law) are elect in this election of the whole people, the historical people of Israel.

This election, however, is to an earthly-temporal status in the old covenantal period of preparation and to an appointed role and task—a service. The status they are given as elect involves typological blessings—earthly, historical blessings that merely symbolize the spiritual-eternal blessings offered in the covenant of redemption. These typological blessings point beyond themselves in promise of the eschatological blessings that flow from redemption accomplished, the truly saving blessings that are applied to the true Israel within Israel, faithful Jews. Corporately, Israel was called to the antitypical blessings of salvation. They were covenantally offered to her and could be appropriated by the obedience of faith. She had been constituted as a hearing-people (being recipients of the oracles of God) by her election. She was admonished to circumcise her heart and hear “with ears to hear,” heeding the word as a doing-people characterized by the hearing of faith-obedience. The anti-typical blessings typologically represented in the Mosaic law were not what she was promised or

elected unto in the conference of her elect status under the Sinai Covenant. These were made available only to those of genuine faith with circumcised hearts in her midst. Though we might say that God intended Israel to enjoy the benefits of fulfillment, this was not a guaranteed result of her election. It depended upon her faithful execution of the task to which she was appointed, upon the fulfillment of her calling to be the people of God in righteousness.

Israel's covenantal task under the law was to depict in shadow-form the kingdom of God. That which she was given fulfilled in {43} type the things promised to Abraham. She was called to represent by her righteousness the true Servant of the LORD. Obedience to that calling would bring her eschatological blessing, the benefits of the true fulfillment. She was called to represent typologically the second and last Adam. Instead, her history—a history of revelational symbolic significance—actually re-enacted and recapitulated the first Adam in his transgression and fall. She thus, as a vessel unto dishonor and a vessel of wrath, definitively underscored the abject failure of the old order and dramatically pointed out the need of the new covenant that would come by redemption accomplished to the true seed of Abraham, those who are of the faith of Christ. What the law could not do, because it was weak through the flesh, God's sending of his Son and his outpouring of the Spirit could accomplish (Rom. 8:1–3).

The faithful remnant of the Israel of God passes into the church of the new covenant fulfilling itself as part of the body of Christ by the adoption referred to in (Gal. 4:4–5); while the rest of the nation is reprobated in its unbelief and disobedience, having no further place in God's kingdom-program and no standing or inheritance in the covenant of redemption. With the coming of Christ, the blessing of Abraham extends to the nations indiscriminately to embrace any and all Jew and gentile who believe, constituting all believers into a new assembly. The church receives the promised inheritance as the eschatological people of God, the one new man in Christ who brings formerly distinct Jews and gentiles together into one household as co-heirs. The church, the Pentecostal gathering of the formerly scattered nations into the City of God, is the anti-type of Israel and is the true form of the covenant people of God. It is the historical community in which the covenant of redemption is applied and to which the kingdom is appointed.

The creation of the church is the culmination of God's work in history. It is the fruit of redemptive-historical accomplishment. The covenant of redemption is at last established in history and actually revealed in fulfillment-form in a historical community of full-fledged sons of God. As such it makes known the manifold wisdom of God according to the eternal purpose which God purposed in Christ (Eph. 3:11–12). Its institution signals the {44} dispensation of the fullness of time. Though it is new upon the scene of redemptive-history (as the community of the new covenant sealed in Christ's blood and assembled upon Matt. Zion as the Spirit-baptized Body of Christ on the day of Pentecost), it fulfills the everlasting covenant and so gathers into it the whole company of the redeemed of all ages (Heb. 12:22–23; 11:40). It is hardly a parenthesis, but is the re-established City of God in history that Israel only foreshadowed. Only in it is the Abrahamic promise fulfilled. However, to grasp this point is to reject dispensationalism and its Judeocentricity.

Paul made it clear that there was indeed a distinction between the fleshly line of the law-seed and the spiritual line of the promise-seed (Gal. 3:15–29). Thus, the purpose of the line of the law-seed obviously goes beyond merely establishing the covenantal locus for the application of the covenant of redemption, as though this seed-line was the community of the heirs of promise, and as though the law was to be identified with the promise. Were this all that dispensationalists mean by their insistence that the dispensations are not merely dispensations of the covenant of redemption, we could and would agree. However, since that recognition does not itself lead to dispensationalism's controversial distinctives, this cannot be all they mean. They do not recognize the temporary function of the law-seed within a system of typological shadows. They do not recognize that the earthly-temporal promises that the law made to this historical community were themselves typologically significant blessings made to a typologically significant people and as such were intended to be temporary, intended to terminate when Christ came (Gal. 3:23–25; Rom. 10:4). The promise-heirs among the law-seed receive redemption from the law and adoption in the fullness of time, while the rest of the law-seed are disinherited for their disobedience. Thus they have no further role to play and no promises to claim as flesh-

circumcised law-seed. There is thus no basis for a Judeocentric reading of the new covenant and no juxtaposition of two distinct peoples of God.

Postmillennialism vs. Amillennialism

We have significantly narrowed the field. If premillennialism is not a viable eschatological option, we are left with {45} postmillennialism and amillennialism. Can we narrow the field further, eliminating one or the other?

The real issue here is the controversy between the outlooks we have dubbed “pessimillennialism” and “optimillennialism.” What is the course of this age that lies between the two advents and on what note will it end?

It seems to me that amillennialists, while paying lip-service to the biblically revealed fact of the significant redemptive-historical change of economy that is implied in the terms “realized-millennialism” and “inaugurated eschatology,” do not truly do justice to these concepts of fulfillment and kingdom-presence. In other words, amillennialism is not really consistent with the implications of realized-millennialism and inaugurated eschatology. They do not comprehend how radical is the change from old to new covenant and what it truly means to say that Jesus now rules at the right hand of God as King of Kings and LORD of LORDS. Instead, amillennialists seem to affirm a status quo perspective on all history before the consummation. They disparage the empirical (i.e., visible, tangible—measurable and manifest) impact of the change and emphasize continuities that embrace all history from the fall to the second coming (this present evil age, the god of this age, the cosmic order that lies under the sway of the wicked one) over discontinuities (the intruded presence of the powers of the age to come, the new creation, life in the Spirit, the reign of righteousness and life). To understand the issue involved, we must return to the definition of eschatology proposed at the beginning of this article (see page 12).

Inaugurated Eschatology

By observing our earlier qualification concerning the meaning of eschatology we can better note that the field of eschatology is not exhausted by a concern with only that which is yet future. The definition given in the first paragraph of that chapter is appropriate to future eschatology. However, the eschatological hope of the OT, its concern with future events that are definitive acts of God in the long-anticipated fulfillment of his promises and purposes, may have included events that are now established realities and which, in some sense, ought to be included under a study of the victory of {46} the kingdom of God. That is, the kingdom of God maybe present as well as future. Eschatological events such as resurrection and judgment may in some respect have already taken place as well as still be a waiting a time yet to come. That which the OT prophets saw as the last days (when God would rise up, stretch forth his mighty arm, and act in power to establish righteousness and save his people) may refer to a time that has arrived as well as to a time for which we yet wait in hope. Eschatological fulfillment, God's definitive action, may need to be considered as both already and not yet having occurred, with these two diverse perspectives being related to the two advents of Christ. In other words, the first coming of Christ might also need to be viewed as an eschatological event and the realization and/or inauguration of eschatological fulfillment.

While the dispensationalist view of "mountain-peaks of prophecy,"¹¹ which holds that nothing between the two advents is foreseen, is in error, it is nevertheless generally agreed that the OT does not envision two separate comings of the Messiah-figure. Instead it conflates the two advents into a single advent, viewing them as constituting but one event, an eschatological event of the last days. No period of time is envisioned by the OT as separating the Suffering Servant from the Son of Man's reign in glory. Instead the Messiah's humiliation and his exaltation are "confused" and presented together as aspects of one coming. Mysteriously, he

11. According to this dispensationalist view of OT prophecy, there is a hidden and therefore unexpected gap, a "valley" between the "peaks", of the sixty-ninth and the seventieth week of Daniel 9:24-27. Filling that unforeseen gap is the parenthetical Church Age, a mystery unforeseen by the prophets.

comes in lowliness from Bethlehem and also comes down from heaven in glory and power. He is a Lamb and a Lion.

What the further-qualified definition of eschatology presented in the second paragraph of this article intends to stress is that there is an integral connection between what the NT revelation distinguishes as the two advents of Christ. These are actually two aspects of one event of fulfillment. By stressing this integral connection, the indivisibility of the two advents, we are in a better position to relate present and future eschatology. That is, what is to come at the second advent, judgment, resurrection, salvation, righteousness, eternal life, etc., is also what has come at the first advent. What will be openly, “publicly” revealed to the world and experientially manifested on a cosmic scope of realization has already taken place in Christ. {47} The second coming unfolds and openly discloses that which has been accomplished in Christ in his first coming. The gospel announces as accomplished fact that which, presently hidden in Christ (and revealed to faith), will appear to sight before all on the last day. Eschatology is thus given a Christological shape and focus in the NT such that we can understand what will come (future eschatology) by properly understanding what has already come in the first coming of Christ. For Christ is the microcosm of the new-creation, the locus of the realized-eschatological state of affairs in whom all fulfillment is presently concentrated and out of whom it will flow on the last day to transform all things.

We may thus speak of realized eschatology, affirming that all God’s promises are now fulfilled in him (2 Cor. 1:20). He is the firstborn (Col. 1:18), the first fruits (1 Cor. 15:23), the forerunner (Heb. 12:2), the eschatological Adam (1 Cor. 15:45), and he is presently the locus of every spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:3). As such, he will be the agent of future consummate eschatology, for this simply unfolds and fully applies what is already realized in him. However, we must also add another dimension to this understanding of eschatology: inaugurated eschatology. Christ has sent his Spirit to apply on an “earnest” (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:14) or “first fruits” (Rom. 8:23) level a partial and anticipative foretaste of the powers of the age to come. Life in the Spirit is eschatological existence, though only such in part as opposed to the full enjoyment to come.

As our present justification is an aspect of the realized

eschatology in Christ and our future glorification is an aspect of consummate eschatology, so our sanctification is an aspect of this inaugurated-eschatological experience in the Spirit that makes new life and resurrection-power present to and in us and frees us from the dominion of the powers of this present world-order and age.

The NT Gospel Basis of Optimism

Because Christ has come, we are renewed in the divine image (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). The dominion of sin has been broken (Rom. 6:14) so that we can once more be a dominion-people (1 John 5:4), free to serve God and express his image as sons. Thus liberated from bondage to sin to serve as instruments of righteousness¹² in {48} holy service to our LORD (Rom. 6:13–22), we are now commissioned and sent out as a Spirit-empowered people into the world. We are sent to proclaim that Jesus is LORD, that he is presently acting in heaven, enthroned at the right hand of God, putting all enemies under his feet, increasing his government in the progressive subjugation of all hostile and opposing powers (1 Cor. 15:22–28).

Christ is now enthroned as LORD and King and has been given

12. The Greek word for “instruments” (*hopla*) denotes weapons, instruments of warfare. Our bodies are God’s weapons in the spiritual warfare by which he will achieve victory in casting down opposing powers, subjecting the world to his kingly reign (cf. 2 Cor. 10:3–5) and establishing his righteousness. The Biblical-anthropological view of our corporeal existence (embodiment) conceives of our bodies as the way we are in the world, the means by which we relate to and interact with the world. Our bodies are our interface and point of contact with the world, the way in which we make our presence felt therein. By our bodies we act upon the world, affect it, effect our will, and so transform our situation (the world we inhabit). Thus, the presentation of our bodies as living sacrifices in the service of God (Rom. 12:1; cf. 6:12–19) means our engagement and involvement in the world as active agents to effect the will of God. By our bodies we express ourselves. We express our commitment to the Lordship of Christ, in bodily activities, bringing to bear—externalizing and objectifying through concrete deeds that impress upon the world the renewed image of God we express—our will in its bondservice to the cause of the kingdom. Our bodies as divine weapons bring the warfare and victory into the sphere of the world, into history, as our sphere of embodied action, for our bodily occupation of the world as living sacrifices the way God’s military strategy for extending his reign on earth is carried out in this age. We are members of Christ’s body, the means by which he executes his will on earth.

all nations as his inheritance (realized eschatology). However, he is also presently continuing to act to execute his will over his domain, to apply his authority and extend the sway of his kingdom in a progressive exertion of his power (inaugurated eschatology). The realized-eschatological fact of his messianic inheritance of dominion over the nations is not simply something hidden in Christ that awaits a future manifestation. It is now being made known in a concrete way that produces visible and tangible results. It is progressively transforming the situation so that it increasingly reflects the reality of what has been accomplished by the LORD's grant of the nations to his Anointed. The present age (the time between the two advents) is the time of Christ's mediatorial kingdom, the preconsummate stage of the kingdom of God that is properly the kingdom of the Messiah, the revelation of his reign in which he progressively reveals the righteousness of God in history by effecting, by means of the gospel (the power of God), the obedience of the nations.¹³ People are continually being effectively transferred from the dominion of sin-power into the saving dominion of Christ, remaining in this world while invested with the powers of the age to come.

By obeying the Great Commission we are fulfilling the Cultural Mandate—the Dominion Charter—of Genesis 1:28. In the name of Christ we are subduing the world to the dominion of the last Adam, making disciples of the nations. We are repopulating the earth, filling it with those who are renewed in the image of God. It is precisely because he has already been granted total dominion over all things in heaven and on earth (realized eschatology—see Matt.28:18; Eph. 1:19–22) that we are not simply to announce that reign as something realized though invisible. We are rather sent forth with inaugurated-eschatological Spirit-power to apply the present reign of the LORD and work it out, confidently acting upon {49} its reality as accomplished fact in order to bring it to bear upon the world. We must expect to succeed in the task of producing obedient disciples, of filling the earth with Christ's seed—a seed of new men who are delivered from the dominion of sin and thus restored to the capacity of exercising a stewardship of

13. See my "Paul the Postmillennialist," *Chalcedon Report*, 368 (March 1996) 12–14.

godly dominion as sons of God.

Out of the heart flow the issues of life. Therefore, our every activity thought, word, and deed ought to express the LORDSHIP of Christ. Our every endeavor in every area of life, in every sphere of our influence, responsibility, and authority in the world, ought to concretely manifest the impact of our every thought being captive to the obedience of Christ and our being transformed into good trees that bring forth good fruit. For we are created in Christ Jesus unto good works. Since God has not surrendered the world and history to Satan, but rather has laid claim upon it, we cannot restrict ourselves to a narrowly conceived set of pious endeavors cloistered from the broad range of human activities and human affairs. We cannot renounce the world and abandon it to the sons of Satan. Rather the usurpation of our Father's world by the would-be autonomous rebels, the City of Man, must be challenged in every field of human action and every area of culture. Christ is LORD of all. He does not recognize a sphere of secular life that is exempt from his totalitarian claim. He does not restrict us from redemptive engagement in any aspect of culture. Again, inaugurated eschatology, the sanctification of the whole man in the whole of life, demands that we ought to expect his victory over the powers to be applied and manifested by such involvement. We ought to expect that our labors in the LORD will not be in vain.

Thus, given the dimension of inaugurated eschatology, postmillennialism fully expects to see the whole earth covered with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. This hope is both quantitative and qualitative. We expect a great multitude of disciples to be won, and we expect that the faith of these converts will have a noticeable impact upon every area of life, affecting all of culture. We thus expect righteousness and peace to be the norm, the dominant characteristics. We expect genuine obedience from those who are discipled. We expect them to exercise dominion and thus take leadership positions in every field of cultural endeavor {50} according to their gifts and callings. We expect changed hearts to transform society. We expect the sanctification of persons to translate into the sanctification of their various contexts of existence and the circumstances of their lives. In other words, we expect visible and tangible results from the successful discipling of the nations. We expect redemption to

reverse the trend of the fall in history and thus to make Christ's blessings flow as far as the curse is found in that grace upon grace that superabounds where sin had abounded and in that kingdom-leavening that pervasively leavens the whole lump. We expect a world that is both extensively and intensively won to Christ. Moreover, we expect God to do exceedingly far more than we can ask or think, and we take this as a challenge to think big.

Postmillennialism is simply confidence in the gospel as the power of God unto salvation, a confidence that produces boldness. Postmillennialism is simply faith in Christ's present LORDship and understanding of what that LORDship entails and the difference it makes for this present age as the realized millennium that is suffused with the transformative and renewing power of inaugurated eschatology. It takes seriously Paul's assertion that the righteousness of God is revealed by means of the gospel.

By means of the gospel, passed on from faith to faith, God is securing the obedience of faith among all the nations, producing a people of the Spirit. By means of the gospel he is manifesting his faithfulness to the ancient promises we read in the OT, promises of nations flowing into his kingdom and of his glory filling the earth. By means of the gospel God is achieving victory in history, destroying the works of the devil and crushing Satan beneath the feet of his saints in a display of Christ's present LORDship. By means of the gospel that LORDship will be universally acknowledged. All the ends of the earth will look to God and be saved, and the knowledge of the LORD will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

The City of God will emerge triumphant on earth and in history, even as was originally intended in the mandate given to Adam at creation before he fell from his first estate. God's purpose for history is not frustrated by sin;¹⁴ it is renewed and restored by grace.

14. The point at issue here does not concern the absolute sovereignty of God, as though amillennialists in their "pessimillennialism" are being accused of denying that God ordains and governs whatsoever comes to pass, infallibly ordering every event in history according to his indefeasible counsel so that history perfectly fulfills his eternally decreed purposes. Obviously, any Calvinistic amillennialist would justly be offended by a charge that his philosophy of history supposedly overturns God's eternal decree, that it frustrates the secret counsel and thereby views sin as ultimately contrary to God's sovereign purposes. The amillennialist can justly maintain that the cultural dominance of the City of Man in history,

This triumph of the saints, as a preconsummate, penultimate {51} expression of the victory of the kingdom and the restoration of human vicegerency, is the fitting prelude to the eternal state. This is the redeemed and reconciled world—the kingdom—that Christ finally delivers over to the Father at the consummation.

Amillennialist Objections

Amillennialists are often “pessimillennialists.” Their arguments against postmillennialism are, most often, arguments against postmillennial optimism (“optimillennialism”).¹⁵ There is, however, another objection to postmillennialists: viz., the belief that Christ may return at any time and therefore possibly quite soon. This latter objection warrants a discussion unto itself and is therefore taken up in the next section. In the remainder of the present section, our concern is with amillennialist arguments against postmillennial optimism.

Though it is often used as a litmus test in differentiating amillennialists from postmillennialists, we must realize that there is, in one sense at least, nothing that requires amillennialists to be “pessimillennialists.” Postmillennialists, however, by definition, must be “optimillennialists.” An optimistic amillennialist is one who does not believe that this age must end in a state of rampant

the ascendancy of wickedness at the end of this age, and the salvation of only a relative few out of the mass of fallen mankind are what God has inscrutably decreed and thus fulfills his ultimate purposes for history.

15. Often, the objection is framed against what is said to be a naive and altogether unrealistic optimism that does not take seriously present world conditions. In light of the glaring facts of rampant evil and unbelief, we are told no one can possibly believe in such a bright future. However, to raise this objection is simply to lack the faith of Abraham—the very paradigm of that faith which pleases God and is accounted as righteous response. Abraham did not look at his circumstances in evaluating God’s promise. The facts of his situation seemed to be contrary to what God promised. His present circumstances, by all appearances, seemed to run wholly counter to the hope God held forth. Yet Abraham hoped against hope. He did not look to the apparent counter evidence that seemed to disconfirm God’s promise and warrant an incredulous response of tough-minded realism. Instead, he judged God faithful and able, and by this confidence in God’s promise he was justified. Shall we then, in the name of realism, stagger at the promises and draw back in unbelief from God’s ability to bring life from the dead, from his ability to multiply a seed as innumerable as the dust and the stars? It is never naive to take God at his word, despite what we see. We are to walk by faith, not by sight.

wickedness and widespread apostasy, or that the entire age is characterized by a general pattern of decline. His optimism for the future of this age is, however, significantly qualified. He cannot hold out as a sure hope the gospel prosperity envisioned by the postmillennialist. He must maintain that there is no scriptural warrant for a yet-greater fulfillment of the Great Commission the way postmillennialists confidently anticipate. The best may be either past or present, or it may be in the future; we can only wait and see. The most the amillennialist can say in his version of "optimillennialism" is that, should Christ tarry, there are good reasons for believing that greater things may yet come, even though there is no revealed necessity that can be assigned to such a state of affairs as though following from a determined course given by special revelation. The course of the age has not been predicted in a manner that we can say what the future must be like or how long it will last, but we ought to work for revival and expect God to bless our faithful efforts in the time remaining. Good, if not {52} sufficient, reasons are available for a general optimism about possibilities on an open horizon. We remain ignorant but hopeful about the future.

Amillennialism might then be more clearly distinguished from postmillennialism by the fact that it does not believe the OT prophecies warrant the postmillennial optimism. One or more of the following reasons might be offered to justify the amillennial negation: (1) the prophecies may not apply to this age but to the eternal state; (2) they may not apply to the earth but to heaven; (3) their application may need to be understood more "spiritually" and hence with far less detailed specificity and precision in what their fulfillment actually entails. At any rate, amillennialism charges postmillennialism with drawing unwarranted conclusions. Without this specifically warranted optimism about the course of this age the amillennialists may subdivide into agnostic amils and dogmatically pessimistic amils. The former include the optimistic amils discussed above and those weak-form "pessimillennialists" who, taking a similar stance as the optimistic amil on the predictive silence of Scripture, adopt on the basis of "newspaper exegesis" and "realism" a darker view of the prospects for this age, should Christ tarry. The latter hold to a strong form of "pessimillennialism." They maintain that

Scripture predicts necessary decline. The agnostic amillennialism allows for, but does not require, the view that Christ may return at any moment. While the dogmatically pessimistic amillennialism strictly does not provide such an allowance. However, there is tension and ambivalence in the latter. Some of these amils seem to affirm both the possibility of the any-moment coming and the necessity of end-time apostasy.

The Coexistence of the Wheat and the Tares

Amillennialists, however, are united in speaking of this age as one of parallel growth. The wheat and the tares grow together in one field throughout this age. It is a mixed field of the wicked alongside the righteous, both growing and maturing side by side. In the case of pessimistic amils, however, this parallel-growth view often seems to be little more than lip-service. They seem to see the growth of wickedness as a more culturally potent and dominant {53} force than the growth of righteousness. Yet this should not surprise us, for the growth of one will almost surely be at the expense of the other. One will dominate and displace the other over time; either a vital righteousness must suppress the growth and spread of wickedness or else wickedness will strangle righteousness. Wickedness only fills the vacuum where righteousness is absent. An integral part of righteousness is to witness and strive against wickedness. A parallel growth assumes that, though they are altogether antithetical and mutually exclusive principles, one does not adversely affect the other. It assumes they do not interact or vie with each other, the one seeking to displace the other and emerge dominant.

Allegedly, this parallel-growth idea is derived from the kingdom-teaching of Jesus in his parable of the wheat and tares. Such an interpretation, however, is not warranted by the parable. The mixed company of wheat and tares is not the distinction between church and world (i.e., the wheat = the saints within the church, while the tares = the ungodly outside the church). The tares are counterfeit believers, those within the visible church who outwardly appear to be the planting of God, but who in actuality are false brethren. The point of the parable is that the visible church—the church on earth and in history, will be a mixed company. Only the Son of Man at

the end, the harvest time, can perfectly sort out the genuine from the counterfeit.¹⁶ It speaks against a sectarian quest of perfectionist purists who seek by separatism, rigorous discipline, and fencing to exclude all but the genuine (a pure church), risking in the process schisms, infliction of spiritual harm upon authentic but weak brethren, and a restriction of promiscuous seed sowing (that casting of a broad dragnet). Discipline is to be applied in the church, and a credible confession sought from all, but the judgment of the church remains imperfect and cannot weed out all the counterfeits to create a perfect church.

The parable thus does not speak of the two societies, the City of God and the City of Man, in the world. Accordingly it does not teach what amillennialists mean when they speak about the parallel growth of wheat and tares in the world. The Great Commission is all about our curbing and reversing the growth of unbelief by {54} spoiling the camp of unbelief and shrinking its numbers. The growth of the population of the City of God comes precisely at the expense of the population of the City of Man, by reducing the number of those who comprise that city. Unlike our approach to the tares within the wheat field of the kingdom, we are to uproot unbelief and idolatry in an aggressive taking of enemy territory by the liberal preaching of the gospel. ‘We are as salt and light to restrain wickedness and retard its spread of decadence and corruption. We are to reprove it and bear prophetic witness against its every manifestation, standing as nonconformists against the tide of the spirit of this age in testimony to godliness. We are to promote righteousness and advance the cause of the kingdom in this world in word and deed. Our presence in the world must make a difference. We cannot make a comfortable peace with the world in a spirit of compromise. We must instead do battle for the hearts, souls, and minds of men, militantly opposing all that opposes the kingdom of which we are citizens and ambassadors.

16. Often, this point is missed by those who assert: “the field is said to be the world, not the church.” This, however, is an incorrect contrast that does not capture the meaning of “world” in this context. The point is that Christ, the sower, has sown the good seed of the word throughout all the world universally, establishing the kingdom worldwide and among all nations (not just in Israel) by creating a community of faith. It is in the midst of this worldwide planting that Satan sows counterfeit tares that resemble the wheat.

Of course believers and unbelievers are present alongside each other throughout this age, but which is the majority and which at any time is ascendant or culturally dominant is not addressed by the simple recognition that the two cities exist side by side throughout history. One cannot help but suspect that there are many hidden assumptions underlying the amillennialist argument which lead them to conclude (from what is actually a rather glaring non sequiter) the cogency they ascribe to it as a persuasive argument for this bizarre notion of parallel growth.

This idea of parallel growth is a notion that seems to encourage a passivity and resignation to peaceful coexistence. It is an attitude that actually promotes the growth of wickedness and grants it entitlement to pursue its cultural ends without our interference when it is clearly engaged in a culture war against us. Parallel growth in reality puts us in retreat. It limits our sphere of influence to an internalized piety of personal-private quietism. It is an individualistic religion of an invisible kingdom that is marginalized, isolated from the public square, and rendered culturally ineffective and irrelevant. It promotes an otherworldly spirituality conceived in terms of a dualism of nature and grace.¹⁷ It is that dualism, that compartmentalization of life into hermetically sealed spheres, {55} divided between the two cities as the field of their growth—that seems to be the hidden assumption rendering the non sequiter argument persuasive to its proponents. By such compartmentalization, the reduction of Christianity, the “parallel growth” of wickedness becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy inasmuch as nature abhors a vacuum.

Now it is true that many amillennialists warn against a false triumphalism. The growth of the kingdom is not by fleshly

17. Nature/grace dualism refers to that compartmentalization of life into contrasted spheres of the sacred and the secular. It reduces the legitimate area of Christian concern to a limited range of “spiritual” activities and declares all other areas of life religiously neutral. As such it surrenders the world to “natural law” and “the light of nature” (“natural reason” or that allegedly neutral reason that is supposedly common to both believer and unbeliever and that operates without the benefit of principles derived from special revelation). Nature/grace compartmentalization declares that Scripture does not speak to vast areas of life and that we ought neither to appeal to it nor to attempt to apply it in the public square using it as an area of common ground upon which believers and unbelievers meet to cooperate by reason alone.

weapons and a warfare of power as the world defines power. We are not to adopt the methodologies, tactics, or politics used by the City of Man in its struggle for dominance. Our militancy is not to be the sort of revolutionary action employed by unbelieving ideologies. It should not be directed to seize control of the state as the primary agent of social change and cultural dominance.¹⁸ Indeed, the wisdom and power of God—which is to be our wisdom and power—appears by the standards of the City of Man to be foolishness and weakness. We dare not appropriate their so-called wisdom and power in our struggle. Our goal is not success. Our task is simply to be faithful and obedient. It is God who gives the increase as we seek first his kingdom and righteousness.

Moreover, we must not ignore the fact that the assertion of might by the City of Man can and does cause the City of God to grow. Indeed, the City of God grows not in spite of the unleashed wrath of the City of Man, but because of it. Persecution refines and strengthens the commitment of true believers, leading to greater covenantal self-consciousness, consistency, and increased zeal.

18. The state is the ordained minister of God and therefore ought to be a faithful steward in dispensing true justice that is justice according to God's standards in keeping with its responsibility under God. For us to pursue an essentially political course of action that equates social reform with reform of the political system and its institutions and laws would be to adopt the idolatrous absolutization of the state that figures so prominently in unbelieving ideologies. It would be to view the state as messianic, as the savior of the world, offering salvation by law (legislated conformity, enforced by punitive sanctions). We cannot use the sword of the state, a fleshly weapon, to institute change from the top down. The state will most likely be the last sphere affected, for it will simply reflect a grassroots social change that has altered the worldview and values of society at large. It will be reformed more as the result of a groundswell of social change. It will not serve any significant role as the engine of such social change. Significant and enduring social change will be by regeneration, not legislation. The law can, as an external authority, restrain the manifestation of overt wickedness in the public sphere (1 Tim. 1:9–10), but it cannot itself produce righteousness (cf. Gal. 3:21) or make people virtuous. Thus, we cannot legislate morality in the sense of really changing people's hearts and achieving an internalization of true moral values. Since all law is legislated morality, (reflecting cultural mores—a social consensus on values), the changing of hearts through persuasion unto a prevailing and pervasive Christian worldview in society will express itself in the formally legislated civil and criminal code of a society. Our sword is the sword of the Spirit, the word of God, and wielding it we must effectively change hearts and minds and so win the culture war (a war of ideas) by the power of ideas (or rather the power of God unto salvation—the gospel), rather than seeking to establish a new “political correctness” enforced by official statist sanction.

Qualitative growth in authentic discipleship is an underground and counter-cultural movement. In such a climate the basic antithesis is more pronounced, the issues more black and white, the stakes all or nothing. The decision as to whom we will serve presses with greater urgency and explicitness, precluding any lukewarmness and double-mindedness in the drawing of lines. Also, as history repeatedly demonstrates, the numbers of the City of God tend to grow exponentially in such a climate, as bold witnesses arise to challenge the lawlessness of the antichrist. Nevertheless, all such persecution and repression is short-lived. In the long run, that underground growth must make a subversive impact, eventually toppling the tyrant and unleashing reformation. The {56} issue is that the growth of the church must make a difference in the long run. The bankrupt City of Man, exhausting itself, must eventually fall in self-defeat and self-destruction, vindicating God's declaration that its wisdom is folly and its power impotent in light of the divine wisdom and power revealed in the gospel. There is no room for triumphalism in the cruciform community. The struggle and sacrifice, including many setbacks in the short run, bear the fruit of victory over the long haul as the kingdom of God continues to leaven the world (Matt. 13:33). The mustard seed shall indeed become a great tree (Matt. 13:31–32). The river flowing out of Zion, at first quite shallow, shall become an impassible flood of the water of life, bringing forth many abundantly fruitful trees and an exceedingly great number of fish for the fishers of men and the dragnet of the kingdom (Ez. 47:1–12).

Since the general objection of amillennialism to postmillennialism has failed, the dogmatically-pessimistic amillennialists might here wish to raise their distinctive objection to postmillennialism. This objection is that Scripture foretells that apostasy must increase throughout this age and must, in the end time, manifest itself in a concentrated and ultimate expression of antichristian power that results in great tribulation for the people of God. Things are thus bound to get worse, not better.

There is, however, good reason to think that the proof-texts adduced in support of this argument are misapplied: For example, passages such as 2 Tim. 3:1–7 and 2 Pet. 3:3–4 refer to events looming on the immediate horizon of the authors. They speak to a first-century readership of contemporary situations, not of a

situation far off in the distant future. We must not here be misled by the language of “the last days,” for the first advent occurred in the last days (Heb. 1:2). Pentecost, when the Spirit was poured out in fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy, was a last-days event (Acts 2:17). The new-covenant church has always lived in the last days. Thus, the fact that Paul and Peter refer to unbelief in the last days provides no warrant for applying such passages to our time. The troublesome times they foresaw were birthpangs of the new Messianic Age. They were part of the shaking of the foundations at the beginning of the new order in the time of transition when the new order was {57} displacing the old (cf. Heb. 12.26–27). These troublesome times signaled the death-throes of the old order.

Against “pessimillennialism” we must assert that this entire age has not been on a steady downward slide into increasing wickedness (gradual deterioration). Such a view is a gross misreading of church history that ignores what missions have accomplished. Such a view of the history of Christianity also seems to buy into current forms of humanist historical revisionism in its efforts to blame all the ills of the West on the supposedly pernicious influence of Christianity. Surely, much that has been done in Christ’s name merits our condemnation though the use of that name has often been a mere pretext for doing deeds which sprang from motives that had little to do with zeal for, or genuine devotion to, the Christian religion. But we cannot ignore the good that has been done in the name of Christ. Nor can we ignore the role the Christian worldview has played in the rise of science, in reforming law-codes, and in ideas of justice. It has also played a role in developing constitutional government, and in many other areas of genuine progress that have bettered the temporal lot of humankind within the sphere of Christendom.

Neither is there any reason to think that a sudden outbreak of rampant wickedness (punctuated apostasy and great tribulation) is due for the closing years of this age. The texts appealed to (portions of the Olivet Discourse in Mark 13 and parallels; portions of the book of Revelation) are understood by the “pessimillennialists” in terms of futurist interpretation. However, they may actually refer to events now past such as the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. Again, such events were the death throes of the old order and the birthpangs of the new. Certainly, Matthew and Luke are at great

pains to differentiate as separate events the destruction of the temple and the signs of Christ's return, to distinguish between what would occur within one generation and an end that would not then occur.¹⁹ Certainly, John in Revelation speaks of events for which "the time is at hand" in his own day and, if he was not altogether mistaken (and therefore a false prophet), could not have been referring to events two thousand or more years in his future. Thus, the case for "pessimillennialism" is weak when set beside the case for gospel optimism. {58}

The Problem of Possible Imminence

If the NT teaches us that Christ may return at any time (even one minute from now) and that we are to live in expectation of its possible imminence, then obviously we cannot assert that conditions must improve. We cannot say that the new-covenant period is perhaps only in the stage of infancy with yet possibly a long way to go on the road to maturation. We cannot say that the promises applicable to this age have not yet been sufficiently fulfilled. In other words, we cannot be postmillennialists, for we cannot insist that the world will be Christianized by a genuine discipling of the nations whereby the knowledge of the LORD covers the earth as the waters cover the sea. If Christ comes tomorrow, history will obviously have ended on a note far different from that envisioned by postmillennialists. The earth may be moistened or dampened, but it is not soaked, drenched, saturated, or immersed by the overwhelming flood-waters of the knowledge of the LORD.

The view that Christ could return at any moment, even if it were scripturally warranted, does not by itself warrant "pessimillennialism." Granted, one would have to be an amillennialist as postmillennialism would be refuted, but one could be an optimistic amillennialist. That is, the doctrine that Christ's coming ought to be regarded as possibly imminent, barring other considerations (e.g., the belief that Scripture expressly teaches that

19. This, however, is no objection at all. Efficacious grace is greater than human depravity. Or do we doubt the power of God? Grace superabounds over sin, overcoming it. The omnipotent God is not frustrated or defeated by sin. Sin does not withstand God's irresistible grace when God chooses to change hearts and lay claim upon lives .for with God nothing is impossible. Greater is the Spirit than the world, the flesh, and the devil.

apostasy will grow; wickedness will ascend to cultural dominance; the true church will be a persecuted “little flock” in the midst of a hostile world; etc.), is compatible with optimism for the prospects of gospel prosperity (revival, awaking, etc.) should Christ tarry. If one knows not whether one day or a thousand years remain, and one does not believe that general decline is explicitly prophesied as the divinely revealed course of this age, one could believe that, given the power of the Spirit and the word, the potential exists for a fruitful harvest far exceeding anything that has yet occurred should the age continue on for several more years.

Optimistic amillennialism is justified by an argument from silence (*viz.*, that the actual course this age will follow has not been revealed and so cannot be known) that is coupled with a high estimation of the spiritual capital we have available to us. Pessimistic {59} amillennialism may simply involve the same argument from silence coupled with a generally pessimistic outlook that is usually rationalized by “newspaper exegesis” (“look at current events and recent history—the present situation”) and perhaps theologically justified by a nod to human depravity (the exceeding sinfulness of sin and the extent to which sin abounds). Pessimistic amillennialism, however, may and often does, offer a positive argument in place of the argument from silence. It asserts that Scripture prophesies the trajectory of this age as one tending toward degeneration and growing wickedness. Both varieties of amillennialism agree, however, that the time of the second coming has not been revealed. Christ encouraged a watchfulness and readiness which indicates that the Christian ought to live in a state of constant expectancy, in the awareness that he could come at any time and may come soon. That idea of its suddenness, its coming without warning, coupled with the impossibility of setting dates (whether tomorrow or ten thousand years hence) and the apparent sense of expectancy within the primitive church for Christ’s soon return, cannot be reconciled with the idea that, in order for the promises to the patriarchs and the many OT prophecies of a future glory to be fulfilled adequately, the interadvental period is to be an age of considerable duration in which the gospel will gradually win the world to Christ. The optimistic amillennialist may indeed appeal to such promises and prophecies as applicable to this age. The pessimistic amil is more comfortable referring them to

the eternal state. But the optimistic must interpret them with a flexibility and fluidity that provides sufficient “wobble room,” leaving their meaning vague and general enough so that what has already occurred in gospel mission could (if necessitated by Christ’s imminent return) be held to be sufficient fulfillment. Despite his optimism regarding the potential prospects for mission, were the age to continue, he cannot assert that a yet greater revival and reformation is necessary for fulfillment to be affirmed.

Against both varieties of amillennialism, postmillennialism maintains that the course this age follows has been revealed and that the prophetically projected trajectory is one of an increase of the kingdom of God that issues in manifest righteousness and peace. It is therefore incumbent upon the postmillennialist to deny {60} with warrant the idea that Scripture teaches that the coming of Christ ought to be treated as possibly imminent. Nothing, no event or set of events, has been predicted in Scripture as a definite and specific occurrence necessarily preceding the second advent. It requires a significant amount of time to elapse for it to come upon the historical scene (preparation-time) run its course (duration-time), and thus remove the elements of unknown time, possible proximity, and necessary suddenness from the return of Christ. If he can point to predictions of definite events that must precede the second advent, the idea of an any-moment return is dealt a significant blow. So the objection to postmillennialism dependent upon that idea loses its force to the extent the idea is rendered dubious.

The Olivet Discourse provides postmillennialism with the ammunition it needs to refute the idea of the any-moment return. According to this prophecy, Jerusalem must fall before the end of the age and the return of Christ. Moreover, even with the occurrence of that event 40 years after the ascension, the disciples knew that the end was not yet at hand. That is, history was to proceed for an indefinite amount of time after this event. The end would not accompany this specifically foretold event, but was clearly distinguished from the fall of Jerusalem as a separate event that would come later. Before the end could come, the gospel would have to be preached throughout the whole world. The nations must be disciplined and baptized.

Although Paul had begun this work in earnest before the fall

of Jerusalem, the church as a whole did not seriously devote itself to this task until after the mission to Israel had been effectively concluded by Jerusalem's fall. World mission would of course take considerable time. Christ had made it clear that his return would not occur until the gospel had reached the uttermost parts of the earth.

Accordingly, no Christian in the thirties through at least the early seventies of the first century AD was warranted in believing in an any-moment return. Paul warns against such an expectation in 2 Thessalonians, offering signs that must precede the day of the LORD. Unless we are to say that the exhortations to watchfulness made by Christ were inapplicable to whom he spoke them and {61} irrelevant to the church until the second or third generation, having force only after AD 70, we must conclude that they are not intended to warrant an any-moment expectation. They are simply to exhort us to a life of circumspect readiness that lives in light of the certainty that Christ will one day return and demand an accounting of us. They admonish us against letting the hope for his return be eclipsed by the cares of the world, lest we be distracted and forget that our presence is only meaningful within the eschatological context and that a day of reckoning will come in which our stewardship of time, our eschatologically oriented conduct in hopeful living, will be evaluated (Rom. 14:10b–12; James 2:12). Watchfulness thus entails a guarding of our hope in his return. It remains in us a living hope and a constant consciousness of the context in which our lives are lived in this present age, citizens of the age to come. Those who have the hope purify themselves (1 John 3:2–3) and redeem the time as faithful stewards, storing up treasures in heaven by doing kingdom work.²⁰

20. We get a clue as to what watchfulness means in some of Jesus' parables. The foolish virgins (Matt. 25:1–13) did not plan for a long wait and so did not have enough oil in store to keep their lamps lit until the bridegroom actually came. The steward set over the household, when the master's return was "delayed" for a long time, became derelict in the faithful discharge of his duty, acting as one who believed he would never be held to account (Luke 12.41–46). Readiness—preparedness for the coming was lacking in both cases, and this is equated with a failure to be watching. That unwatchfulness or unpreparedness, which is a degeneration into a heedless and complacent worldliness, is exemplified in the case of the rich fool (Luke 12:16–21), who sets his affections on earthly treasures to the neglect of a heavenly hope and thus is not ready for a day of reckoning when it comes. Watchfulness is thus clearly a matter of keeping the

If we do not read these exhortations and warnings to watchfulness in this manner, we will have to conclude that at least some of them assert a mistaken expectation that the coming of Christ was actually imminent for those in the first century. However, approximately two thousand intervening years demonstrate just how mistaken such an expectation (if it was held and taught) was. In retrospect we know that Christ's return was not near at hand in the apostolic period, that hundreds of generations would live and die in the interim.

One could argue that, after the fall of Jerusalem and some years of world mission (and certainly in our day of global penetration), Christians are in a position to hold an any-moment expectation, that an imminent return is made possible, if not by the third generation, then certainly in our day. The question is not, however, whether it is possible to believe it now, but whether we are warranted in believing it, whether we are taught by the Scripture to have such an expectation. If the watchfulness exhortations are not intended to evoke such an expectation, the explicit warrant is removed for such an expectation. We may be permitted to believe on the basis of an argument from silence (or perhaps, an argument from ignorance), but, in such a case, the {62} strong warrant of epistemic duty is altogether lacking. There is no positive factor of confirmation to provide any warrant for one's choosing either to adopt or to reject the any-moment hope. Whatever one's opinion on this topic, it would (barring other possibly relevant considerations) be wholly speculative. It would be an expectation based upon the bare possibility created by a wholly open question and a complete lack of information. We don't have a revelation of the any-moment return as a distinct possibility we are commanded to entertain. The salient question then becomes whether there are in fact other relevant considerations that we ought to factor into the equation.

certainty (not imminence) of the hope constantly in the forefront. It causes us to set our priorities aright, to see things in the eternal context and be directed and motivated by the kingdom as our highest good and ultimate concern, refusing to be distracted into an inauthentic existence that is of the world. In watchfulness every moment is set immediately before the faith-vision of the returned Lord. It is a critical moment of eternal import and consequence because our every act is oriented toward the future in terms of the blessed hope.

Here, the postmillennialist appeals to the world evangelization that must precede the end, insisting that this ought to be understood in terms of the promises of nations obedient to the faith. If we are, on the basis of revelation, to expect disciplined nations as the fulfillment of the Great Commission, then we are not permitted to look for an any-moment return. An imminent coming is not possible because something must yet occur before the end and time is necessary for that to come to pass. If the preaching of the gospel that must be completed involves merely a witness, then perhaps it has been sufficiently fulfilled by this time to qualify and thus allow for the end to come at any time. This simply ignores the evidence marshaled by the postmillennialist that would indicate that the preaching of the gospel is to be effective in actually making disciples in quantities not yet realized. The main objection raised against that seemingly warranted expectation was the any-moment doctrine that has been disarmed. Thus, we have an epistemic duty to be postmillennialists and expect that the knowledge of the LORD will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea in fulfillment of the Great Commission.

The Olivet Discourse

Previously we have had more than one occasion to refer to the Olivet Discourse. The interpretation of the Olivet Discourse focuses on the course this age will follow and whether we should subscribe to the possibility of an any-moment return of Christ. It also is central to the proper understanding of Revelation. John's apocalypse is in many respects an expansion on this "little {63} apocalypse." Such considerations therefore warrant taking a closer look at this passage. Our attention will be primarily directed to Matthew's version.

Matthew 24 sets the scene for the prophecy with the disciples asking Jesus about things to come. Specifically, having heard Jesus' pronouncement of doom upon the Jerusalem temple (v. 2), they wish to inquire as to when this event will occur (v. 3). However, they ask what signs shall precede and portend this time when the prophecy of judgment and the end of the age will be fulfilled. In other words, the question posed by the disciples was intended by them as a single question concerning a single period of time—the

end time. It assumed that the temple's destruction would occur at the end of the age, that Jerusalem's judgment and the final judgment (the great assize of the last day) would occur at roughly the same time (i.e., within a brief time frame) as part of the one set of events marking the end of history.

Jesus' reply to the disciples' question(s) is that their generation, contemporaries of those who were present with Jesus on the Mount of Olives, the original addressees, will live to see the fall of Jerusalem (obviously referring to the cataclysm of AD 70) and witness the many signs preceding and accompanying that holocaust (vv. 4–8, 15–26, 34). The time of the end is known only to the Father (v. 36) and should not be naively equated with the time of Jerusalem's destruction. Thus, despite the disciples' mistaken assumption of contemporaneity, Jesus clearly regards that which they posed as a single question to be in actuality two quite distinct questions. His reply clearly separates Jerusalem's doom and the end of the age into two distinct occurrences.²¹ His warning against confusing them is emphatic: when this judgment is finally fulfilled upon Jerusalem, the disciples are not to assume that this spells an imminent end.

Indeed, Jesus, in answering both questions (signs of Jerusalem's destruction and signs of the end) further underscores the fact that the disciples' question is in reality (and despite their failure to realize it) two different questions. His answers, dealing respectively with proximate and remote events, stress the differences between the two time periods in order to preclude any confusion that would lump two temporally separated events together. The conditions surrounding the end of the age (the time of the Son of Man's return {64} in glory) stand in sharp contrast to the conditions surrounding Jerusalem's doom. The latter will be accompanied and preceded by many signs, while the former will not.

The destruction of Jerusalem will be foreseen on the horizon as it approaches by many portents, but the end will come without such warning. The conditions at the time of the end will be normal and ordinary, not tumultuous and especially disruptive of the routines and customs of daily life (vv. 38–44). The only sign of

21. Luke's version (chap. 21) is even more emphatic in presenting these as distinct occurrences.

the end, beyond those very general signs of travail which more or less mark the entire age from beginning to end (vv. 6–8), is the successful preaching of the gospel to all the world (v. 14).

Much of our confusion results from our reading of v. 34. If “all these things” in v. 34 refers back to, and includes, everything said up to that point in the discourse through v. 33, then our interpretation is faced with a perplexing dilemma. If we take seriously that “all these things” are to be fulfilled “in this generation,” we have to discount that which seems to speak of Christ’s return which did not occur in that generation in order to understand everything (including v. 27) as now past: If, on the other hand, we take seriously the language of the coming of the Son of Man (an event yet in the future), we must discount the plain sense of “in this generation.” However, the “all these things” of v. 34 refers back to “these things” in v. 3, referring back to the assertions made by Jesus in vv. 1–2 concerning the temple and need not include everything said in vv. 4–33 (including v. 27) once we understand the structure of the discourse.

All that is said up to v. 14 is intended as a preliminary survey of the entire interadvental age, providing in broad, sweeping strokes a panoramic overview of what must occur before Christ returns. Beginning with v. 15 we recapitulate to a more detailed exposition of specific events within that total time frame. Thus, in vv. 15–26 we zoom in closely to focus exclusively on the event which answers the disciples’ first question concerning the destruction of the temple. Verse 27 is a parenthetical aside that momentarily takes us out of the time-frame, interrupting the flow of thought regarding the tribulation of those days. This statement is inserted at this point as a warning against one aspect of that tribulation: in the calamities accompanying the judgment upon Jerusalem many false prophets {65} and messianic pretenders will arise among the zealots leading the Jewish revolt against Rome. The disciples must not be deceived by their claims (vv. 23–26). Christ therefore pauses at this juncture to interject into the discourse, as a tangential clarification, what his coming will be like. He contrasts it to the comings of these false messiahs who will be assembling armies in the desert for holy war against Rome. Thus, v. 27 does not fall into the temporal sequence of events that is the subject of this portion of the discourse and therefore is not intended to be included in

the narration of “these things” (the destruction of Jerusalem). Thus, when Christ in v. 29 resumes the sequential narration of the holocaust that is to befall this generation, the “immediately after” skips over v 27 and refers only to the tribulations of the ill-fated Jewish War that results in the Romans’ razing of Jerusalem and its temple and v. 34 comprehends in its scope vv. 15–26 and vv. 29–33.

Some modern readers, unfamiliar with the conventions of the genre Christ employs to depict this scene of judgment, may mistakenly assume that v 29 must envision the end of the world (cosmic catastrophe) because of the apocalyptic imagery it employs. This assumption, however natural to us, is quite unwarranted. There are several cases in which this kind of language clearly refers to divine judgments upon nations in history. It refers to God’s past historical judgments upon Babylon and Egypt (Isa. 13:10; Ez. 32:7). Since these were obviously localized and limited judgments of individual nations, the cosmic-apocalyptic language is obviously intended figuratively, referring to a shaking of the powers. Christ simply employs this familiar, traditional manner of prophetic speech about divine judgment to the fall of Jerusalem, referring to the historical destruction of one more ungodly nation that dared oppose the LORD and persecute his people. Moreover, by implicitly comparing Jerusalem to such former manifestations of the godless City of Man (cf. Jerusalem as spiritually called Sodom and Egypt in Rev. 11:8), he is telling his disciples not to mourn for Jerusalem nor to be dismayed by its demise. They were not to view this event as a tragedy and a disaster upon what Jews traditionally regarded as the holy city, and hence a victory for God’s enemies. It is rather a divine act of judgment upon an apostate nation that had become the enemy of God’s new covenant people. The synagogue of the {66} unbelieving Jews may view it as a great calamity and a horrible catastrophe, but Christ’s disciples were to interpret it as a sign of victory for the kingdom of God: the sign that Christ now reigns at the right hand of God in heaven and visits judgment upon his enemies for the furtherance of his kingdom. The fall of Jerusalem previews and anticipates the day of the LORD, graphically depicting the fate of all who would array themselves against the LORD and his Christ.

It is after this exercise of divine judgment that the sign of the

Son of Man in heaven is truly manifested. This does not refer to a sign appearing in heaven, and certainly not to Christ's visible and bodily return from heaven. It is the sign that the Son of Man is in heaven, that he has ascended to enthronement there as the King of Kings and LORD of LORDS, reigning at the right hand of God in glory and power to exert his will upon the earth. The tribes of the Land, the people of Israel, will see his power and authority manifested, demonstrating that this Jesus whom they crucified is indeed risen and has ascended as Son of Man to receive the kingdom from the Father. The coming in the clouds of heaven is to stand before the throne of the Ancient of Days in heaven, not a coming to earth. The unbelieving Jews, who could not discern the signs of the times and had perversely sought from Jesus a powerful sign of attestation (Matt. 12:39; 16:1-4; cf. 1 Cor. 1:22; John 6:30), were given only the sign of Jonah. This sign of Jonah is the key to understanding this sign of the Son of Man.

In the double tradition, the dominical saying concerning the sign of Jonah refers primarily to gentiles repenting at the preaching of God's prophet and thus being saved from impending judgment (cf. Luke 11:29-32). Even as Ninevah of Jonah's day represents a heathen people who turned to the LORD and became God-fearers in the time of Israel's apostasy, so the gentile response to the preaching of the kingdom will bear witness against this generation of Jesus' day, condemning Israel's unbelief and impenitence. The gentilization of the kingdom will be a sign of judgment to Israel, signaling her loss of the kingdom inheritance, her supersession by a "nation" bearing the fruits of repentance that Israel did not bring forth (Matt. 8:11-12; 22:43). The city that, unlike Ninevah of old, did not repent at the preaching of this one who is greater than {67} Jonah will be destroyed. Those who, like Ninevah, had been enemies will find salvation through repentance and stand in testimony against this wicked and adulterous generation that has filled up the cup of wrath to the uttermost.

The sign of Jonah is part of the double tradition²² and Luke probably better preserves its original form as a sign of the gentiles'

22. The double tradition, often labeled "Q-material," is the tradition that is shared by Matthew and Luke, but is not found in Mark. Tradition common to Matthew, Mark, and Luke is called the triple tradition.

displacement of the Jews in the kingdom. Indeed, it might first appear that Matthew's editorial revisions, his shaping it to include, as part of its meaning, a reference to the resurrection, serve only to obscure the original reference to a positive gentile response. One might think that Matthew, in making the sign do double duty, has allowed the prediction of the resurrection to crowd out the sense that Luke's form bears. Yet we must not be too hasty in drawing the conclusion that Matthew has been clumsy and has overloaded the saying with another unrelated meaning that the accusing witness of the gentiles simply falls into the background. Matthew's move is made because, in his view of redemptive history, it is only after the resurrection that the disciples are commissioned by the risen Christ to go to the nations (Matt. 28:18–20). During the period of the earthly ministry they had been restricted exclusively in ministry to the house of Israel (Matt. 10:5–6). The resurrection is thus viewed by Matthew as the sign of a pivotal redemptive-historical change that effectively opens the kingdom to the Gentiles. It is the Son of Man who was, like Jonah, three days and three nights in the belly of the earth. The risen Jesus—the one who is given all authority in heaven and on earth—is revealed to be the glorified Son of Man of Daniel's vision. He is the one who has received from the Ancient of Days dominion, glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him. The resurrection and the influx of the gentiles are integrally bound up together as a sign of the new age.

Moreover, the resurrection is crucial to understanding the sign of Jonah as a witness against the Pharisees and their post-Jamnian heirs. The Pharisees, and the Rabbinic Judaism they spawned, blaspheme with a blasphemy against the Spirit by labeling Jesus a sorcerer and a deceiver who has led Israel astray by casting out demons with the power of Beelzebub (Matt. 12:24). The Pharisees and the synagogue blaspheme against the Spirit when they explain {68} the sign of the empty tomb as a hoax perpetrated by the disciples' theft of Jesus' body (Matt. 28:11–15). By slandering the church (attacking her Easter faith and her apostolic foundation), the Pharisees and the synagogues of Matthew's day refuse to acknowledge the significance of the gentiles' entry into the messianic assembly that heralds the new age of kingdom fulfillment, the time of the last days when,

according to the prophets, the nations would flock to Zion and join themselves to Israel's God. The synagogue blasphemes against the work of the Spirit—the creation of the new covenant church as an eschatological community assembled by the risen Christ—by their benediction against the heretics, gainsaying that which the church confesses and proclaims and attributing its fruit to the work of Satan (Matt. 10:25). Nevertheless, the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom to all the world stands as a witness to the truth of the gospel of Easter. It is, together with the judgment upon faithless Jerusalem, a part of the sign that the Son of Man is in heaven, demonstrating that Jesus is risen and is laying claim to his messianic inheritance in an exercise of resurrection power.

We must insist that vv. 29–31 are part of “all these things” that must be fulfilled before the passing of the generation of Jesus' contemporaries, that they must refer to events in the AD 66–70 conflagration. That set of events is what is meant as “the tribulation of those days.” We have seen that the apocalyptic language of cosmic events (the sun, moon, and stars) is, on the basis of OT precedent, figurative and not to be taken literally as depicting the end of the world. We have seen that the sign that appears is a sign that the Son of Man reigns in heaven. It refers to the effects of his reign that appear in history. What is seen by the mourning tribes of the land as the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory is a parallel statement of the appearance of the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, further explicating it and referring (as in Dan. 7:13–14) to his ascension to the Ancient of Days to receive the kingdom, not to a coming again to earth out of heaven. Yet, if v. 30 does not refer to the second coming (and, if we take v. 34 seriously, it cannot), what does v 31 mean? Does this not sound like the eschatological harvest? If it is not a last-day event, to what {69} does it refer and how should we understand the language of the angels and the gathering of the elect from the four corners?

Revelation 7 helps us to understand Matthew 24:31. As previously mentioned, there is obviously a connection between John's vision and Jesus' prophecy. Both refer to the same events and use very similar images to depict those events. John's vision is largely an expansion on the Olivet Discourse, depicting the same subject matter in greater detail and with further development of

the scenario. We ought immediately to recognize the parallels between Revelation 7 and Matthew 24:31.

At this point, it does not matter whether we approach Revelation as futurists or as preterists (those who interpret it as fulfilled in the past). Of course, if the Olivet Discourse refers to events that have already been fulfilled (that which is past for us) like the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, then that is a strong argument for reading Revelation in terms of a preterist interpretation. However, simply for the sake of argument, let us for the moment grant that the time was not as at hand as John indicated, that Revelation and Matthew 24 may refer to a future period such as the Great Tribulation of the futurists that will come in the closing years of this age, immediately preceding the second coming. Even on such a reading, the event depicted in Revelation 7 is not taking place at the second coming, but occurs some time before. It is not the harvest gathering at the end of the tribulation, but a sealing of the elect at the beginning of the time of great tribulation, before the calamities of the seven trumpets and seven bowls commence. This may be the final chapter of history, but it is still history as it leads up to the climax of Christ's return.²³ On a literalist reading, at least three and half years remain before the climax.

The very literal minded among the futurists, believing many fantastic things will occur in the extraordinary time of the tribulation period, may still believe that an actual angel will literally be dispatched to seal the 144,000. It should at least be granted that the 144,000 are left on earth to endure the time of tribulation. Even in the dispensational scheme, this scene is neither the rapture nor the gathering of tribulation saints at the second coming, though it does in a sense envision them, from a

23. Some wish to see the visions of the seven trumpets and seven bowls as recapitulations that cover the same period as the seven seals, with the seventh in each series taking us up to the end point of the return of Christ. Were this the case, this scene, being the last in the series of seals, would occur at the second coming. This way of reading Revelation in terms of parallel and simultaneous visions fails, however, to account for the data. A careful reading demonstrates that the sealing occurs before the trumpets sound in the judgments depicted in Revelation 8 and 9, judgments which hurt the earth, the sea, and the trees (8:7–11). Indeed, 9:4 makes it clear that the locusts released by the sounding of the fifth trumpet are only to hurt those who have not the seal of God, thus establishing the chronological sequence of the seven trumpets following the seven seals.

heavenly standpoint, as an assembly, the 144,000, gathered unto the LORD and already with {70} Christ by virtue of this act of sealing. It is, however, best (especially if we read Revelation as preterists) to take this as imagery vividly depicting in figurative terms the work of the gospel in gathering and sealing God's elect through the preaching of God's messengers. This is what Matthew 24:31 conveys, using the symbol of the trumpet as the familiar call to assembly of the congregation of the LORD (Num. 10:3). Christ so gathers the fullness of "all Israel" (the Israel of God—the elect remnant of believing Jews who constitute the spiritual, eschatological Israel) out of the reprobate nation in a final divorce of church and synagogue.

With verse 36 Christ begins to talk not of "those days" (the time of tribulation), but of "that day." This is an expression found throughout the OT prophets to refer to the day of the LORD. Christ uses it to refer to the day of the coming of the Son of Man. No one knows when this day will come, but the gospel must first be preached to all the nations before it comes and brings history to an end. It comes not in a time of calamity and distress, but when people are quietly attending to ordinary affairs of life and going about their usual daily business. In contrast to the time of tribulation, it comes without warning. No date can be given, but the possibility of a long "delay" is suggested. Sufficient time for the task of the saturation-evangelization of the world to its uttermost parts is required.

Conclusion

The gospel will be carried to the uttermost parts of the earth and bear miraculous fruit: The preaching by Christ's witnesses will be effective, and the kingdom will have a marked impact upon world history, affecting nations, societies, and cultures. The times of messianic woes—birthpangs of great tribulation and tumult—will pass, and the fruit of righteousness and peace will have social consequence as widespread cultural blessings of peace and prosperity. The world will not continue in a state of crisis, constantly disrupted by a series of disasters and catastrophes. It will not be continually disturbed by Sodom-like overt wickedness or the lawlessness of tyrants and their reigns of terror and

warmongerings. Conditions will improve and stabilize as the effects of the gospel transform societies. {71} The prevalence of Christian values serves as a check upon destabilizing and disintegrative forces in society and promotes true justice. People can begin to lay aside their fears and worries, feel secure, and pursue their day-to-day lives in peace, enjoying a settled normalcy.

It is for this reason that we are warned against allowing the relative peace and safety of such a settled and undisturbed life to lull us to sleep. We must not be distracted by the mundane concerns of day-to-day life in a period of such normalcy and be caught unprepared. We must not grow negligent or slothful in praying “thy kingdom come” and “come, LORD Jesus” in keeping our priorities straight concerning what is our blessed hope. The snare of peace and prosperity—fruits of the gospel’s impact upon a culture—is that they can breed forgetfulness and complacency (cf. Deut. 8:6–20). Accordingly, many who are not themselves personally believers in Christ, but who nevertheless enjoy by common grace, the socio-economic benefits of Christian civilization, as a living off of borrowed cultural capital, will be wholly unprepared for that day of reckoning. They will be called to account for not wisely investing the talents entrusted to them as common-grace beneficiaries of a gospel-permeated, Christianized society. Divine beneficence and longsuffering that ought to have led to repentance, in the wake of hardhearted ingratitude and refusal to give glory to God, at last evoke the wrath of God and become the basis of greater condemnation with the greater responsibility attending the magnitude of the blessings bestowed.

At the very end Satan is loosed once more to deceive the nations and gather them. However, he gathers them in a figurative sense, not geographically or as a literal army mustered for physical battle. He unites the City of Man in spirit in a renewed spiritual struggle against the City of God. The City of Man emerges from the underground once more to assert openly its self-consciously antitheistic agenda and challenge the City of God.

Revelation 20 gives no hint of a renewed persecution, of a new time of tribulation. The City of Man is gathered only to be suddenly and swiftly destroyed. It follows Satan only to plunge headlong to its own destruction and has been allowed by God to be gathered {72} under Satan to this end. Judgment consumes the

rebels before they can wreak havoc upon the established order, before they can disrupt the peace or do any harm. The status quo of peace and safety continues without war or violence or any notable disruption of the routines of ordinary life (Matt. 24:37–39). This process precludes any notion of a penultimate triumph of wickedness, a great tribulation, or an Armageddon. Indeed, the rallying cry of the City of Man is that of “peace and safety” before sudden destruction befalls (1 Thess. 5:2–3) for Satan has deceived the nations to turn in their hearts from the LORD and deny in self-deception (“the lie”—2 Thess. 2:10–11) the true basis of the peace and prosperity that has been long enjoyed. In this self-deception, the ungodly reassert the humanistic Babel-dream of the City of Man and thus repudiate the gospel-foundation of the latter-day culture. The City of God is thus philosophically opposed. The City of Man unsuccessfully seeks to claim the fruits of culture for itself (cf. Deut. 8:7–20) when the crack of doom sounds to bring this revolt to nought before it can truly get underway. The wrath of man is exposed but not allowed to express itself in violence to the City of God, and the ungodly are consumed as chaff as Christ quickly returns to glorify his saints.

We cannot go beyond the broadest of strokes, the most general of outlines, in predicting the shape of the future. There is no room for speculative “prophetic roadmaps” that supposedly plot out the future with detailed specificity and a clear chronological order of things to come. We cannot read prophecy simply as history written in advance, seeking accordingly to develop that which has aptly been dubbed a reportorial eschatology. What we have instead is an orientation of hope and confidence—a vision—that encourages us to bold action, to aggressive kingdom activity directed toward attaining the future God has ordained and revealed to us in his word of promise. As the gloom and doom of “pessimillennialism” has often led to a spirit of retreat and defeat which surrenders the world to the devil in passive resignation, so the optimistic spirit of postmillennialism has the psychological effect of motivating and mobilizing strategies for dominion work, for genuine Christian reconstruction, reformation, and mission in the confidence of long-term victory. {73} This attitude inspires us to think big, to make long-term plans and invest in this future. It moves beyond the merely defensive posture of “pessimillennialism” to assume

an offensive posture of advance and conquest. It is an eschatology of engagement that seeks to transform the wilderness, rather than merely survive in it. Given the fact that the present age has already lasted 2000 years, how much more could have been accomplished if all Christians had embraced this vision of victory rather than falling prey to the evils of pessimism, escapism, short-term thinking, disengagement, or worldliness that have too often historically characterized the church's attitude?

Let us therefore have the kind of faith exemplified by the heroes of faith described in Hebrews 11, going forth to do great and noble deeds inspired by unwavering confidence in God's promises. We are God's instruments, empowered by his Spirit. We are Christ's witnesses. He is LORD. And he is with us to the end of the age. Let us therefore be as Joshua and Caleb (Num. 13:26–33), not as those who could not enter the land because of unbelief. Our God reigns!

If optimistic amillennialists truly have this confidence, I have no quarrel with them. My argument is with "pessimillennialists." However, for my part, I believe that only postmillennialism consistently expresses this gospel optimism, and thus, only postmillennialism is consistently true to biblical faith.

THE DISPENSATIONAL HERMENEUTIC

Kenneth L. Gentry Jr.

Historical Backdrop

Eschatology is the last locus of systematics to receive scholarly attention in the history of doctrine. As recently as 1941 Reformed theologian Louis Berkhof could lament, “When Klieforth wrote his *Eschatologie*, he complained about the fact that there had never yet appeared a comprehensive and adequate treatise on eschatology as a whole... In general it may be said that eschatology is even now the least developed of all the loci of dogmatics.”¹ This deficiency has been greatly alleviated of late, of course. Unfortunately, dispensationalistic novelties (e.g., Charles C. Ryrie, John F. Walvoord, J. Dwight Pentecost)—and especially its subspecies of apocalyptic sensationalism (e.g., Hal Lindsey and Dave Hunt)—dominate the *popular* interest in eschatology.

This state of affairs is most tragic and embarrassing for the Christian witness in our secular environment. Eschatology is one of the leading themes of Scripture and, consequently, quite important for maintaining the integrity of the Bible and the legitimacy of Christian truth-claims. In essence, eschatology establishes the biblical philosophy of universal history—a foundationally important concern for a world and life view.² The material of biblical eschatology begins at the very genesis

1. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1941), 664.

2. For helpful treatments of the Biblical philosophy of history, see: R. J. Rushdoony, *The Biblical Philosophy of History* (Phillipsburg, N J: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969) and, especially with reference to eschatology, Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion*, 2d ed. (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1996), chap. 1: “The Significance of Eschatology.”

of universal history and extends to its ultimate consummation. Thus its sweep encompasses the whole of time and the entirety of the biblical record. As Jürgen Moltmann puts it, “From first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present.”³ J. J. Van Oosterzee agrees, “All true Theology is at the same time teleology, which must of itself lead to Eschatology.”⁴

However, with accountants-turned-prophecy-experts dominating Christian publishing, it is difficult to promote an effective Christian challenge to the prevailing secular worldview. [82] The secular world scoffs at popular apocalypticism with its failed predictions⁵ and bizarre expectations.⁶ Rightly so. Evangelical Christians, with their insatiable appetite for the sensational, have sold their birthright for a mess of verbiage.

How does such sensationalism sustain itself? How can pop-apocalypticism so successfully attract the average evangelical Christian? Especially in light of so many failed expectations? Remember Hal Lindsey’s *The 1980s: Countdown to Armageddon*

3. Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, trans. by J. W. Leitch (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 16. Berkhof also laments the epilogical placement of eschatology: “In such a scheme eschatology could only appear as the finale of history, and not at all as one of the constitutive elements of a system of truth.” Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 664.

4. J. J. Van Oosterzee, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2 vols., (New York: Scribner’s Sons, n.d.), 2:581.

5. See: Dwight L. Wilson, *Armageddon Now! The Premillennarian Response to Russia and Israel Since 1917* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1977). Gary North, *Rapture Fever: Why Dispensationalism is Paralyzed* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1993). Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness: The Folly of Trying to Predict When Christ Will Return* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1991). C. Marvin Pate and Calvin B. Haines Jr., *Doomsday Delusions: What’s Wrong with Predictions About the End of the World* (Downer’s Grove, IL: Inter-varsity, 1995).

6. Robert Thomas holds that the eerie locusts of Revelation 9 and the strange frogs of Revelation 16 are demons who literally take on those peculiar physical forms; that the two prophets of Revelation 11 literally spew fire from their mouths; that every mountain in the world will be abolished during the seventh bowl judgments; that the fiery destruction of the literal city of Babylon will smolder for more than 1000 years; that Christ will return from heaven to earth on a literal horse; and that the new Jerusalem is literally a 1500 mile high cube. Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1–7* (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 455 and *Revelation 8–22* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 30, 46, 49, 90, 264, 360, 386, 467.

and Edgar Whisenant's *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Could Be in 1988*? Surely these are complex questions, questions rightly engaging the minds of sociologists of religion, as in: Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (1992) and Robert Fuller, *Naming the Antichrist: The History of an American Obsession* (1995).

Nevertheless, at the risk of oversimplifying, I would maintain that *one* of the key factors sustaining evangelical apocalypticism is its devotion to Scripture as the word of God, a devotion justly deserving of evangelical commitment. Devotion to Scripture, though, requires careful reflection and serious analysis. The Christian is under a moral obligation to "handle accurately the word of truth" (2 *Tim.* 2:15). In fact, God warns of the dangers confronting those who "wrest the Scriptures" (2 *Pet.* 3:16). With dispensationalism's rise to prominence in the last century, the role and importance of interpretive principles have become a major focus of eschatological discussion and debate.⁷ In itself this concern with hermeneutics is praiseworthy. Unfortunately though, popular dispensationalism adopts a naive *method* of hermeneutics. In fact, one of the most alluring arguments of dispensationalism is its claim to consistent interpretive literalism. Ryrie even presents interpretive literalism as a *sine qua non* of dispensationalism, noting that: "Dispensationalists claim that their principle of hermeneutics is that of literal interpretation... The dispensationalist claims to use the normal principle of interpretation *consistently* in *all his* study of the Bible."⁸ Regrettably, this attracts modern evangelicals unaccustomed to deep reflection (see: Os Guinness, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don't Think and What to Do About It* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994] and Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994]).

Before I actually analyze the dispensational hermeneutic error, {83} I would like to note a historical matter regarding the dispensational hermeneutic. It is novel—even *among*

7. For the evolution of literalism in fundamentalism, see: George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (Oxford: University Press, 1982) and Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton, IL: Bridge Point, 1993).

8. Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody, 1965), 86, 89.

dispensationalists. Let me explain.

Dispensationalism is in flux today. Indeed, it is undergoing a major paradigm shift. In fact, the new school dispensationalists are making remarkable strides toward a more covenantal approach to Scripture and interpretation. The average dispensationalist needs to be alerted to the developments within his beloved theology. Craig Blaising of Dallas Theological Seminary is one of the new breed of dispensationalists. He points out that there are three basic stages of dispensational development in history, which he calls: classic dispensationalism, revised dispensationalism, and progressive dispensationalism.⁹ *Classic dispensationalism* includes the earliest phase of dispensationalism from the time of John Nelson Darby (1800–1882) through C. I. Scofield (1843–1921) up to and including Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871–1952). *Revised dispensationalism* covers the mid–1950s, arising from the triumvirate of Charles C. Ryrie, John F. Walvoord, and J. Dwight Pentecost, and resulting in the *New Scofield Reference Bible* (1967). This view presently dominates dispensationalism (though it is beginning to wane). The newest version, *progressive dispensationalism*, arose in the 1980s and numbers among its leading scholars Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock of Dallas Theological Seminary and Robert Saucy of Talbot Theological Seminary.

Although I cannot develop this point in this context,¹⁰ it is important to note that within dispensationalism's historical development only revised dispensationalism (1950s–present) *emphasizes* hermeneutic literalism. That is, classic dispensationalism only *inconsistently* employs literalism. Blaising notes that revised dispensationalists “differed from classic dispensationalists in their gradual withdrawal from ‘typology,’ the spiritual hermeneutic of the earlier dispensationalists. Revised dispensationalists claimed to follow *only* a literal interpretation

9. Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*. See also: Blaising, “Contemporary Dispensationalism,” in *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, 2:37 (Spring 1994): 5–13.

10. For more information see my free e-mail newsletter *Dispensationalism in Transition* at: LIST-REQUEST@METANET.NET. In the text box, write: SUBSCRIBE TRANSITION-LIST

of Scripture... This was not true for classic dispensationalism.”¹¹ He notes that progressive dispensationalism rejects outright the hermeneutic commitments of revised dispensationalism.¹²

In the present paper I am focusing on the prevailing hermeneutic of dispensationalism, i.e., the literalism of revised {84} dispensationalism. This is the form that has taken the evangelical commoner by storm. A few examples of literalism from the highly regarded Ryrie will illustrate the dispensationalist application of the principle.

Ryrie chides Mickelsen for suggesting that the ancient weapons and chariots of Ezekiel 39 (which passage both Ryrie and Mickelsen deem to be in the future) are symbolic equivalents of modern weaponry; “If specific details are not interpreted literally when given as specific details, then there can be no end to the variety of the meanings of a text.”¹³ Here the principle of consistent literalism is so vigorously held that we are left with what non-dispensational evangelicals would consider an absurdity, despite attempted explanations.¹⁴

Elsewhere Ryrie writes, “Jerusalem will be exalted (Zech. 14:10), and there is no reason to doubt but that this will be literal and that the city by means of certain physical changes shall be exalted above the surrounding hills”!¹⁵ Of the “future” battle of Gog and Magog, Ryrie suggests, “A cavalry in this day of jets and atom bombs? It does seem unbelievable. But Ezekiel saw the mighty army from the north coming against the land of Israel on horses (Ezek. 38:4,

11. Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 35. One subtle evidence of the validity of this assertion may be found in Chafer’s massive eight volume *Systematic Theology*. Chafer gives only a few pages to hermeneutics—and that a very cursory and generic overview.

12. Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 36–37.

13. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 89–90. Elsewhere he suggests that horses will play a role in Armageddon because of Ezekiel 38:4, 15. Ryrie, *The Living End* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1976), 54.

14. “With the worldwide catastrophes evident during the first three and one-half years of Daniel’s 70th Week (Matt. 24:6–8; Rev. 6), a reversion to more primitive methods of warfare might become possible.” Charles H. Dyer, “Ezekiel,” in John E Walvoord and Roy G. Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1985), 1:1301.

15. Charles C. Ryrie, *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith* (Neptune: Loizeaux, 1953), 148.

15).”¹⁶ Can anyone accept such ideas as reasonable, especially since it is so easy to understand these elements as figurative? But why does Ryrie adopt these absurdities? His system-controlling hermeneutic theory requires it.

Dispensational Arguments

Ryrie provides three arguments for the literalistic hermeneutic:¹⁷

Philosophically, the purpose of language itself seems to require literal interpretation... If God be the originator of language and if the chief purpose of originating it was to convey his message to man, then it must follow that He, being all-wise and all-loving, originated sufficient language to convey all that was in His heart to tell man. Furthermore, it must also follow that He would use language and expect man to use it in its literal, normal, and plain sense.

[P]rophecies in the Old Testament concerning the first coming of Christ—His birth, His rearing, His ministry, His {85} death, His resurrection—were all fulfilled literally. There is no non-literal fulfillment of these prophecies in the New Testament.¹⁸

(3) If one does not use the plain, normal, or literal method of interpretation, all objectivity is lost.

Yet despite the vigorous assertions of revised dispensationalists, “consistent literalism” is impossible. Several problems present themselves to the would-be consistent literalist following Ryrie’s presentation.

The Philosophy of Language Argument

That which is immediately striking about Ryrie’s first proof is that it is *preconceived*. This is quite evident in Ryrie’s statement that “principles of interpretation are basic and ought to be established

16. Ryrie, *The Living End*, 54.

17. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 87–88.

18. See also: Charles L. Feinberg, *Millennialism: The Two Major Views* (3 ed.: Chicago: Moody, 1980), 41; J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1958), 10; Robert P. Lightner, *Last Days Handbook*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 126–27.

before attempting to interpret the prophetic Word.”¹⁹ Does not his approach to language function disallow the possibility of any other interpretive options *at the very outset*? Why must we begin with the assumption of literalism? May not so vast and rich a work as the Bible, dedicated to such a lofty and spiritual theme as the infinite God’s redemption of sinful man, written by so many authors over 1500 years, employ a variety of literary genres? Should not the Bible itself determine its proper interpretation?

Even revised dispensationalists admit that biblical revelation often does employ figures of speech. This brings up the very question before us: *when* shall we interpret prophecy literally and when figuratively? Poythress rightly suspects that dispensationalists “may have conveniently arranged their decisions about what is figurative *after* their basic system is in place telling them what can and what cannot be fitted into the system. The decisions as to what is figurative and what is not figurative may be a product of the system as a whole rather than the inductive basis of it.”²⁰ This problem becomes clear in Ryrie’s statement that, “The understanding of God’s differing economies is *essential* to a proper interpretation of His revelation within those various economies.”²¹ Notice what he is arguing: you must have a dispensational framework (“understanding God’s differing economies”) in order to do “proper interpretation”!²² Feinberg agrees, “Every prophecy is a part of a wonderful scheme of revelation; for the true {86} significance of any prophecy, the whole prophetic scheme must be kept in mind and the interrelationship between the parts in the plan as well.”²³

Ironically, the dispensationalist presumption of a *consistent*

19. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 86.

20. Vern Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987), 53. For a discussion between Poythress and two leading dispensationalists over Poythress’ arguments, see: *Grace Theological Journal* 10:2 (Fall 1989), 123–60.

21. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 31.

22. This is despite Ryrie’s complaint: “Thus the non-dispensationalist is not a consistent literalist by his own admission, but has to introduce another hermeneutical principle (the ‘theological’ method) in order to have a hermeneutical basis for the system he holds.” Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 94.

23. Charles L. Feinberg, *Millennialism: The Two Major Views* (3ed: Chicago: Moody, 1980), 40.

literalism is not only unreasonable, it is *unbiblical*. Regarding calls to consistent literalism over against varied approaches for passages of different genres, J. A. Alexander argues, “To assert, without express authority, that prophecy must always and exclusively be one or the other, is as foolish as it would be to assert the same thing of the whole conversation of an individual throughout his lifetime, or of human speech in general.”²⁴ Dispensationalism does not have biblical warrant for establishing consistent literalism—as the preconceived nature of their argument demonstrates.

In addition, Ryrie’s first argument begs the question. Ryrie proves that since God created language, “the purpose of language itself seems to require literal interpretation” on the basis that “it must ... follow that he would use language and expect man to use it in its literal, normal, and plain sense.”²⁵ Pentecost follows suit:

“Inasmuch as God gave the Word of God as a revelation to men, it would be expected that His revelation would be given in such exact and specific terms that His thoughts would be accurately conveyed and understood when interpreted according to the laws of grammar and speech. Such presumptive evidence favors the literal interpretation, for an allegorical method of interpretation would cloud the meaning of the message delivered by God to men.”²⁶

This is hardly a convincing argument. Why *must* God use language in only one sense? Besides the descriptive function, the emotive, expressive, stylistic, and other aspects of rational communication for high order creatures surely allows a varied function for language.

Finally, the dispensational practice of hermeneutics tends to be immune to criticism by its exclusion of countervailing evidence. As Poythress demonstrates, dispensationalists apply prophecies in a non-literal way by calling them “applications”²⁷

24. J. A. Alexander, *Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah*, 2 vols. in one (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, rep. 1977 [1875]), 1:30.

25. A problem of which dispensationalists seem to be unaware is the question as to whom a prophecy is “plain.” The dispensational practice is to make it plain to the 20th century reader, rather than the ancient audience to whom it was written.

26. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 10.

27. J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1991), 80.

or “partial fulfillments,”²⁸ or as classifying them as spiritual level fulfillments,²⁹ or arguing that sometimes original prophecies contained figures themselves. Poythress queries, how may we know this in advance?³⁰ His point is well taken. {87}

The First Coming Fulfillment Argument

The next argument is one of the most popularly employed. However, it also begs many questions. Pentecost holds that this is “one of the strongest evidences for the literal method.” He vigorously asserts, “When the Old Testament is used in the New it is used only in a literal sense.” “No prophecy which has been completely fulfilled has been fulfilled any way but literally”³¹ Walvoord argues that “the literal fulfillment of promises pertaining to the first coming is a foreshadowing of the literal fulfillment of promises pertaining to the second coming.”³²

The New Testament, however, does not support this bold claim. To say that all prophecies fulfilled in the New Testament are fulfilled literally requires that one’s system *already be in place*. In other words, it definitionally writes off all non-literal fulfillments! The Old Testament prophecies of the establishment of the kingdom, for example, find fulfillment in the ministry of Christ, though not as a literalistic, political conception (Matt. 12:28; Luke 17:20–21). These must find fulfillment beginning in the first century, for the prophecies of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit associated with them come to pass then (Acts 2).³³

Even apart from the debate regarding the kingdom, the dispensationalist argument is unfounded. For instance, though Matthew often interprets Old Testament prophecies literally,

28. For example, Psalm 69:25 in Acts 1:20. Feinberg, *Millennialism*, 51.

29. For example, the church’s participation in the new covenant: John F. Walvoord, *Prophecy Knowledge Handbook* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1990), 502–503.

30. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, 53–55.

31. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 10–11. See also: H. Wayne House and Thomas D. Ice, *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1988), 321–323.

32. John F. Walvoord, *The Nations, Israel, and the Church in Prophecy* (3 vols. in 1: Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), 3:61.

33. See Isa. 32.:14–17; Ez. 36:25–27; Joel 2:28 ff. cf. John 7:39; 16:12 ff.

he does not always do so. Crenshaw and Gunn have carefully demonstrated that “out of 97 OT prophecies only 34 were directly or literally fulfilled, which is only 35.05 percent.”³⁴ They show that there are other types of fulfillment than literal ones in the New Testament. Typical fulfillments are used by Matthew; such as God’s calling Israel up out of Egypt (Hos. 11:1) being fulfilled when the young Jesus is returned from his flight to Egypt (Matt. 2:15). Analogical fulfillments are also used, as when Rachel weeps for her children (Jer. 31:15) being fulfilled in Bethlehem’s weeping for its children (Matt. 2:18).

Types are fulfilled in their antitypes. There are a number of types that come to fulfillment and are spiritually transformed in the New Testament. For instance, historical Jerusalem is typical of its antitype, the heavenly city. Paul sets the new covenant over against the old covenant, and the heavenly Jerusalem over {88} against the earthly Jerusalem, in teaching that Christianity represents the heavenly Jerusalem: “For this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children; but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all” (Gal. 4:25–26; cf. 22–31). The writer of Hebrews does the same when he says that new covenant Christian converts (Heb. 12:24) are now come from old covenant Judaism “to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect” (Heb. 12:22–23). John sees the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven to earth in the establishment of Christianity (Rev. 21:1,2).³⁵ This is the heavenly city that Abraham ultimately seeks beyond the temporal, typical land promise (Heb. 11:10, 16).

Premillennialist LaRondelle insightfully observes:

34. Curtis Crenshaw and Grover Gunn, *Dispensationalism Today, Yesterday, and Tomorrow* (Memphis, TN: Footstool, 1985), 22. See their helpful chart on pages 14–22.

35. For a brief statement regarding the New Jerusalem/church connected, see Chapter 17 of *He Shall Have Dominion*. It seems clear from the time statements in Revelation following the New Jerusalem imagery that this must come to pass not long after John wrote (Rev. 22:6, 7, 10). See my contribution to C. Marvin Pate, *Four Views of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997).

In dispensationalism we face the fact that the hermeneutic of literalism accepts Christian typology for some selected historical parts of the Old Testament. But it suddenly rejects each typological application of God's covenant with Israel to Christ's new covenant with His Church. This seems to be an arbitrary, speculative use of typology with the Old Testament.³⁶

A classic and eschatologically relevant spiritual fulfillment of the Old Testament in the apostolic era is found in Acts 2.³⁷ Peter interprets the Davidic kingdom prophecies in general (Acts 2:30) and in Psalms 16:8–11 (Acts 2:25–28) and 110:1 (Acts 2:34–35) specifically as coming to fulfillment in the ascension and session of Christ:

Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, he would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy {89} Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear (*Acts 2:30–33*).³⁸

Later Paul preaches that the Davidic promise to Israel has been fulfilled in the resurrection of Christ:

And we declare to you glad tidings; that promise which was made to the fathers. God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that he has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm: 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You.' And that he raised Him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken thus: 'I will give you the sure mercies of David. (*Acts 13.32–34*)

Examples could be multiplied to exhaustion.

The Objectivity Argument

Due to the alleged "objectivity" factor, dispensationalists commonly suspect as evidence of liberalism any employment of

36. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy*, 48.

37. I will treat another important passage in this regard below: Acts 15:15–17.

38. As an autobiographical aside, this very passage brought me out of dispensationalism.

a non-literal interpretation of any particular passage of Scripture:

Although it could not be said that all amillennialists deny the verbal, plenary inspiration of the Scriptures, yet, as it will be shown later, it seems to be the first step in that direction. The system of spiritualizing Scripture is a tacit denial of the doctrine of the verbal, plenary inspiration of the Scriptures... Thus the allegorical method of amillennialism is a step toward modernism.”³⁹ Elsewhere we read that postmillennialism “is a system of theology based upon a subjective spiritualizing of Scripture” that “lends itself to liberalism with only minor adjustments.”⁴⁰ Consequently, “it is a fact that there are few, if any, theologically liberal premillennialists because premillennialists follow the literal method of interpreting all the Bible.”⁴¹

Of course, literalism is not necessarily protective of orthodoxy. Many cults approach Scripture literalistically—and erroneously. Consider the Mormon doctrine that God has a literal, tangible body. After citing Genesis 1:26–27 regarding Adam’s creation “in the image and likeness of God,” LeGrand Richards, an Apostle of the Church of Jesus Christ, Latter-day Saints, writes, “Attempts have been made to explain that this creation was only in the spiritual {90} image and likeness of God... Joseph Smith found that he was as literally in the image and likeness of God and Jesus Christ, as Seth was in the likeness and image of his father Adam.”⁴²

Besides being naïve, the dispensational claim to “consistent literalism” is frustrating due to its inconsistent employment. For instance, the several Old Testament prophecies regarding *David’s* reign in the millennium are not always literally understood. Ryrie comments on Hosea 3:4–5 which speaks of “David their King,” “Thus the Old Testament proclaims a kingdom to be established on the earth by the Messiah, the Son of David, as heir of the

39. Ryrie, *Basis of the Premillennial Faith*, 34, 35, 46.

40. John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1959), 34, 35.

41. Lightner, *Last Days Handbook*, 106.

42. LeGrand Richards, *A Marvelous Work and Wonder* (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1958), 16. There are even non-Mormons who point to the Biblical references to God’s “hand” as indicative of a body: F. J. Dake, *Annotated Reference Bible* (Atlanta: Dake Bible Sales, 1965), New Testament, 280.

Davidic covenant.”⁴³ Why should a consistent literalist allow this?

Neither is it necessary for Elijah’s coming as prophesied in Malachi 4:5–6 to be literally understood, according to Pentecost, “The prophecy is interpreted by the LORD as being fulfilled, *not in literal Elijah*, but in one who comes in Elijah’s spirit and power.”⁴⁴ Here he breaches two hermeneutic principles of his dispensationalism: he allows the New Testament (Luke 1:17) to interpret the Old Testament (Mal. 4:5–6) and he drops his consistent literalism.

The “millennial” sacrifices in the prophecy of Ezekiel 45 are expressly said to “make reconciliation” (Ez. 45:15, 17, 20), using the piel form of the Hebrew *kaphar* (as in *Lev.* 6:30; 8:15; 16:6 ff.⁴⁵). However, Pentecost notes that “the sacrifices *will be memorial* in character.”⁴⁶ But what literalist, reading the phrase “make reconciliation,” would surmise that this was only “memorial”? Where is the consistent literalism here?⁴⁷ 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.”⁴⁸

Isaiah 52:15 says of Messiah, “So shall he sprinkle many nations.”

43. Ryrie, *Basis of the Premillennial Faith*, 88. See also: John F. Walvoord, *Prophecy Knowledge Handbook* (Wheaton, IL: Victory, 1990), 60.

44. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 311–313; cf. E. S. English, “The Two Witnesses,” *Our Hope*, xlvii (April, 1941), 666.

45. Often sacrifices in Scripture speak figuratively of prayer (Ps. 141:2), praise (Ps. 44:6; *Jere* 17:26; 33:11), thanksgiving (Ps. 107:22; 116:17), joy (Ps. 27:6), righteousness (Ps. 4:5; 51:19), confession (Ps. 66:13), contrition (Ps. 51:17), and so forth.

46. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 525. See also Charles C. Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible* (Chicago: Moody, 1988), 1299.

47. The whole idea of a reinstated sacrificial system is repulsive to the Biblical scheme of things (see Hebrews). The dispensational system presents an unnecessary confusion here, consider: By Christ’s appointment the Lord’s Supper is the sign of the New Covenant (Matt. 26:28; *Mk* 14:24; Luke 22.20; 1 Cor. 11:25). It is to be kept until he comes (1 Cor. 11.25–26). But in the dispensational system, when Christ comes to establish the new covenant with Israel for a millennium, the Lord’s Supper (which is the sign of the new covenant) will be done away with while the sacrificial system (which is an old covenant foreshadowing of Christ’s redemptive labor, Heb. 10:1–3) will be reinstated as a “memorial.” Further, this memorial will be done in his very presence!

48. C. I. Scofield, ed., *The New Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford, 1967), 888, n. 1 (at Ez. 43:19).

The *New Scofield Reference Bible* comments, “Compare the literal fulfillment of this prediction in 1 Pet. 1:1–2, where people of many nations are described as having been sprinkled with the blood of Christ.”⁴⁹ Literal? When was Jesus’ blood *literally* sprinkled on the nations? This sounds more like “spiritualizing” than “consistent literalism.”

Of Isaiah 13:17–22 we learn that these verses “predict the destruction of the literal Babylon then existing. The verses also {91} look forward to the destruction of both political Babylon and ecclesiastical Babylon in the time of the Beast.”⁵⁰ At Revelation 18:2 we read, “The term ‘Babylon’ in prophecy is sometimes used in a larger sense than mere reference to either the ancient city or nation ...”⁵¹ This is exactly the case. And this approach is true in many other such cases, as with Israel (Gal. 6:16; Heb. 8:6–13), David’s throne (Luke 1:32; Acts 2:29–31), circumcision (Phil. 3:3; Col. 2:11), sacrifices (Rom. 12:1; 1 Pet. 2:5), the temple (1 Cor. 3:17; Eph. 2:19–22), the tabernacle (Acts 15:16; Heb. 9:11), and so forth. But when it suits them, dispensationalists will vigorously argue for literalism. For instance, of Isaiah 9:7 we read, “The throne of David’ is an expression as definite, historically, as ‘the throne of the Caesars,’ and does not admit of spiritualizing. ...”⁵² Poythress (24n) cites many examples of non-literalism in the notes of the original *Scofield Reference Bible* at Gen. 1:16; 24:1; 37:2; 41:45; 43:45; Ex. 2:2; 15:25; 25:1, 30; 26:15; Ruth Intro; Ez. 2:1; Zech. 10:1; Jn 12:24.⁵³

The catastrophic judgment prophecy in Jeremiah 4:23–28, where the heavens become black and the mountains shake and all the birds flee, is not to be understood literally, according to Charles H. Dyer, “Jeremiah pictured God’s coming judgment as a cosmic catastrophe—an undoing of creation. Using imagery from the Creation account (Gen. 1) Jeremiah indicated that no aspect of life would remain untouched.” The universal catastrophe imagery

49. Scofield, *New Scofield Reference Bible*, 758, n. 3.

50. *New Scofield Reference Bible*, 724, n. 3.

51. *Ibid.*, 1369.

52. *Ibid.*, 721.

53. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, n. 24.

had to do with “the approaching army of Babylon.”⁵⁴ John A. Martin, writing in the same dispensational commentary, explains the language of Isaiah 13:10–13, where the sun, moon, and stars are darkened and the earth is moved out of its place:

The statements in 13:10 about the heavenly bodies (*stars ... sun .e moon*) no longer functioning may figuratively describe the total turnaround of the political structure of the Near East. The same would be true of *the heavens* trembling and *the earth* shaking (v. 13), figures of speech suggesting all-encompassing destruction.⁵⁵

New Testament Finality

Rather than such “objective” interpretations, the Christian exegete must allow the New Testament to interpret the Old. “The Christian interpreter comes to the Old Testament with a {92} different theological perspective than the Jewish expositor.”⁵⁶ As Van Gemenen well states, “Christian students of the Old Testament *must pass by the cross of Jesus Christ on their return to the Old Testament*, and as such they can never lose their identity as a Christian.”⁵⁷ Simply put, “We cannot forget what we have learned from Christ.”⁵⁸ This process allows the conclusive revelation of God in the New Testament authoritatively to interpret the Old.

The dispensationalist resists such: “As a result of the covenant of grace idea, covenant theology has been forced to place as its most basic principle of interpretation the principle of interpreting the Old Testament by the New.”⁵⁹ However, the Scripture suggests that even the prophets could not always fathom their own predictions⁶⁰

54. Charles H. Dyer, “Jeremiah,” in Walvoord and Zuck, *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 1:1136, 1135.

55. John A. Martin, in *Ibid.*, 1059.

56. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy*, 7.

57. Willem Van Gemenen, *The Progress of Redemption: The Story of Salvation from Creation to the New Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), 21.

58. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, 104.

59. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 187.

60. 1 Pet. 1:10,11. See: Dan. 8:27; 12:8; Zech. 4:13; Rev. 7:13–14; 17:89. Young defends the view that Daniel did not understand his prophecies in Dan. 8:27 and 12:5. E. J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949), 182.

because of the nature of predictive prophecy (Num. 12:8). Nor could the pre-resurrection, pre-pentecostal disciples,⁶¹ nor could the last prophet of the old covenant era, John Baptist (Matt. 11.2–6). This is because “with respect to eschatology, people in the Old Testament were not in the same position as they were for short-range prophecy... The exact manner of fulfillment frequently could not be pinned down until the fulfillment came.”⁶² The conclusive New Testament revelation was needed (Heb. 1:12) for the fuller understanding.

The Emmaus disciples, holding to current literalistic Jewish conceptions, had to have Christ open the Scripture to them (Luke 24:32, 45). Christ rejected the political Messianism of the literalistic Jews.⁶³ The Jews had a dullness of understanding⁶⁴ that seems to be accounted for, at least partially, in that “the prevailing method of interpretation among the Jews at the time of Christ was certainly the literal method of interpretation.”⁶⁵ After all, when Christ confronted Nicodemus, he pointed to this very problem: “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? ... If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?’” (n. 3:10, 12). Literalism plagued the Jews throughout Jesus’ ministry; see: John 2:19–21,; 3:5–7; 4:10–15, 31–38; 6:31–35, 51–58; 8:21–22, 32–36; 8:51–53; 9:39–40; 11:11–14; 13:33–37;

61. *Matt.* 16:21–22; *Luke* 18:31–34; *John* 2:22; 20:9.

62. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, 107.

63. *Matt.* 23:37–38; *Luke* 19:41–42; 24:21–27; *John* 6:15; 18:36. “The Jews expected such a kingdom for they took God literally at His word.” Ryrie, *Basis of the Premillennial Faith*, 88.

64. *2 Cor.* 3:14; cf. *Matt.* 13:15; *John* 8:12; 12:46; *Acts* 28:26–27; *Rom.* 11:7–8. The dullness led eventually to their ascribing Satanic influence to Christ (*Matt.* 12:22–28).

65. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 17. See also: Richard Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), chap. 1. Bernhard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: W. A. Wilde, 1950), 48f. In fact, the fundamental idea of a premillennial kingdom seems to be traceable back to the literalistic Jewish conception, and thus it may be said that “premillennialism is a descendent of ancient Judaism,” William Masselink, *Why a Thousand Years?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1930), 20. See also Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1969), 234; Henry B. Swete, *Commentary on Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1977 [1906]), cxxxiii; Feinberg, *Millennialism*, 34–35.

18:33–37. Few would dispute the fact that the Jews of Christ's day looked for a political Messiah (John 6:14–15, 18:33–36). The {93} Emmaus disciples were rebuked for just such a conception (Luke 24:17–21, 25–26). Christ suffered, then entered immediately into his glory.⁶⁶ The cause of Israel's rejection of Christ is due, at least partially,⁶⁷ to their not knowing he fulfilled prophecy (Luke 19:42–44; Matt. 23:37, 38)—since he did not fulfill it in a way that met their literalistic expectations.

Consequently, “it is irresponsible to jump unprepared into the area of end-time prophecies of Scripture. By considering such apocalyptic portions of Holy Scripture by themselves, in isolation from the total prophetic-messianic framework, one will necessarily fall into the pitfall of a geographic and ethnic literalism.”⁶⁸ The whole concept of progressive revelation points to this truth. Thus, the historical-grammatical analysis “cannot be separated from interpretation ‘in faith.’ The Bible requires continual submission of our understanding to what the spirit of God has inspired (1 Cor. 2:12–15).”⁶⁹

In the final analysis, the widely popular, linchpin hermeneutical argument, as promoted by leading Dallas Seminary dispensationalists, has been greatly exaggerated. For instance, John S. Feinberg, a noted contemporary dispensationalist, has been led to admit on the hermeneutical argument that “Ryrie is too simplistic.”⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the issue is still popularly promoted

66. Luke 24:26; 1 Pet. 1:11. cf. John 12:23–24; *Phil.* 2:8–9.

67. Ultimately, their spiritual condition is the source of their rejection. And the misapprehension of prophecy is a result of their rejection.

68. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy*, 7. As Young notes, “In speaking of the future or Messianic age, Isaiah, as a prophet of the Old Testament, uses the thought forms and the figures which were current in that age. It is obvious that the language of the prophet cannot be interpreted in a consistently literal sense. Rather, Isaiah takes the figures which were the property of the Old Testament economy and makes them the vehicles of expression for the truths of salvation and blessing which were the characteristics of the age of grace.” E. J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), 1:99.

69. Willem VanGemeren, *The Progress of Redemption: The Story of Salvation from Creation to the New Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), 27.

70. John S. Feinberg, in Feinberg, ed., *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1988), 73. One major theologian who converted from dispensationalism is S. Lewis Johnson, who warns of the anti-apostolic nature of

as *the* danger of a non-dispensational eschatology.⁷¹

Israel in Prophecy

The role of Israel as a distinct people radically distinguished from the church is the leading feature of dispensationalism. In fact, as Poythress suggests, this theological presupposition is probably the *raison d'être* of the literalistic hermeneutic: “The dualism of Israel and the church is, in fact, the deeper dualism determining when and where the hermeneutical dualism of ‘literal’ and ‘spiritual’ is applied.”⁷² Non-dispensational evangelical exegetes are in agreement against the radical Israel/church dichotomy of dispensationalism.

It is important that non-dispensationalists grasp the significance of dispensationalism’s understanding of Israel, for herein lies a fundamental error of the entire system. This crucial error distorts the entire idea of the progress of redemption, the {94} unity of God’s people, the fulfillment of prophecy, and the interpretation of Scripture.

Ryrie points to the distinctiveness of Israel as the first of the three *sine qua non* of dispensationalism: “A dispensationalist keeps Israel and the Church distinct.”⁷³ Elsewhere he is even more detailed:

- (1) The church is not fulfilling in any sense the promises to Israel.
- (2) The use of the word church in the New Testament never includes unsaved Israelites.
- (3) The church age is not seen in God’s program for Israel. It is an intercalation.
- (4) The church is a mystery in the sense that it was completely unrevealed in the Old Testament and now revealed in the New Testament.
- (5) The church did not begin until the day of Pentecost and will be removed from this world at

literalism, which he says interprets “woodenly.” S. L. Johnson, *The Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), 83.

71. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, Ch. 14; Dave Hunt, *Whatever Happened to Heaven?* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1988), Ch. 12; Hal Lindsey, *The Road to Holocaust* (New York: Bantam, 1989), Ch. 3.

72. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, 24.

73. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 44. See also: Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, 9. Walvoord, *The Nations, Israel, and the Church in Prophecy*, “Nations” section, 56 ff. Feinberg, *Continuity and Discontinuity*, 81 ff. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, 29 ff.

the rapture which precedes the second coming of Christ.⁷⁴

The Scripture does not support such theological assertions, as I will demonstrate.

Israel in Scripture

The Israel of the Old Testament is the forerunner of and continuous with the new covenant phase of the church, which is the fruition of Israel. Thus, New Testament Christians may even call Abraham our father (Rom. 4:16) and the old covenant people our “fathers” (1 Cor. 10:1). This clearly evinces a spiritual genealogical relation. Employing another figure, we are said to be grafted into Israel (Rom. 11:16–19) so that we become one with her, partaking of her promises (Eph. 2:11–20). In fact, the LORD appointed twelve apostles in order to serve as the spiritual seed of a New Israel, taking over for the twelve sons of Israel. Both the names of the twelve tribes (as the old covenant representatives) and the twelve apostles (as the new covenant representatives) are incorporated into the one city of God, the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:12, 14).

Dispensationalists strongly assert that “the Scriptures never use the term Israel to refer to any but the natural descendants of Jacob.”⁷⁵ Nevertheless, we are designated by terms associated with the old covenant people: the “seed of Abraham,”⁷⁶ “the {95} circumcision,”⁷⁷ “a royal priesthood,”⁷⁸ “twelve tribes” (James 1:1), “diaspora” (1 Pet. 1:1), and the “temple of God.”⁷⁹ Do not these terms clearly speak to the essence of Israel’s covenantal identity? The Jews trusted in and boasted of their descendancy from Abraham⁸⁰ and circumcision was a distinguishing covenantal

74. Ryrie, *Basis of the Premillennial Faith*, 136.

75. Feinberg, *Millennialism*, 230. See also *The New Scofield Reference Bible*, 1223. “The term *Israel* is nowhere used in the Scriptures for any but the physical descendants of Abraham.” Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 127.

76. *Rome* 4:13–17; *Gal.* 3:6–9, 29.

77. *Rom.* 2:28–29; *Phil.* 3:3; *Col.* 2:11.

78. *Rom.* 15:16; 1 *Pet.* 2:9; *Rev.* 1:6; 5:10. See: *Ex.* 19:6.

79. 1 *Cor.* 3:16–17; 1 *Cor.* 6:19; 2 *Cor.* 1:16; *Eph.* 2:21.

80. We read often of “the God of Abraham” (*Gen.* 28:13; 31:42, 53; *Ex.* 3:6, 15–16; 4:5; 1 *Kin.* 18:36; 1 *Chr.* 29:18; 2 *Chr.* 30; 6; *Ps.* 47:9; *Matt.* 22:32; *Mark*

mark of the Jews⁸¹ —yet these concepts are applied to Christians. Peter follows after Paul’s thinking when he designates Christians as “stones” being built into a “spiritual house” (1 Pet. 2:5–9), but he does more. He draws upon several Old Testament designations of Israel and applies them to the church: “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation.”⁸² He, with Paul, also calls Christians “a peculiar people” (1 Pet. 2:10; Tit. 2:14), which is a familiar Old Testament designation for Israel.⁸³

If Abraham can have Gentiles as his “spiritual seed,”⁸⁴ why cannot there be a spiritual Israel? In fact, Christians *are* called by the name “Israel”: “And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16). Although dispensationalists attempt to understand Galatians 6:16 as speaking of Jewish converts to Christianity “who would not oppose the apostle’s glorious message of salvation,” such is surely not the case.⁸⁵

The entire context of Galatians is set against claims to a special Jewish status or distinction, as urged by dispensationalists: “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26–28). In Christ all racial distinction has been done away with. Why would Paul hold out a special word for Jewish Christians, “the Israel of God,” when he had just stated that there is no boasting at all, save in the cross of Christ (Gal. 6:14)? After all, “in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a

12:36; Luke 20:37; ; *Acts* 3:13; 7:32). The Jews expected blessings in terms of their Abrahamic descent (Matt. 3:9; 8:11; Luke 3:8; Luke 13:16, 28; Luke 16:23–30; 19:9; John 8:39, 53; Rom. 11:1; 2 Cor. 11:22).

81. Circumcision is *the* special sign of God’s covenant with Abraham and Israel (Gen. 17:10, 13). Circumcision is mentioned 86 times in the Scriptures; the uncircumcised are mentioned 61 times.

82. 1 Pet. 2:9–10; Ex. 19:5–6; *Deut.* 7:6.

83. Ex. 19:5; *Deut.* 14:2; 26:18; Ps. 135:4.

84. *The New Scofield Reference Bible*, 1223 (at Rom. 9:6).

85. *Ibid.* See also: Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 139. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 89. Donald K. Campbell, “Galatians,” in Walvoord and Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 1:611.

new creation” (Gal. 6:15). That new creation is spoken of in detail in Ephesians 2:10–22, where Jew and Gentile are united in one body.

It is important to note, as does Poythress, that the church is not a “straight-line” continuation of Israel. It fulfills Israel through Christ.⁸⁶ All God’s promises are “yea” and “amen” in Christ (2 {96} Cor. 1:20). Since we are all the sons of Abraham (Gal. 3:29) through Christ, we receive the fullness of blessing through him (Rom. 8:17; Eph. 1:23; Col. 2:10).

The well-known and vitally important “new covenant” is originally framed in Jewish terminology: “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah” (Jer. 31:31⁸⁷). Nevertheless, despite the contortions through which dispensationalists go to avoid the obvious—some even declaring there are two new covenants⁸⁸—this new covenant specifically comes to existence in the days of Christ.

We should note that the new covenant is specifically applied to the church: (a) Pentecost is quite correct, when he writes of the establishment of the LORD’s Supper, “In its historical setting, the disciples who heard the LORD refer to the new covenant . . . would certainly have understood Him to be referring to the new covenant of Jeremiah 31.”⁸⁹ What could be more obvious? (b) In fact, the sudden appearance of the “new covenant” designation in the New Testament record, without qualification or explanation, demands that it be referring to the well-known new covenant of

86. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, 126.

87. See also: Ezek. 11:16–21; Joel. 2:32; Zeph. 3:12–13.

88. See Ryrie, *Basis of the Premillennial Faith*, chap. 6 and Pentecost, *Things to Come*, chap. 8, for more detail. There has been a serious division even within dispensational circles over the function of the new covenant as illustrated in Ryrie’s work. There are three main views: (1) The Jews Only View is “the view that the new covenant directly concerns Israel and has no relationship to the church” (107). (2) The One Covenant/ Two Aspects View is that the one “new covenant has two aspects, one which applies to Israel, and one which applies to the church” (107). (3) The Two New Covenants View, Ryrie’s view, actually “distinguishes the new covenant with Israel from the new covenant with the church. This third view finds two new covenants in which the promises to Israel and the promises to the church are more sharply distinguished even though both new covenants are based on the one sacrifice of Christ” (107).

89. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 126.

Jeremiah (Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25). Paul was the apostle to the gentiles, even promotes the new covenant as an important aspect of his ministry (2 Cor. 3:6). He does not say he is a minister of a “second new covenant” or “another new covenant.”

Hebrews 8, in everyone’s view, cites Jeremiah’s new covenant in a context in which he is speaking to New Testament Christians. Yet Ryrie argues that “the writer of the Epistle has referred to both new covenants”!⁹⁰

Though Ryrie dogmatically affirms “Israel means Israel” via his literalistic hermeneutic, he does so on the basis of an inconsistently applied principle. Elsewhere Ryrie fails to demand that “David means David.” He cites Jeremiah 30:8–9 as proof of Messiah’s millennial reign: “They shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them.” Then he says, “the prophet meant what he said—and what else can we believe ... ?” He cites also Hosea 3:4–5 where “David their king” will be sought in the millennium, then comments, “Thus the Old {97} Testament proclaims a kingdom to be established on the earth by the Messiah, the Son of David, as the heir of the Davidic covenant.”⁹¹

Other passages illustrating how the church fulfills prophecies regarding Israel are found in the New Testament. Citing Amos 9:11–12, James says God is rebuilding the tabernacle of David through the calling of the gentiles (Acts 15:15 ff.).⁹² In Romans 15:8–12 Paul notes that the conversion of the gentiles is a “confirming of the promises to the fathers.” And at least one of the verses brought forth as proof speaks of Christ’s messianic kingdom rule (Rom. 15:12). In Acts the preaching of the gospel touches on the very hope of the Jews, which was made to the fathers (Acts 26:6–7). The promises did not set forth a literal, political kingdom but a spiritual, gospel kingdom. Psalm 2 begins coming to fulfillment in the resurrection of Christ—not at the second advent (Acts 13:32–33).

Ryrie’s argument that “Church” never includes the unsaved

90. Ryrie, *Basis of the Premillennial Faith*, 121.

91. *Ibid.*, 86–7, 88.

92. O. Palmer Robertson, “Hermeneutics of Continuity,” in Feinberg, *Continuity and Discontinuity*, chap. 4.

Israelites is not a good argument. Not only do we not discover unsaved Israelites in the church, but neither do we find unsaved gentiles there—if by “church” Ryrie means the invisible church. However, if he is speaking of the visible church, there surely were unsaved Israelites in it, just as there were unsaved gentiles caught up in it in the first century. The idea of the church is not racial—it represents a purified Israel (Rom. 2:28–29), not a wholesale adoption of the Jewish race. Ryrie’s argument is irrelevant.

Regarding the parenthesis or intercalation view of the church, I have already noted that there are Old Testament prophetic passages that do apply to the calling of the gentiles in the New Testament. These speak then of the church. Another illustration in addition to those given above is Paul’s use of Hosea 1:9–10 and 2:23. In Romans 9:24–26 he interprets these very strong Jewish-contexted verses as referring to gentile salvation in the new covenant phase of the church.

Neither should we deem the new covenant era, international church as a mystery that is “completely unrevealed in the Old Testament,” as does Ryrie. The clarity of the revelation increases in the New Testament and the audience who hears it expands. Nevertheless, the revelation itself was given in the Old Testament. [98] Ephesians 3:3–6 reads, “By revelation he made known unto me the mystery ... which in other ages was not made known unto the *sons of men*, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ.” In Romans 16:25–26 Paul points out that the “mystery” of gentile salvation was hidden only from the *gentiles* (which in Eph. 3 Paul calls “the sons of men”), *not from the Old Testament prophets*, for he defends his doctrine of the mystery from “the scriptures of the prophets.” He speaks of “the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and *by the scriptures of the prophets*, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, *made known to all nations* for the obedience of faith.” Paul says that the “mystery” that was kept secret is “now made manifest” to “all nations,” not just to Israel.

In Luke 24:44–47 the LORD taught that it was necessary for him to die in order to fulfill Scripture in bringing salvation to the gentiles:

All things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among *all nations*.

The distinction between Jew and gentile has *forever* been erased. Paul points out this fact in Ephesians 2:11–16:

Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh..., at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: but now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who *bath made both one, and bath broken down the middle wall of partition between us*; having *abolished* in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for *to make in himself of twain one new man*, so making peace; And that he might {99} reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, *having slain the enmity thereby*.

Thus, “there is neither Jew nor Greek ... for ye are all one in Christ” (Gal. 3:28) and “there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision” (Col. 3:11). Dispensationalists see this as but a temporary parenthesis in God’s plan!

Many of the early church fathers—even those claimed as premillennialists by modern dispensationalists—understood the church to be the recipients of Israel’s promises. Let us show this by quoting Dallas Seminary trained dispensationalist Alan Patrick Boyd, “The majority of the writers/writings in this period [A. D. 70–165] completely identify Israel with the Church.”⁹³ He specifically cites Papias, 1 Clement, 2 Clement, Barnabas, Hermas, the Didache, and Justin Martyr.⁹⁴ Boyd notes that, “In the case of Barnabas, ... he has totally disassociated Israel from the precepts of

93. Alan Patrick Boyd, “Dispensational Premillennial Analysis of the Eschatology of the Post-Apostolic Fathers (Until the Death of Justin Martyr),” Master’s Thesis, Dallas, TX: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1977, 47.

94. Papias, *Fragment* 6; 1 Clement 3:1; 29:1–30:1; 2 Clement 2:1–3; 3:5; Barnabas 2:4–6,9; 3:6; 4:6–7; 5:2, 7; Hermas, *Similitudes* 9:16:7; 9:15:4; 9:12:1–13:2; the Didache (14:2,3), and Justin Martyr (*Dialogue* 119,120,123,125). See Boyd, “Dispensational Premillennial Analysis,” 46, 60, 70, 86.

the Old Testament. In fact he specifically designates the Church to be the heir of the covenantal promises made to Israel (4:6–7; 13:1–6; 14:4–5).⁹⁵ Elsewhere he writes, “Papias applied much of the Old Testament to the church.”⁹⁶ Of Hermas he notes “the employment of the phraseology of late Judaism to make the Church the true Israel ...”⁹⁷ Of Justin Martyr “he claims that the Church is the true Israelitic race, thereby blurring the distinction between Israel and the Church.”⁹⁸

Conclusion

The Bible is the revelation of the holy and gracious God to sinful, rebellious man. It is a vast and deep work touching on time and eternity that was written over a period of fifteen centuries by “holy men of God [who] spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1.21). Due to the richness of its expression and the glory of its content, we must approach it with a holy reverence for God and a fearful appreciation of its own majesty and grandeur. The Scripture is not a cold mathematical formula that may be scientifically resolved. It is the living word of God to man concerning God’s gracious, multi-faceted plan of redemption.

There are, of course, general rules of interpretation that are essential to follow if one is to understand its message. Non-dispensationalists follow the general evangelical approach to Scripture known as the grammatico-historical hermeneutic. The “plain and simple” approach to a passage is not always the correct one. This is why Jesus can be heard saying, “He that has ears to hear, let him hear.” This is why so many—including his own disciples—often misunderstand his preaching. Biblical interpretation requires careful thought and reflection, rather than mechanical manipulation. Having weighed dispensational literalism in the balance of reason and Scripture we have found it wanting. {100}

95. *Ibid.*, 46.

96. *Ibid.*, 60–61.

97. *Ibid.*, 70.

98. *Ibid.*, 86.

THE LATTER DAY TRIUMPH OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM:

A Biblical and Theological Exposition of Isaiah 2:2–4

William O. Einwechter

© 1996 by *William O. Einwechter*

Introduction

The vision of Isaiah 2:2–4 is a glorious one! What Christian can read it without being thrilled at the future prospects for the kingdom of God? The description of the nations streaming to the mountain of the Lord's house to be taught the law of God so that they can walk in the ways of the Lord is as amazing as it is wonderful. The picture of a world where the nations no longer fight one another nor even concern themselves with the arts and implements of war is as astonishing to behold as it is glorious to contemplate. Unbelievers may scoff at this prophecy of Isaiah, considering it nonsense, but every true believer in Jesus Christ gives assent to the truth of what Isaiah says, and with hope longs for the day of the fulfillment of this vision.

Yet, in spite of the agreement that Isaiah 2:2–4 is the infallible word of God, Christians do not agree on the details of the prophecy, nor do they see eye to eye on the time or the nature of the realization of this prophetic text. Interpretations of Isaiah 2:2–4 generally follow the broader understanding of the three basic millennial views. The premillennialist believes that the details of Isaiah 2:2–4 are a description of the future millennial kingdom of

Christ that will be set up here on earth after Christ's return. The amillennialist generally sees Isaiah 2:2–4 as being fulfilled in only a spiritual sense in the church and in the hearts of individuals. Other amillennialists who adhere to “realized eschatology,” contend that Isaiah 2:2–4 will find an initial spiritual fulfillment in this age, and then a complete realization in the new heavens and new earth of the eternal state. Finally, the postmillennialist holds that Isaiah 2:2–4 will be fulfilled in this age, and that the prophecy is a {108} picture of what will happen in history by the power of the risen Christ working through his church. Which one is the proper interpretation? The goal of this essay is to seek an answer to that question.

Isaiah 2:2–4 is a very important text for understanding biblical eschatology.¹ In a few verses it not only gives a comprehensive picture of the ultimate effect of the kingdom of Christ on the nations, but it also contains an extremely significant phrase that pinpoints *the time in history* when these things will take place. We believe that this passage, when properly understood in the light of other Scripture, is able to provide strong biblical support for the correctness of the postmillennial view of Christ's kingdom. The postmillennialist believes that the kingdom of our LORD Jesus Christ was established at his first coming, that Christ is now seated at the Father's right hand, and that he has been given dominion over all the earth. During this age (i.e., the inter-advent period) Christ will bring the nations into submission to his authority through the preaching of the gospel by his Spirit empowered church, and, as a result of the fulfillment of the Great Commission, there will be a time of great peace and blessing throughout all the earth. We believe that Isaiah 2:2–4 not only agrees with this view, but that it is also one of the primary texts for establishing this outlook on biblical prophecy. In this paper we take up the challenge of Thomas Ice who says:

My challenge is simply this ... show me one passage that requires a postmillennial interpretation and should not be taken in a premillennial sense. After fourteen years of study it is my belief that there is not one passage anywhere in Scripture that would lead

1. Its importance is amplified by the fact that the prophecy of Isaiah 2:24 appears almost verbatim in Mic. 4:1–3.

to the postmillennial system. The best postmillennialism can come up with is a position built upon inference.²

We intend to show that Isaiah 2:2–4 is one passage of Scripture that requires a postmillennial interpretation and that leads to the postmillennial system.³

But before we actually begin the study of Isaiah 2:2–4, a fundamental hermeneutical principle must first be established. Without a concurrence on this axiom we cannot hope to come to any agreement on the interpretation of the text before us. The {109} principle is this: the New Testament Scripture is the final authority for the Christian's understanding of the Old Testament Scripture: therefore, we must interpret the Old Testament in the light of the teaching of Jesus and his apostles. This hermeneutical principle has always been the understanding of the Christian church. God has spoken his final word to the church in Jesus Christ, and through him has brought together all the strands of Old Testament revelation into one comprehensible whole (Heb. 1:1–2). Christ not only fulfills the Old Testament Scripture in his person and work, but also in his teaching that explains the full meaning of what Moses and the prophets wrote (Matt. 5:17–18; Luke 24:25–27; 44–45). The apostles of Christ were given the Holy Spirit so that they would continue the teaching of Christ and bring to completion the canon of the New Testament (John 16:12–15; Eph. 2:20; Rev. 21:14). Longenecker rightly exhorts us to “recognize the uniqueness of Jesus as the true interpreter of the Old Testament and the distinctive place he gave to the apostles in the explication of the prophetic word.”⁴ Many err in their interpretation of prophecy because they fail to heed this exhortation. Often, instead of allowing the New Testament to determine the true sense of Old

2. H. Wayne House and Thomas Ice, *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1988), 9.

3. Obviously, the postmillennialist believes that there are many passages that require a postmillennial interpretation besides Isaiah 2:1–4. For a Biblical defense of postmillennialism from two other texts of Scripture see my previous papers, “The Dominion of Christ: The Message of Psalm 2 and Its Interpretation in the NT” and “The Victorious Reign of Christ: The Message of Psalm 110 and Its Interpretation in the NT”

4. Richard Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis In The Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), 218.

Testament prophecy, they bind themselves to the limited vista of Old Testament Israel, and that is a serious mistake. Bright explains the proper approach:

Because the New Testament has claimed the Old, and because Christ is for us the crown and norm of revelation and thus the key to its true significance, we have to read and understand the Old—i.e., interpret it—in the light of what the New affirms. We have to hear the Old Testament through Christ, for it is at his hands that we ... have received it. That is to say, we have to refer each of the Old Testament's texts to the New for verdict, whether it be ratification, modification, or judgment.⁵

Bright continues:

Interpretation of the Old Testament must begin, as all interpretation must, with a grammatico-historical exegesis of the text (with all that that entails) aimed at arriving at its precise verbal meaning. That goes without saying. An interpretation {110} that will not begin there cannot be called an interpretation of the text. But, again as elsewhere, exegesis must proceed in theological depth ... But, in the case of the Old Testament, a further step imposes itself. Having determined the theology that informs his text, the preacher [or any interpreter] must—because he is a Christian and has received the Old Testament from the hands of Christ, who is its fulfillment—bring his text to the New Testament, as it were, for verdict. He must ask what the New Testament has done with this aspect of Old Testament faith in the light of Christ. Does it announce its fulfillment? Does it ratify it and take it over intact? Does it modify it or give it a new significance? Or pass judgment upon it and abrogate it?⁶

As Christian interpreters of Old Testament prophecy we cannot confine ourselves to a reading of the text that goes no further than the literal perspective of the Old Testament Jew.⁷ The

5. John Bright, *The Authority of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1967), 200.

6. *Ibid.*, 211–12.

7. This limited Jewish perspective on Old Testament prophecy in regard to the kingdom of the Messiah is particularly evident among dispensational premillennialists. David Brown, in his book *Christ's Second Coming: Will It Be Premillennial?* (Edmonton: Still Waters Revival Books, 1990. Reprint of 1882 edition), devotes an entire chapter to the refutation of the premillennial view of a future “millennial revival of Jewish peculiarities” (338–358). Brown says, “That

New Testament is our final standard. Our construction of Old Testament prophecy in general and of Isaiah 2:2–4 in particular must, ultimately, rest there.

The purpose of this essay is to provide a biblical and theological exposition of Isaiah 2:2–4. The first section will deliver an interpretation of the text in its Old Testament setting. Having done this, the New Testament will be studied for a “verdict” on the meaning and fulfillment of this prophecy by Isaiah.

Exposition of Isaiah 2:2–4

Isaiah, the son of Amoz, is considered by many to be the greatest of the Old Testament prophets. His prophecies are unsurpassed in their content, beauty, and power. Isaiah is sometimes referred to as “the evangelical prophet” because of his clear presentation of the Messiah as the lamb of God who dies for the sins of his people. Furthermore, Isaiah prophesies of the coming glory of the Messianic kingdom in a way that is unequaled in the Old Testament; Isaiah 2:2–4 is one of those sublime predictions of the glorious kingdom of Christ.

Isaiah was sent by the LORD to preach and prophesy to the kingdom of Judah and to the capital city of Jerusalem. His ministry as prophet extended over a period of approximately sixty years, {111} running at least from 739 B.C. (Isa. 6:1) to 681 B.C. (Isa. 37:38). The conditions in Israel during the years of his ministry varied, but, except for the revival under King Hezekiah, the spiritual conditions in Judah were in a low and deplorable state.⁸ Isaiah’s prophecies focused on the southern kingdom of Judah,

the unbelieving Jews should look for a rebuilt temple, a re-established priesthood, the restoration of their bloody sacrifices, and an Israelitish supremacy—at once religious and civil—over all the nations of the earth, when their Messiah comes, is not to be wondered at... But that any Christians should be found agreeing with the unbelieving Jews in their views of Old Testament prophecy—that there should be a school of Christian interpreters, who, while recognizing Jesus as the promised Messiah, and attached in all other respects to evangelical truth, should nevertheless contend vehemently for Jewish literalism, and, as a necessary consequence, for Jewish altars, sacrifices, and supremacy—is passing strange” (338). Brown seeks to demonstrate that this hermeneutical approach of Jewish literalism is “in flat contradiction to the New Testament” (347).

8. For the Biblical account of the conditions in Judah during the time of Isaiah, see 2 Chronicles 26–33.

but he reached beyond Judah and also prophesied concerning the northern kingdom of Israel and the surrounding gentile nations. Isaiah announced the judgment of God upon sinful Judah and Israel, and upon the heathen world powers of Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon. But he also declared the future salvation of God that would come to Israel and the gentiles through the Messiah, the Servant of the LORD. Isaiah 2:2–4 needs to be seen in this connection; this text declares the effect of the Messiah's salvation and universal kingdom on Israel and the nations.

Isaiah 2:2–4 in Its Old Testament Context

Chapter one of Isaiah serves as an introduction to the entire book. It contains the four major themes that will be developed in the book: the sinfulness of Judah; the need for repentance; the remnant according to grace; judgment and restoration. With chapter two, Isaiah begins the record of the prophecies that God commanded him to deliver to Judah, Israel, and the nations. It is significant that Isaiah begins with a prediction of the exalted destiny of Mount Zion and Jerusalem in the Messianic age. This prophecy declares that, in spite of the prevailing sin and unfaithfulness of the people in Isaiah's day, God will fulfill his covenant promises to Abraham and David. The spiritual conditions in Judah and the dire predictions of judgment could have caused despair were it not for the vision of the future glory and triumph contained in such texts as 2:2–4.

The Superscription (2:1)

It is generally believed that verse one contains the heading, not only for the prophecy of 2:2–4, but also for the oracles in 2:54:6. Chapters 2–4 do seem to comprise a unit. The section begins with the vision of the future exaltation of Zion (2:2–4), then it proceeds with prophecies of judgment on the house of Jacob for its excessive wickedness and apostasy (2:6–4:1). The section {112} concludes by returning to the theme of Zion's deliverance and future glory through the Messiah (4:2–6). So then, it appears correct to read 2:1 as the superscription to the opening series of oracles. However, this fact should not cause us to lose sight of its close connection to the prophecy of 2:2–4.

The oracle of 2:2–4 is the word that Isaiah, the son of Amoz “saw.” This word is from the LORD; it is a divine word of revelation given to Isaiah so that he will make known the truth of God. This word is one that Isaiah saw. This does not mean that Isaiah saw the revelation with his physical eyes, but that God disclosed the matter to the mind of the prophet. As Young explains, “Isaiah does not hear; he sees the word. The phrase simply refers to a revelation in a vision, which was communicated in words.”⁹ The vital thing to note is that the prediction of the exaltation of the LORD’s house, of the streaming of the nations to Zion to be taught the law of God, and of the end of all war among nations is the infallible word of God! All of these things may appear as impossibilities, but all will take place exactly as stated because the sovereign LORD has revealed this word to his people.

The prophecy that Isaiah saw concerns “Judah and Jerusalem.” Judah is the name of one of the sons of Jacob and Leah (Gen. 29:35). Judah also names the tribe of Israel that descended from him. The tribe of Judah is very important in biblical history. It was prophesied by Jacob that a mighty ruler would arise from Judah (Gen. 49:10–12). David, who was of the tribe of Judah, was chosen by God to be king of Israel. God made a covenant with David, that David’s throne would be established for ever through his seed (2 *Sam.* 7:8–16). Both the prophecy of Jacob and the covenant with David find their fulfillment in the Messiah, who is the son of David of the tribe of Judah. Judah also became the designation of the southern kingdom after the division of Israel into two kingdoms in the days of Solomon’s son Rehoboam. The southern kingdom was comprised of only the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin.

In the specific context of Isaiah chapter 2, Judah would appear to refer to the southern kingdom. However, Judah is a term of rich significance because of its association with David and the Davidic covenant. All of the hopes of Israel clustered around the Messiah who comes from David’s line. The future of Judah, in a very real {113} sense, is the future of all Israel. After the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel, the covenantal history of the seed of Abraham continues in Judah alone. During the Babylonian captivity, and

9. Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), 1:95.

after their return from exile, all the people of Israel came to be known by the name of Judah. They were all called “Jews” which comes from the Aramaic form of Judah (Dan. 3:8; Jer. 40:11–12; Es. 3:4; Ez. 4:12; Neh. 1:2). Therefore, this prophecy concerning the future of Judah need not be restricted to one tribe or to the southern kingdom alone, but might properly be extended to include all the seed of Abraham.

The vision that Isaiah received also concerns “Jerusalem,” the capital city of the kingdom of Judah. As with Judah, Jerusalem is a term of rich importance in the Old Testament. The city was initially called Salem. We hear of it for the first time when Melchizedek, the king of Salem and the priest of the most high God, greets Abraham with bread and wine after Abraham’s victory over the confederation of kings who had captured Lot (Gen. 14:17–20). Later, Jerusalem is chosen by David to be his capital city. Then, with the building of the temple on Mount Zion by Solomon, God chooses Jerusalem as his dwelling place among men and the center for his worship and the offering of sacrifices (2 Chron. 6:1–7:3). With Jerusalem being the place of David’s throne and the location of the temple where Yahweh dwells, the city becomes the center of the theocracy (Ps. 132:11–17). The Messiah himself is to be enthroned upon the “holy hill of Zion” (Ps. 2:6). Thus, in the developing theology of the Old Testament, Jerusalem (Zion) becomes symbolic of God’s kingdom and heavenly throne. The earthly Zion is representative of the heavenly Zion (Ps. 11:4; 103:19; 48:2; 99:1–3; Mic. 4:7).

Isaiah makes numerous references to Jerusalem and Zion in his prophecies. At times he is directly referring to the actual city (Isa. 7:1; 36:2), while at other occasions Jerusalem is used in a symbolic or representative fashion. The name Jerusalem stands for the covenant people of God (40:2; 41:27; 51:17; 52:9; 65:18–19); it is typical of God’s kingdom (Isa. 24:23); it is the source of salvation (Isa. 33:20–22; 66:10–14); in it the LORD will lay “for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation” (Isa. 28:16). Therefore, Isaiah uses Jerusalem in both a literal and {114} figurative sense, and the context must determine in what specific way he is employing it. This must be kept in mind as we approach the vision of 2:2–4: The vision concerns Jerusalem, but is it Jerusalem in a literal or symbolic sense? According to the usage

of Jerusalem in Isaiah and in the rest of the Old Testament, either could be acceptable; only an exposition of the text can determine its proper significance here.

The superscription to Isaiah 2:2–4 informs us that the text is the word that God revealed to Isaiah concerning Judah and Jerusalem. But our survey of the usage and theology of Judah and Jerusalem forbids an unstudied literalistic approach to the vision and its fulfillment. Judah and Jerusalem could very well be understood in a symbolic sense in this particular vision.

The Latter Day Exaltation of the Mountain of the Lord's House (2:2)

With verse 2 the actual vision begins, and what a revelation it is! Isaiah declares that a time is coming when the LORD's House will be pre-eminent in all the earth, and all nations shall flow unto it! This verse teaches the ultimate triumph of Yahweh and his kingdom over all false gods; the day will come when Yahweh alone is worshipped by the nations. That Isaiah begins his prophecies with this triumphant vision is significant in light of the wickedness of the people and the impending judgment of God on Judah. The vision provides the necessary perspective for the righteous remnant and gives them hope, for in spite of the present calamity, the cause of truth shall prevail and God's covenant promises will be realized. Oswalt states that, in its historical context, Isaiah 2:2–4 functions to emphasize "the certainty of Israel's destiny," and also to motivate "the present Judeans to live lives of faithfulness and righteousness" because their nation is to be restored and become the means for the redemption of the nations.¹⁰

It is notable that Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah, delivered the very same prophecy on the exaltation of the LORD's house (Mic. 4:1–3). There has been much scholarly discussion over whether the prophecy was original with Isaiah or with Micah, or if they both quoted from a common source. Very possibly, they both received the same vision directly from the LORD.¹¹ But indeed,

10. John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, ch. 1–39, in *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, ed. R. K. Harrison (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 116.

11. See Oswalt for a discussion of this question, *Ibid.*, 115–116.

the {115} question of sources makes no real difference in the interpretation of either text. The important element, for those who accept the divine inspiration of the Bible, is that both Isaiah 2:2–4 and Micah 4:1–3 are the infallible word of God. The fact that the LORD had this prophecy recorded twice is an indication of its great importance as a revelation of the future triumph of the Messianic kingdom.

Isaiah begins his oracle by saying, “And it shall come to pass.” This expression is one frequently used for the announcement of a future event. It refers to something that certainly will be. With the confidence of a prophet speaking the word of God, Isaiah says that the things that he is about to relate will *surely* come to pass.

The specific time for the fulfillment of the vision is indicated by the phrase, “in the last days.” The Hebrew word here translated “days” could refer to a literal day, to time in general without any reference to days, or to a certain space (period) of time.¹² The term *day* “is the most important concept of time in the OT by which a point in time as well as a sphere of time can be expressed.”¹³ In this context “days” is utilized in reference to a sphere of time. The definite article indicates that a specific period of time is in view. The particular period of time in sight is defined by the word “last.” The meaning of “last” is that of the latter or extreme part, and the term is primarily employed in regard to time and is often joined to the word “days,” as it is in this text. The expression, “the last days,” is used fourteen times in the Old Testament and can refer to the general future (Dt. 31.29; Jer. 23.20; 30.24), or it can pertain to the final period of history, which is the age of the Messiah and his kingdom (Gen. 49:1; Num. 24:14; Dan. 2:28; Hos. 3:5; Mic. 4:13). Consequently, “the last days” often functions as a technical term in the Old Testament to designate the Messianic era. The days of the Messiah are the last days because they are the days of fulfillment and consummation. As Young explains, “The phrase, therefore, is eschatological; when the latter days appear they will reveal the Messiah, who is the fulfillment and goal toward which

12. F. H. W. Gesenius, *Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scripture*, trans. S. P. Tregelles (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), 342.

13. Leonard J. Coppes, “*yôm*” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R Laird Harris (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 370.

all previous history has been pointing.”¹⁴ There can be no doubt that Isaiah is referring to the days of the Messiah and his kingdom in this passage. Although the Messiah is not mentioned by name in this vision, the phrase “in the last days” locates the time for the fulfillment of the details of the prophecy of 2:2–4 in his days, *i. e.*, after he has {116} made his appearance in history and inaugurated his reign. It is *vital* to observe that all the particulars of 2:2–4 are to come to pass within the sphere of time indicated by the expression “in the last days.”

Isaiah proceeds to describe what will take place in the Messianic era by saying, “the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills.” Zion is the mountain of the LORD’s house for on it the temple, which is specifically called the house of Yahweh (1 Kin. 6:5, 37; Ps. 116:19; 122:1; 134:1; Isa. 37:1; 38:20; Jer. 7:2), was situated. Zion is “the mountain of the LORD of hosts” (Zech. 8:3), for there he dwells (Ps. 74:2; Joel 3:21), from there he reigns (Ps. 146:10; Mic. 4:7), and there he receives the worship and sacrifices that he had, through Moses, commanded the children of Israel to bring to him. Zion originally referred to the southeastern hill of Jerusalem and was distinct from Mount Moriah where the temple was built. However, in time, the name Zion expanded to include the temple and the temple area. Eventually, Zion was used as a name for the entire city of Jerusalem and is employed interchangeably with Jerusalem (Ps. 135:21; Zech. 1:14). In addition, Zion became a name to connote the people of Judah (Ps. 78:68; 87:2; 97:8), and all Israel (Ps. 126:1; 147:2; Zech. 2:7). Thus, Zion came to be used in a figurative or symbolic sense as the name of the covenant people of God (Ps. 102:13). Another very important non-literal application of Zion in the Old Testament is its usage to designate God’s throne and kingdom (Ps. 125:1). Zion is associated with God’s rule when it is called “the city of the great King” (Ps. 48:2). The LORD will reign forever from Zion (Mic. 4:7; Ps. 146:10), and the Messiah shall be enthroned at his right hand on the holy hill of Zion (Ps. 2:6; 110:1–2).

Isaiah’s usage of Zion is rich and in accord with the rest of the Old Testament. He refers to the capital city of Judah by the

14. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 97.

names of Zion and Jerusalem (10:12, 32). For Isaiah, Zion is used to denote the nation of Judah (10:24; 14:23; 49:14). Zion is the dwelling place of Yahweh (8:18; 33:5), symbolic of God's kingdom (33:20; 52:1–2), and from it God will reign over the nations (24:23; 31:9; 33:5). Of particular importance is the association of Zion with those who are the partakers of the LORD's salvation. The one {117} who is saved is an "inhabitant of Zion" (12:6), the people of God will be called "the Zion of the Holy One of Israel" (60:14), and God says to Zion, "Thou art my people" (51:16), and it will be from Zion that the good tidings of the LORD's salvation will come (40:9).

The perspective that Zion (and Jerusalem¹⁵) is very frequently used in a non-literal and symbolic sense in the Old Testament, and by Isaiah, is significant for a proper interpretation of Isaiah 2:2–4. Many interpreters ignore the abundant evidence that Zion is frequently used figuratively and insist that the mountain of the LORD's house be understood of the literal hill of Zion. But the fact is that Isaiah uses Zion in a figurative way far more often than he employs it in a literal fashion. This leads to the strong possibility of a non-literal meaning in Isaiah 2:2. Furthermore, the comprehensive nature of the vision of 2:2–4 suggests that various aspects of the symbolism of Zion are in view.

It is "the mountain" (Zion) that will be "established" and "exalted" above all other mountains and hills. This implies that God's kingdom and his covenant people will be firmly fixed in a place of dominance and supreme importance. The vision is one of triumph for the LORD and his people. Central to the kingdom of God and God's covenant is worship. Isaiah's oracle denotes that "in the last days" the worship of false gods will cease and the worship of Yahweh will be preeminent. In the ancient world mountains were associated with the worship of the gods. But in the Messianic era all these "hills" and "mountains" will fall, be forsaken, and then all worship will be centered in the one holy hill of Zion. Only one temple will be "exalted," and that is the temple in Zion where the LORD dwells. Young affirms that, "By means of this picture Isaiah wishes to teach the truth that the worship of the

15. See the 5th page of this article for a survey of the figurative usage of Jerusalem. Note how closely it parallels the usage of Zion.

LORD, expressed by metonymy as the mountain of the house of the LORD, will triumph over all other religions and forms of worship.”¹⁶ The elevation of Zion typifies God’s house as “the spiritual center of the world of nations.”¹⁷ But it is not Zion as one localized hill that is in view here, but Zion as the symbol of God’s presence and the pure worship that his covenant people bring unto him wherever they are gathered. In the time of the Messiah the “LORD will create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, {118} a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night” (Isa. 4:5; cf. also Mal. 1:11), thus indicating that Zion will have many “assemblies” in that day, and that God will manifest his glory in “every” dwelling place of Zion.

The exaltation and establishment of Zion over all other mountains also reveals the triumph of God’s kingdom over all other kingdoms. As Grogan notes, “‘Zion’—‘Jerusalem’ represents divinely ordained worship and divinely authorized government.”¹⁸ Zion depicts God’s throne and his rule over the nations. His Son, the Messiah, shall rule the nations from Zion and bring all of his enemies under his feet (Ps. 2:6–9; 110:1–2). Mountains are symbols of power in the Old Testament (Jer. 51:25; Zech. 4:7), and the Messianic kingdom that will last forever is symbolically depicted as a mountain that fills the whole earth (Dan. 2:44).¹⁹ The future worldwide kingdom of the Messiah is designated by the LORD as “all my holy mountain” (Isa. 11:9). Therefore, since Isaiah 2:2–4 is a vision of what will take place in the days of the Messiah, and since other Old Testament predictions teach that he will subdue the nations to his authority during his reign, it can be properly inferred that the exaltation of Zion above the “hills” is also a picture of the coming rule of God over all the nations through the Messiah (cf. Isa. 9:6–7; 11:1–9). This inference is confirmed by Isaiah 2:4.

16. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 101.

17. J. Ridderbos, *Isaiah*, trans. John Vriend in *The Bible Student’s Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985), 54.

18. Geoffrey W. Grogan, “Isaiah” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 6:35.

19. Bruce K. Waltke, “*har*,” *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 224.

The latter day exaltation of the mountain of the LORD's house is not a description of a physical elevation of the actual hill of Zion, but is a symbolic depiction of the triumph of the pure worship of God over all idols, and the establishment of the sovereign dominion of God's kingdom over all the earth.

The Latter Day Conversion of the Nations (2:2b-3)

The future glory of the Messianic age is further depicted by the declaration that "all the nations shall flow unto" Zion so that they can learn of God's ways and walk in obedience to his law. In other words, "in the last days" the nations will be converted to the worship and service of the LORD. In the time of Isaiah, the gentile nations were hostile to Israel and the worship of Israel's God (Ps. 2:1-2). The only reason why a gentile nation came to Jerusalem was to seek to conquer it (cf. Isa. 36)! Yet in the future, when Zion is exalted and established, the nations will stream unto it so that {119} they might give their obedience to the God of Jacob. The verb "flow" refers to the flowing of a river. It is an image of continuance and abundance. The picture, therefore, is that of multitudes from "all" the nations continually surging unto the exalted house of God.

Verse three explains the specific reason why the nations are flowing to Zion: 'And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths.' This utterance of the people expresses an intense desire to obey God's word. These are the words of people who are converted; their speech indicates a changed heart. As Poole states, "They show the truth of their conversion by their hearty desire to be instructed in the way or method of worshipping and serving God acceptably, and by their firm purpose of practicing the instructions given to them."²⁰ This wonderful picture of the conversion of multitudes from every nation is a mighty work of God's grace. Young says, "Note how clearly the doctrine of grace is present in this passage. It is not in their own strength that peoples resolve to flow unto Zion. They act only because God has worked in their hearts, making

20. Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible* 3 vols. (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1963. First Published in 1685), 2:330.

them dissatisfied with their present condition and inclining them to seek him.”²¹ Having been turned from their idolatry, false religions, and false philosophies, the people of all nations will come “to the house of the God of Jacob” to learn the truth so that they can live according to the commandments of God.

The reason they come to Zion is because Zion is the center for the propagation of God’s truth. Isaiah declares, “For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.” In the Old Testament era the law of God was taught from Zion unto the tribes of Israel, and the word of the LORD was limited to the sons of Jacob. The gentile nations were left in their darkness and ignorance. But when the Messiah comes all this will change, and God’s word and holy law will be declared to all the nations of the earth. The teaching of the Scripture will be extended to all nations without distinction. Calvin interprets Isaiah as here stating that Zion “shall become the fountain of saving doctrine, which shall flow out over the whole world.”²² In this text “Jerusalem has become a symbol of God’s self-revelation in history, and there is no life apart from him who has revealed himself supremely in {120} that context.”²³ The word of the LORD will be taught from Jerusalem and all peoples will come to know that the truth is being proclaimed there and shall seek it out with zeal.

So then, Isaiah 2:2b–3 predicts the conversion of the nations to the worship and service of the one true God. This prediction of Isaiah is in full agreement with the promise of the Abrahamic covenant that in “thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 22:18). The important aspect of Isaiah’s vision is that it specifies that the time in sacred history when the promise of the Abrahamic covenant shall be fulfilled among the nations will be the period of time known as the last days, *i. e.*, the Messianic era. In those days the nations will be converted and will partake of the blessings of the covenant of grace.

The Book of Isaiah asserts repeatedly that the nations shall

21. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 103.

22. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, 4 vols., trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, reprint edition, 1989), 1:96.

23. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 118.

participate in the Messianic salvation. The Root of Jesse shall be “an ensign for the people” and gentiles shall seek him (11:10). The Servant of the LORD will be “a light for the Gentiles” so that he might bring the LORD’s “salvation unto the end of the earth” (42:6; 49:6, 22). Kings shall see him and worship and bow down their faces to the earth (49:7, 23; 60:3): God’s Servant shall “sprinkle many nations” and “all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God” (52:9,15). Nations that did not know of the promised Messiah shall run unto him (55:5), the peoples will leave their gross darkness and come to his light (60:2–3), and the nations that were not called by the LORD’s name shall seek him (65:1). The other prophets concur with these predictions of Isaiah. Jeremiah speaks of the day when “the nations shall bless themselves in him, and in him shall they glory” (4:2). Daniel tells of a vision he received wherein the Son of Man is given “dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him” (7:14). Zechariah prophesies of the day when “many nations shall be joined unto the LORD” and be his people (2:11). In a passage very similar to Isaiah 2:2–3, Zechariah foretells the time when “many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD” (8:21–23). The prophet also declares that the future King of Israel, who comes bearing salvation, “shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to {121} the ends of the earth” (Zech. 9:9–10). Through Malachi the LORD foretells of the conversion of the nations in emphatic terms, saying, “For from the rising of the sun even to the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts” (1:11).

The Old Testament doctrine on the conversion of all the nations of the earth to the worship and service of Yahweh is unmistakable. And by means of Isaiah 2:1–3 it is equally plain that this marvelous turning of all peoples will take place “in the last days.”

The Latter Day Cessation of War Between Nations (2:4)

Verse four unveils one of the exceptional results of the salvation of the nations of the earth: all warfare between nations shall utterly cease. This indicates that in the “last days” there shall come a time of complete worldwide peace; there shall be an age of unprecedented tranquility and harmony among men. It is crucial to note that the advent of peace is due to the fact that the nations have been drawn to Zion to learn God’s law and walk in his commandments. Peace is the fruit of submission to the LORD and obedience to his holy word.

The text says that “he shall judge among the nations.” “He” would refer back to the “LORD” in verse three. However, in the light of such passages as Isaiah 9:6–7 and 11:1–10, and because the vision here concerns “the last days,” i.e., the Messianic era, it is evident that the one who is doing the judging and rebuking is the Divine Son, who is called the Prince of Peace.

The primary sense of the word “judge,” is to carry out the process of government.²⁴ The Hebrew term “judge” means to act as a law-giver, judge, or governor; it refers to one who gives and executes the law and decides controversies in accord with the law.²⁵ The word “judge” can, therefore, be properly translated in this verse by the word “govern” or by the word “rule.” The LORD will govern “among the nations.” This indicates that the sphere of the Messiah’s rule is over all the nations. It agrees with verse 2 that {122} pictured the world-wide kingdom of the Messiah by the exaltation of Zion over all the other hills and mountains of the earth. The Messiah is not just the king of the Jews; he is the king of all the earth. “In the last days” what was said of Yahweh in regard to Israel will be said of the Messiah in regard to all the nations. “For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; he will save us” (Isa. 33:22).

As King, the LORD will “rebuke many people.” The word “rebuke” denotes the establishment of justice by the punishment of those who break the law. When a man is guilty of transgression

24. Robert D. Culver, *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 947.

25. Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, Charles Briggs, *The New Brown, Driver, and Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Lafayette, Ind.: Associated Publishers and Authors, 1981; reprint of 1907 edition), 1047.

he is censured by the judge and the penalty is imposed. So will the King of all the earth (Ps. 47:2) rebuke and correct the nation that breaks his law and ignores his authority (Isa. 9:4).

But how will the Messiah judge and rebuke the nations? As the nations are converted they will come to recognize that God has enthroned his Son at his right hand on the holy hill of Zion (Ps. 2:6; 110:1). This will cause them to repent of their rebellion (Ps. 2:1–3), and they will acknowledge the Messiah as their king and his law as their rule. The Messiah shall publish his law in Zion and each nation will seek a knowledge of this law, and then in obedience to their king, will order their affairs in strict compliance with the word of God. If a nation fails to honor him and obey his law, the Messiah shall punish them for their disobedience (Ps. 2:9–12; 110:2; Isa. 9:4). In time, all the enemies of the Messiah will be put under his feet (Ps. 110:1). So shall he be “the governor among the nations” (Ps. 22:28), and so shall peace come to the earth.

Therefore, as a result of the conversion of the nations and their submission to the authority of the Messiah and the rule of his law-word “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.” This text declares that warfare will completely vanish from the face of the earth. Instead of resorting to war to settle their differences the nations shall submit their disputes to the judgment of the word of God. Accordingly, the tools of war will no longer be necessary, so these implements of destruction will be refashioned into useful instruments for peaceful and productive work. Since nations will {123} no longer act in hostility to one another, the need to be proficient in the arts of war will also cease.

Other Old Testament texts speak of a coming era of worldwide peace. The LORD “maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire” (Ps. 46:9). David says concerning the Messiah, “In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth” (Ps. 72:7). Hosea foretells the day when Yahweh “will break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the earth” (2:18). Isaiah himself says that the Messianic king shall be called “The Prince of Peace,” that “of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end” (9:6-

7), and that “the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance forever” (32:17).

That there shall be an era of world-wide peace is as sure as the word of God. Equally sure is the time in history when all warfare shall cease; that time, according to Isaiah 2:2–4, will be “in the last days.”

The word that Isaiah saw in 2:2–4 depicts in figurative language the future triumph of Jerusalem and Judah, *i. e.*, the victory of God’s kingdom and God’s people. The text declares that the LORD’s throne will be established over all other governments and that the pure worship of God shall prevail in all the earth; that all the nations of the world shall be converted to the worship and service of Yahweh; that the Messiah shall govern the nations; and that there will be an age of peace in all the earth. According to the word of God, all of these marvelous doings shall come to pass *in the last days*.

Isaiah 2:2–4 In Its New Testament Perspective

Having completed the exposition of Isaiah 2:2–4 in its Old Testament context, it is necessary that this passage be considered according to the perspective of the New Testament. It is essential that the final revelation of God in Christ shed its light on the word given to Isaiah during the Old Testament economy. The New Testament is the final authority on the interpretation of Old Testament prophecy. Christ and his apostles teach the full meaning and the true explanation of the Old Testament text, and to their words all must bow.²⁶ {124}

The Period of Time of the Last Days

One of the most significant aspects of Isaiah 2:2–4 is the statement that all the details of the prophecy shall be fulfilled “in the last days.” This phrase pinpoints the time in world history when the events predicted by Isaiah will take place. In the Old Testament, “the last days” often functions as a technical term to designate the Messianic era (Mic. 4:1; Gen. 49:1; Num. 24:14; Dan.

26. See our previous discussion of the hermeneutical principle of the priority of the New Testament in the interpretation of Old Testament Scripture on pages 2 and 3 of the paper.

2:18; Hos. 3:5), and this is doubtless its usage in Isaiah 2:2: But does the New Testament give more explicit teaching on the time frame of the last days? It most certainly does.

Hebrews 1:1–2 is a good place to begin a study of the New Testament usage of “the last days.” Here the author compares the revelation of God in the past through the prophets with the revelation of God in the present through his Son, the LORD Jesus. “In time past” God revealed his word to men in different ways and at different times through a group of men called prophets. The “time past” is the Old Testament era. But “in these last days” God has revealed himself supremely through his own Son, Jesus Christ. The revelation of God in Jesus is absolutely unique because Jesus is God’s Son, and in him the age of fulfillment has arrived; accordingly, the writer uses the Old Testament technical term that designates the final age of realization and consummation. Morris, commenting on the usage of “last days” in this text, says, “Here, in Hebrews, it means that in Jesus the new age, the Messianic Age, has appeared. Jesus is more than simply the last in a long line of prophets. He has inaugurated a new age altogether.”²⁷ In Jesus Christ the era of the Old Testament prophets ceases and the era of the New Testament begins. Jesus, himself, explicitly taught that John the Baptist was the last of the Old Testament prophets (Matt. 11:7–15). Therefore, with the ending of John’s public ministry and the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, the last days, the Messianic age, began (Mark 1:14–15). The testimony of Hebrews 1:1–2 is that the last days commenced with the public teaching and preaching ministry of Jesus.

Peter’s sermon in Acts 2 provides further instruction regarding the time of the last days. On the Day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples of Jesus according to the LORD’s promise (Acts 1:4–5, 7). The baptism of the Spirit was accompanied {125} by a miracle of speaking in tongues, but some scoffers said that the disciples were simply drunk. Peter begins his Pentecost sermon by showing the absurdity of the charge of drunkenness (2:14–15), and then goes on to declare what is really taking place. He says, “But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel;

27. Leon Morris, “Hebrews,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 12:13.

And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh..." (2:16–17; emphasis added). The baptism of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost is the fulfillment of Joel 2:28–32, and this means that the last days have truly arrived; it is a "clear indication that the messianic age has dawned."²⁸ Significantly, both the Septuagint and the Hebrew text of Joel 2:28 begin only with the words "after this." So then, the words, "and it shall come to pass in the last days," are Peter's commentary on the meaning of the simple phrase "after this." Peter transfers the Old Testament expression for the Messianic age into Joel 2:28 to announce that Pentecost is proof that the Messianic age of fulfillment Messiah is here. Notice carefully that Peter uses the *exact words* from Isaiah 2:2, "and it shall come to pass in the last days."

Other New Testament texts give additional and unmistakable evidence that "the last days" commenced in the days of Christ and his apostles. Paul warned Timothy of the evil men who would arise to trouble the church "in the last days," and encouraged him to stand fast, specifying that Paul considered that they were already in the last days (2 *Tim.* 3:1). James, speaking to the rich of his own day, rebuked them for their covetousness and for laying up treasure (literally) "in the last days" (5:3). The Apostle John, writing to the churches under his care, said, "Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time" (1 John 2:17). Jude indicates that the mockers he and the other believers had encountered were the fulfillment of the words of Christ's apostles who said that "there should be mockers in the last time" (17–18). Peter taught that Christ had been "foreordained before the foundation of the world" to be the savior, "but was manifested in these last times for you" (1 Pet. 1:20).

In a passage that has important ramifications for the New Testament doctrine of the last days, Peter states that "in the last days" scoffers will come who ask, "Where is the promise of his {126} coming?" (2 Pet. 3:3–4). This reveals that the era of the last days must *precede* the second coming of Christ, for it is in the last days that scoffers appear denying the return of the LORD Jesus.

28. Everett F. Harrison, *Interpreting Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 66.

Hence, it can be properly concluded that the Messianic era of the last days will continue until at least the return of Christ. But does the period of time called “the last days” carry beyond the day of Christ’s return? The New Testament evidence points to the fact that it does *not*.

The New Testament indicates that this present age is the final age before the eternal state. This age is “the dispensation of the fulness of times,” during which God shall “gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth; even in him” (Eph. 1:10). The word “dispensation” that is used here by Paul, refers to God’s sovereign plan or scheme, and thus of the divine economy during a particular period. This dispensation is defined (identified) as “the fulness of times.” Other texts specifically identify this present age before the return of Christ as “the fulness of times” (Gal. 4:4; 1 Cor. 10:11; Heb. 9:26). In the biblical perspective all the preceding times were preparatory for the coming of Christ. The Old Testament era looked forward to the days of fulfillment in the age of the Messiah, which age the New Testament calls, “the fulness of times.” Therefore, the dispensation of the fulness of times is synonymous with the last days. This is further evidence that the last days signify *this present age*. What is God’s plan for the fulness of times? The Apostle Paul says that in this dispensation it is God’s purpose “to gather together in one all things in Christ” (Eph. 1:10). Carefully note the comprehensiveness of God’s plan for this age! “To gather up” is to bring everything together and present it as a whole; it is to sum up and complete the work. What work? The work of redemption in Christ! It is God’s purpose to reconcile all things in heaven and earth through Christ during this age (Col. 1:20)!

This perspective on the present age before Christ’s return is in perfect harmony with 1 Corinthians 15:20–28 which states that Christ’s second coming marks the end of his mediatorial reign and brings about the full subjection of all things unto him, even death itself (cf., Ps. 110:1; Heb. 10:12–13). At his second coming, the dead will be raised (Jesus called the day of resurrection “the last day”²⁹), the mediatorial kingdom of Christ will be merged into

29. John 6:39, 40, 44, 54; 11:24–26. The premillennial theory of multiple resurrections has no true Biblical support. The Scripture teaches a single

the {127} eternal kingdom of God, and the eternal state shall begin. Furthermore, in Acts 3:21 Peter declares that Jesus Christ must remain in heaven “until the times of the restitution of all things, which God had spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets.” The “times of the restitution,” is not a point in time (there is no article in the Greek and times is plural), but a span of time in which the restitution, or restoration, of all things takes place. The “all things” are defined as the words that God gave through the Old Testament prophets, and in the context must refer to the prophecies concerning the Messianic age and kingdom! Since “the times of restitution” precede the second coming, the span of time in view is the *inter-advent* period. Therefore, Peter here teaches that the era of time between Christ’s first and second comings will witness the *fulfillment* of all the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah and his kingdom, including the vision of Isaiah 2:2–4!

Comparing Scripture with Scripture it can be concluded that the expressions, “the last days,” “the dispensation of the fulness of times,” and “the times of the restitution of all things,” all refer to the Messianic age which begins at Christ’s first coming and ends with his second coming. The New Testament specifies this present age as the age for the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies of Christ’s redemptive work on the personal, corporate, and cosmic levels, and that it is the final age before the eternal state. The view that the last days include a “millennial kingdom” of Christ after his second coming which will witness the fulfillment of the “kingdom prophecies” of the Old Testament has no New Testament support. There is simply no concrete New Testament evidence for the notion that there will be a one thousand year kingdom of Christ after his return,³⁰ and the apostolic teaching on the last days is decidedly against it.

Isaiah 2:2–4 predicted that in the last days the nations would

resurrection of all men at the last day: Dan. 2:12; John 5:25–29; *Acts* 17:31; 24:15; 1 Cor. 15:23–28, 50–57; 2 *Tim.* 4:1.

30. The appeal to Revelation 20:1–6 for support of a future millennium after Christ’s return is an appeal to a weak, not a concrete witness. The text appears in a highly symbolic portion of God’s word and its interpretation is greatly disputed by conservative scholars. See J. Marcellus Kik, *An Eschatology of Victory* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1971) for a postmillennial interpretation of Revelation 20:1–6.

be converted to the worship and service of God, the Messiah would govern the nations, and all warfare between the nations would cease. According to the New Testament, *the time of the last days is the inter-advent period*. The conclusion is inescapable: all the details of Isaiah 2:2–4 must come to pass before Jesus Christ returns. The New Testament perspective is that the last days will witness the {128} comprehensive restoration of all things in Christ, including the conversion of the nations and the end of all war as predicted by Isaiah. Therefore, Isaiah 2:2–4 is a vision of the glorious victory of Christ and his church.

The Identity of Judah and Jerusalem

If “the last days” refers to the span of time between the first and second comings of Jesus Christ, then the prophecy of Isaiah 2:2–4 will come to pass in the era of the New Testament church. This conclusion creates an immediate problem for some because Isaiah says that his oracle concerns Judah and Jerusalem, the mountain of the LORD’s house, and Zion. All of these expressions seem to imply a fulfillment of the vision for the physical descendants of Abraham (the Jews) in the land of Palestine. However, a careful reading of the New Testament indicates that the promises of the Old Testament are fulfilled in the church which is the spiritual seed of Abraham and the true Israel of God: In New Testament perspective, the Christian Church is the new Israel and the new Jerusalem.

An important factor that should be taken into account is that the Old Testament prophets spoke in the context of the old covenant order and their words were in terms of the institutions and forms of their own day. Therefore, if their prophecies are to be properly understood in the era of the new covenant order, their words must be considered in light of the apostolic teaching to discern if the Old Testament terminology is given a new significance or application. If the New Testament does redefine any of the terms, then it is imperative that the Old Testament prophecy be read in accord with this redefinition. Of great significance for the Christian interpretation of Isaiah 2:2–4 is the fact that the New Testament redefines “Judah” (Israel), “Jerusalem” and “Zion,” and “the mountain of the LORD’s house” (the temple), and applies them

all to the New Testament church!

As previously indicated, “Judah” is a term of rich meaning in the Old Testament because of its association with David, the Davidic covenant, and, therefore, with the Messiah. Truly the hopes and future of all Israel were centered in Judah: After the fall of the northern kingdom the covenantal history of Israel continued in {129} Judah alone, and all the people of Israel came to be called by the name “Jews,” which is the Aramaic form of “Judah.” So then, Judah came to represent all Israel. The New Testament is definite in its teaching that the church is the new Israel, or “the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16). The true seed of Abraham are not the physical descendants of Jacob, but only those who have faith in Jesus Christ, Jew or gentile (Gal. 3:16–17, 26–29). Abraham is the father of “all” who believe (Rom. 4:9–18). The authentic Jew is the one who is circumcised in heart and rejoices in Jesus Christ as savior and LORD (Rom. 2:28–29; Phil. 3:3). The Apostle Paul teaches that believing Jews and gentiles are one body in Christ, and that the Old Testament covenantal distinctions between them are now removed in the church (Eph. 2:11–3:7). The New Testament church is the household of God and the heir of the promises given to Israel in the Old Testament (Eph. 2:12, 19–22; 3:7). Accordingly, the new covenant with Israel is fulfilled in the New Testament church (cf. Jer. 31:31–34 *with* Matt. 26:18; 2 Cor. 3:6; Heb. 8:7–13; 10:12–18). Also, Jesus predicted that the kingdom of God would be taken from national Israel and given to his church (Matt. 8:10–12; 21:19, 43; Luke 20:9–16). Since the church is the new Israel, it is not at all surprising that the apostles designate the church by the very same terminology that was used in the Old Testament to designate Israel (1 Pet. 2:9; Gal. 3:29). As Hoekema concludes, “Is it not abundantly clear... that the New Testament church is now the true Israel, in whom and through whom the promises made to Old Testament Israel are being fulfilled?”³¹ The New Testament does, therefore, give “a new definition of the people of God, and likewise a new conception of Israel.” The church is the eschatological Israel and as such it replaces national Israel as the true people of God in

31. Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 198.

whom the promises of the covenant are fulfilled.³²

Closely related to the New Testament doctrine that the Christian church is the Israel of God is the apostolic teaching that the church is the temple of God. In the Old Testament the temple was located on Mount Zion in Jerusalem. It was there that God manifested his glorious presence in the holy of holies. It was there that the Levitical priesthood ministered and offered sacrifices. The temple was central to the Old Testament order. The temple of God is also central to the New Testament order, but its nature has {130} radically changed! In this present age, the temple is not a building in Jerusalem. Rather, the temple is the *Christian church* for God now dwells in the hearts of men through his Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul states that Christians are the temple of God individually (1 Cor. 6:19) and collectively (1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16), and that the church is “an holy temple in the LORD ... an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Eph. 2:21, 22). Therefore, the temple of God is no longer limited to one location, but it is found wherever Christ’s church is present (cf. Isa. 4:5; Mal. 1:11).

As the temple of God is now identified with the Christian church, so is the city and hill where the Old Testament temple once stood. Jerusalem and Zion were used interchangeably in the Old Testament and each was employed in both a literal and figurative fashion.³³ It is important to recall that both Jerusalem and Zion were used in a symbolic sense to denote the covenant people of God, Israel. Therefore, if the New Testament redefines Israel as being the Christian church, then it should not be at all surprising to find that the New Testament states that the church is the new Jerusalem. The writer of Hebrews indicates that to enter the church by faith in Jesus Christ is to “come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (Heb. 12:22). The Apostle Paul states that the church is the “Jerusalem which is above” and “the mother of us all” (Gal. 4:26), thereby claiming

32. Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard De Witt (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), 333–334.

33. See the 5th, 6th and 7th pages of this article for a discussion of the Old Testament usage of Jerusalem and Zion.

“that Christianity represents the heavenly Jerusalem.”³⁴ The earthly Jerusalem is a type of the heavenly Jerusalem where God dwells. The Christian church supplants the old Jerusalem as the dwelling place of God, and so, the church is the new representative of the heavenly Jerusalem. In conjunction with this perspective Burton asserts, “The same point of view from which the seed of Abraham are, not the Jews, but believers in Christ, makes the new Jerusalem not the Jewish capital, but the community of believers in Jesus the Christ. ...”³⁵

Therefore, the New Testament doctrine that “the last days” refers to the period of time between the first and second comings of Christ is in perfect harmony with the declaration of Isaiah that his prophecy (Isa. 2:2–4) concerns Jerusalem, Judah, and Zion because the New Testament distinctly identifies the church as the new Israel and the new Jerusalem. The glorious predictions of Isaiah 2:2–4 will be fulfilled in and through the church in this present age. {131}

In New Testament perspective then, Isaiah 2:2–4 specifies that the church shall one day be triumphant in the world. The Christian faith shall prevail and all other cults and religions shall fall and be abandoned. Jesus Christ will be worshipped throughout all the world as the nations are converted and people stream to his church to hear the word of God taught and preached. All this will come to pass through the power of the risen Christ working in and through “the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all” (Eph. 1:22–23). Then Jesus Christ will come again to raise the dead, judge all men, and deliver the kingdom to the Father (1 Cor. 15:23–28).

The Conversion of the Nations

Since Isaiah 2:2–4 unquestionably teaches that all the nations of the earth will be converted to the worship and service of the LORD “in the last days,” and since the New Testament identifies the last days as this present age, then it is necessary to conclude that

34. Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1992), 150.

35. Ernest De Witt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1920), 263.

the nations will be converted to the Christian faith before Christ returns. This deduction is fully supported in the New Testament by Jesus' parables on the growth of the kingdom in this age, by the Great Commission, and by the Apostle Paul's prediction that "all Israel shall be saved," i.e., converted to faith in Christ.

In Matthew 13 Jesus delivers a series of parables on "the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven." The Jews of Jesus' day had many misconceptions concerning the Messianic kingdom. In these parables Jesus is dealing with these misunderstandings by teaching on the reception of the message of the kingdom, and the growth and consummation of the kingdom. Three of the eight parables in Matthew 13 have a direct bearing on Isaiah's prophecy that the nations will be converted in this age. The first is the parable of the mustard seed (13:31–32). The mustard seed represents the small beginning of the Messianic kingdom in the time of Christ. During his earthly ministry Jesus was "planting" his kingdom. Contrary to Jewish expectation the Messianic kingdom had a very small and humble inception. However, in time, Christ's kingdom will grow into the largest and mightiest kingdom of all time! The metaphor {132} of birds finding shelter in the branches comes from the Old Testament (Dan. 4:11–12, 20–22; Ez. 17:22; 31:6), and it speaks of a mighty kingdom which has dominion over other kingdoms. Christ's kingdom is a spiritual kingdom that grows by the sowing of the word of God (13:18–23), so the dominion pictured in this parable is a spiritual dominion over the nations brought about by the preaching of God's word. Note also the continuity of the growth of Christ's kingdom; it begins small and grows steadily until all nations come under its power.

The second is the parable of the leaven (13:33). This parable teaches the steady growth and irresistible power of Christ's kingdom. The leaven represents the Messianic kingdom and the meal stands for the world. During Jesus' ministry the "leaven" was placed in the "meal," and the leaven will continue to work until "the whole" is leavened! The interpretation of this parable is self-evident: all nations will eventually be converted to Christ and become part of his spiritual kingdom! Note again the continuity in the growth of Christ's kingdom: the leaven put into the world during Christ's earthly ministry operates unceasingly until all is transformed by it. Both the parable of the leaven and the parable of

the mustard seed are in perfect agreement with the New Testament teaching that the last days began with Christ's ministry (Heb. 1:2), and that within the time frame of the last days all the prophecies concerning the Messiah and his kingdom will be fulfilled.

The third is the parable of the wheat and the tares (13:24–30, 36–43). This parable, contrary to what most think, also teaches the world-wide success of the kingdom of the Messiah. Notice first of all that the field is the world and the field belongs to the Son of Man. Second, observe that the “good seed are the children of the kingdom” and that this good seed is in every part of the field, indicating converts to the Messiah in all the earth. Third, mark the fact that the world is pictured at the end of the age as a wheat field with some tares in it and not a tare field with some wheat in it! True, this parable shows that not every individual will be converted and that the devil will oppose the preaching of the gospel. However, this must never obscure the truth that the world belongs to the LORD Jesus, and he intends to make it a wheat field {133} before his return at the end of the age. So then, all three of these parables in Matthew 13 on the nature of the kingdom's growth concur with the teaching of Isaiah 2:2–3, that the nations will be converted to the worship and service of Christ in this age.

The Great Commission given to the church by the LORD Jesus Christ in Matthew 28:18–20 articulates the church's mission in the world from the time of Christ's ascension until the end of the age. In other words, the Great Commission declares the task of the church for the last days. Christ sends his church into the world with the command to make disciples of “all nations” by preaching the gospel, by baptizing them in the name of the triune God, and by teaching them to obey all that Christ has commanded in his word.

Observe the comprehensive nature of this commission. It is the will of the risen Christ that all nations be brought to faith and be disciplined in the word of God! The LORD Jesus commissions his church to convert the nations to the Christian faith (cf., Rom. 1:5; 16:26–27)! This is very significant, for Isaiah 2:2–3 predicted the conversion of the nations to the worship and service of God in the last days, which, of course, is the very same period of time in which the church is laboring for the conversion of all nations. So then, Isaiah 2:2–3 and the Great Commission harmonize perfectly:

Christ's commission brings the fulfillment of Isaiah's prediction!

Some may object by saying that Matthew 28:18–20 does not indicate that the church will succeed in its mission. But there surely is a definite indication in the words of Jesus that the church will successfully carry out its task and convert the nations. It is found in the promise of Christ, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." The presence of the One who has "all power" in heaven and earth is the guarantee of the church's success in its mission. It is not the church that will convert the nations, but it is Christ who shall accomplish this through his church. If one says that the church will fail to disciple all nations in the Christian faith, that person is really saying that Christ will fail to enable his church to carry out his commission.

So then, the Great Commission gives the New Testament perspective on how Isaiah's prophecy on the conversion of the nations will be fulfilled. It will be fulfilled as the church preaches {134} the gospel and teaches the converts the whole counsel of God, or in the words of Isaiah, "Out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem."

Paul's teaching on the future conversion of national Israel (as opposed to spiritual Israel, the church) in Romans 11:11–36 is another strong New Testament witness to the ultimate conversion of the nations as predicted in Isaiah 2:2–3. In Romans chapters 9–11, Paul is dealing with the problem of Jewish unbelief: if Jesus is the promised Messiah of Israel, why have the Jewish people by and large rejected him? The part of Paul's answer to that question that will be considered here is the one given in 11:11–36. In this text, Paul says there is coming a day when the blindness of Israel concerning their own Messiah will end and "all Israel shall be saved." He begins his discussion concerning the future conversion of Israel by explaining that the Jews have been hardened because of their unbelief, and that they shall remain in their blindness "until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in" (v. 25). The fulness of the gentiles would seem to indicate the time when all the gentile nations have been converted because the occasion when "all Israel shall be saved" is previously defined by Paul as the time of Israel's "fulness" (v. 12). Therefore, Paul evidently foresaw a day when all the gentile nations would become partakers of God's covenant blessings in Jesus Christ. This period of gentile "fulness" will be

used of God to provoke Israel to jealousy (vv. 11, 14), so that he might bring them to repentance for their rejection of their own Messiah. In that day of jealousy, God will lift the blindness from the Jews “and so all Israel shall be saved” (v. 26). This does not necessarily imply that every single Jew will be converted, but it does mean that the great majority of Jews will be converted and enter the Christian church. Israel will then officially become a Christian people! Liddon, commenting on Romans 11:25–26, states, “Whenever a time arrives at which all the heathen nations of the world have entered the church of God, the Jews too, seeing themselves cut off from a Religion in which others have found happiness and blessing, will finally come to Christ for salvation.”³⁶ Shedd concurs, saying, “St. Paul, here, asserts the Christianization of the globe, prior to the Christianization of the Jews”;³⁷ and, “St. Paul distinctly teaches that the conversion of the Gentile world, as a whole, must take {135} place before the Jews, as a whole. ...”³⁸ The result of this glorious conversion of national Israel will be “life from the dead” because when that mighty work of God takes place the world will enter fully into the era of life and blessing promised in the Old Testament Scripture (e.g., Isa. 2:2–4!): So as the prophet Isaiah predicts the conversion of the nations in 2:2–3, so also does Paul foretell the conversion of the nations in Romans 11:11–36. However, Paul goes further and gives the sequence: first, the “fulness of the Gentiles” will come in, and then, after the conversion of the gentile nations, the nation of Israel will also be converted which will mean that the entire world has been reconciled to Christ the king.

The New Testament perspective on Isaiah 2:2–3 is that the conversion of the nations (including the nation of Israel) will take place in this age and before Christ's return. The parables of the kingdom teach that, although the spiritual kingdom of the Messiah will have a small beginning, it will grow steadily and

36. H. P. Liddon, *Explanatory Analysis of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (Reprint of 1899 ed.; Minneapolis, MN: James and Klock Christian Publishing Company, 1977), 217.

37. William G. T. Shedd, *A Critical and Doctrinal Commentary on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans* (Reprint of 1879 ed.; Minneapolis, MN: Klock & Mock Christian Publishers, 1978), 348.

38. *Ibid.*, 349.

irresistibly into a mighty world-wide kingdom that will embrace all nations. The Great Commission of Matthew 28:18–20 shows how the world will be converted. The nations will be brought to the worship and service of Christ as his Spirit-empowered church faithfully preaches the gospel, baptizes believers, and teaches the whole counsel of God. The prediction of the conversion of Israel in Romans 11:13² gives the sequence that leads to the full reconciliation of the world. First, the gentile nations will come to Christ, and then last, but surely not least, the nation of Israel will be saved.

The Reign of Christ Over the Nations

Isaiah 2:2 speaks of the day when “the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills.” This is a symbolic depiction of the triumph of the true religion over all false religions and the supremacy of God’s kingdom over all the kingdoms of this world. In conjunction with this symbolic depiction Isaiah 2:4 states that “he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people,” thereby expressing the sovereign rule of Yahweh over the nations and their affairs; the LORD as governor of all the earth shall publish his law and punish the nation that ignores or disobeys it. Therefore, Isaiah 2:2–4 pictures the conquest of the kingdoms of this world {136} by the LORD and his active rule over the nations “in the last days.” The text of Isaiah 2:2–4 does not explicitly state that the Messiah’s rule and kingdom are in view, but that can easily be proven from the Old Testament Scripture.

According to the New Testament, Jesus Christ is the governor of the nations depicted in Isaiah 2:2–4. The New Testament proclaims that the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah’s installation as king over all the earth have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Because of his complete obedience to the Father’s will, including submission to the awful death of the cross, he has been highly exalted by the Father so that now every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is *Lord* (Phil: 2:8–11). By means of his resurrection and ascension Jesus has been exalted to the right hand of the Father and enthroned as Messianic King in fulfillment of Psalms 2 and 110 (Acts 2:32–36; Eph. 1:20–23; Heb.

10:12–13; 1 Pet. 3:22; Rev. 2.27). Christ now rules in the midst of his enemies having been given authority to crush them and put them under his feet (Ps. 2:9; 110:1–2; Rev. 2:27; 12:5; 19:5; 1 Cor. 15:25). At the ascension “the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven and came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given to him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him...” (Dan. 7:13–14; Matt. 26:64). Jesus Christ is now, therefore, “the prince of the kings of the earth” (Rev. 1:5), meaning that he is the governor of the nations and the sovereign of every earthly ruler. This supreme authority is emphatically proclaimed when Jesus Christ is called “King of kings and LORD of LORDS” (Rev. 17:14; 19:16), and positively depicted when it is said that “on his head were many crowns” (Rev. 19:12). Therefore, the LORD Jesus Christ is the divine king of Isaiah 2:4 who shall judge the nations and rebuke the peoples. All that is asserted in Isaiah 2:4 must be applied to him.

Furthermore, the New Testament doctrine on the time of the last days fully agrees with the New Testament texts just cited that Christ's rule over the nations is in the inter-advent period. His reign officially began at his ascension and shall continue until his return at the end of the age. The clear witness of Isaiah 2:2–4 and the New Testament is that Christ's kingdom and reign are in this {137} age. He rules from his throne at the Father's right hand, and he shall exercise his authority and judge and rebuke the nations until all the nations and all the kings of the earth “kiss” his feet in humble and glad submission to his authority and to his holy law. When that takes place then they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

The New Testament “verdict” on the meaning and fulfillment of Isaiah 2:2–4 is, therefore, as follows: the era of the “last days” is the inter-advent period of the Christian church, and, therefore, all the details of the prophecy will be fulfilled before Jesus Christ returns at the end of the age; the church is the new Israel, the new temple of God, and representative of the heavenly Jerusalem and, accordingly, Isaiah's vision declares the eventual triumph of the church and the Christian faith over all the false religions of the world; the prediction of Isaiah that all nations will flow to “the

mountain of the LORD's house" to be taught the word of God will come to pass as the nations are converted and disciplined in the Christian faith through the obedience of the church to the Great Commission; and Jesus Christ is the LORD who "judges" and "rebukes" the nations from his throne at the Father's right hand, and his glorious reign will lead to the complete cessation of war between the nations. Or, to put it in other words, Isaiah 2:2-4 is an Old Testament vision that portrays what wonderful works God Almighty shall accomplish in "the dispensation of the fulness of times" through his Son, Christ Jesus the LORD! This is the verdict of the New Testament Scripture. What is not as clear is why so many in the church will not yield to the authoritative teaching of Christ and his apostles which affirms that all the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah and his Kingdom, including Isaiah 2:2-4, must be fulfilled in "the times of restitution," which precede the second coming of the LORD Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

The preceding exposition of Isaiah 2:2-4, in both its Old Testament context and in its New Testament perspective, leads to the conclusion that this text provides solid biblical support for the postmillennial view of eschatology. We have endeavored to show {138} Mr. Ice and all our readers that Isaiah 2:2-4 is "one passage that requires a postmillennial interpretation and should not be taken in a premillennial sense,"³⁹ and that postmillennialism is not "a position built upon inference" but upon sound biblical exegesis. Furthermore, this study has also demonstrated that Isaiah 2:2-4 is only one among a multitude of biblical passages that support the postmillennial view that Christ's kingdom shall be victorious and all the nations will be converted to the Christian faith before the second coming of Christ.

If Isaiah 2:2 indicates that all the details of the vision of verses 2-4 take place within the time frame of "the last days," and if the New Testament teaches that the era of the last days began with Christ's first coming and shall conclude with his second coming, then the only logical and possible conclusion is that the prophecy of Isaiah

39. H. Wayne House and Thomas Ice, *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?*, 9. See the 2nd page of this article for the full quote and challenge of Mr. Ice.

2:2–4 must be fulfilled in the inter-advent period! The scriptural logic of this deduction is supported by other New Testament texts that teach that the Christian church is the new Israel and the new temple of God, that the nations will be converted in this age, and that Christ is now enthroned at the Father's right hand as the Ruler of the kings of the earth. In spite of all this, premillennialists still insist that Isaiah 2:2–4 will not be fulfilled until a supposed future millennial kingdom which will be set up here on earth after the return of Christ.⁴⁰ In a similar way, the amillennialist denies the evidence and says that Isaiah 2:2–4 will be fulfilled in the eternal state of the “new heavens and new earth” after the final day of judgment at Christ's return.⁴¹ Both the premillennialist and the amillennialist, without any scriptural authorization, teach that the last days include the time *after* the return of Christ at the end of this present age.

The conclusion of this paper that Isaiah 2:2–4 describes the *victory of the kingdom of Christ*, and the conditions that shall prevail on the earth *before* the end of the era of the New Testament church, is not new or novel, but is a view that has been widely held in the church. John Howe, in one of his fifteen sermons on Ezekiel 39:29 preached in 1678, stated that Isaiah 2:2–4 depicts the enlargement and prosperous state of the Christian church before the end of the age.⁴² Matthew Poole, in his commentary on Isaiah, taught that Isaiah 2:2–4 is a prophecy of Christ's kingdom and the conversion {139} of the gentile nations to the Christian faith by the preaching of the gospel.⁴³ Jonathan Edwards said that Isaiah 2:2 referred to the time “when all nations, throughout the whole habitable world, should embrace the true religion, and be

40. See, for example, John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1959), 299; Leon J. Wood, *The Bible and Future Events* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973), 173, 182; and Herbert M. Wolf, *Interpreting Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985), 77.

41. See, for example, Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 177–178, 205; H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1968), 73; and Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 108109.

42. As cited by Iain H. Murray, *The Puritan Hope* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1971), 245–246. In this book Murray documents the fact that the Puritans were postmillennial in their eschatology.

43. Matthew Poole, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 2:329–30.

brought into the church of God";⁴⁴ and that Isaiah 2:4 spoke of the universal peace that would be in the world because of the success of redemption and the prosperity of the church.⁴⁵ David Brown contends that Isaiah 2:2–4 predicts “the universal reception of the true religion, and unlimited subjection to the scepter of Christ” that would take place during “the era of Christianity”⁴⁶ William Symington asserts that Isaiah 2:2 foretells the universal extension of the church through the preaching of the gospel.⁴⁷ R. J. Rushdoony insists that Isaiah 2:2–4 must be taken as a definite prophecy of the cosmic salvation that will be brought about in history by the LORD Jesus Christ, and that it declares the triumph of God’s kingdom and covenant people in time, i.e., before the second coming.⁴⁸ These men are representative of a host of teachers in the church who have understood, not only Isaiah 2:2–4, but all the prophetic Scripture in a postmillennial sense.

The fact that Isaiah 2:2–4 will be fulfilled in this present age of the New Testament church ought to have a profound impact on the way Christians live and undertake their calling to serve the LORD Jesus Christ in the world. First, let us take courage and labor in the full assurance that all of our faithful efforts to promote God’s truth and Christ’s kingdom shall not be in vain. To know that the true Christian faith will one day triumph over all the false philosophies, cults, and religions of the world should be profoundly encouraging to us as we serve Christ in an environment that is often hostile and unreceptive to biblical truth. Though we may not be of the generation that witnesses the complete fulfillment of Isaiah’s vision, it ought to be enough for us to know that the outcome of history before the LORD’s return is not in doubt; the

44. Jonathan Edwards, *An Humble Attempt to Promote Extraordinary Prayer for the Revival Of Religion and the Advancement of Christ’s Kingdom on Earth*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 2 vols., (Reprint of 1834 ed.; Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 2:285.

45. Jonathan Edwards, *A History of the Work of Redemption*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 1:610.

46. David Brown, *Christ’s Second Coming: Will It Be Premillennial?*, 398-399.

47. William Symington, *Messiah the Prince* (Reprint of 1884 ed.; Still Waters Revival Books, 1990), 184.

48. R. J. Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology*, 2 vols. (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1994), 125, 126, 248, 800.

church of Christ shall triumph and all the glorious details of Isaiah 2:2–4 shall surely come to pass! Let us be content to accept the work that our LORD gives to us in the time in history that he has providentially placed us. The growth of the kingdom of God is a continuum, and the work of every generation of the elect of God in Christ is important and essential to the final victory of {140} righteousness and truth. Jesus said that “one soweth, and another reapeth,” and “that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together” (n. 4:36–37). We may be called to be sowers and, therefore, shall not see in our lifetime the wonderful harvest predicted in Isaiah 2:2–4. But let us not despair because of this. We are extremely blessed to have been chosen by the sovereign mercy and grace of God to be his children and laborers in his fields! So what if we be sowers who may have to bear long hard hours of toil with no visible fruit? The LORD Jesus assures us in his word that there will come a splendid harvest as the result of our combined labors. Someday all of us will rejoice in the presence of Christ himself with those brethren who are chosen to be the reapers! So let us cast off all pessimism,⁴⁹ and courageously and faithfully serve Christ our king, for his cause shall ultimately triumph. Let the church of Jesus Christ see the victory promised in Isaiah 2:2–4 and go forward with renewed zeal, remembering that we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

In view of the fact that Isaiah 2:2–4 will be fulfilled in this dispensation, let us contemplate and understand the comprehensive nature of the church's mission in the world. The church has been called to evangelize the world and disciple all nations in the Christian faith! Our mission is not limited to saving a few souls, and then guarding a huddled remnant as we wait for deliverance from this evil world at the rapture, as some teach. Our mission is to confront the very forces of hell with the truth of God's word, and to pull down all the strongholds of the enemy. We are to bring every culture, every discipline, every institution, and every nation into full obedience to the law-word of God! This is an awesome task, and as we consider it, who cannot but cry “who is

49. Both the premillennial and amillennial views of the course of this present age are pessimistic. Neither teaches that the nations will be converted or that righteousness and truth will triumph before Christ returns.

sufficient for these things?”! The biblical answer is that God makes us able ministers of the New Testament (2 Cor. 3:5–6). “Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it” (1 Thess. 5:24). In the light of our mission let us fervently seek the power and blessing of God upon our work. Let us pray for the outpouring of his Holy Spirit so that the church will be revived and reformed, and sinners will be converted!

The comprehensive nature of the church’s mission in this age must be understood by church leaders and the work of each {141} individual church brought in line with it. The church must rethink its approach to missions and abandon the limited goal of only winning converts and building churches, and expand the vision to include that of reconstructing whole cultures according to God’s moral law.⁵⁰ The missionary/evangelist must preach both personal and national repentance. The ultimate goal must be the development of both Christian churches and Christian nations. The church has been called to teach the nations all of God’s ways so that the peoples will walk in his paths for the family, the church, and the state. The word of God is to transform all our thinking and every area of life. The Great Commission is not “go evangelize,” but “disciple all the nations.” This discipling involves three aspects: preaching the gospel to the lost, baptizing the converts, and bringing believers to maturity by teaching them all that Christ has commanded. Furthermore, if the church is to fulfill its mission, the elders and pastors must commit themselves to the faithful teaching and preaching of the word of God. The word of the LORD must go forth from Zion! The careful exposition of the Scripture and the declaration of sound doctrine must be restored to the ministry of the church. In our day far too many churches are entertainment centers designed to please the tastes of carnal men. The churches often seem more interested in coddling sinners than converting them to obedience to God’s law. How shameful it all is! Let us plead with our LORD to restore unto us a zeal for his word so that “out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.”

May the truth of Isaiah 2:2–4 cause us to press the claims of the

50. Of course, winning converts and building churches is foundational to all Christian reconstruction.

LORDship of Christ over the nations. Christ is the governor of the nations, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Let us, therefore, call upon our magistrates to “kiss the Son,” while at the same time warning them that he shall judge and rebuke all who fail to serve him. Let us boldly contend for the authority of God’s law in our culture, and unceasingly labor to see that his holy law becomes the basis for all our civil law. Furthermore, the lie that pluralism leads to peace and harmony among men must be exposed and refuted. The church must declare that true peace will only come to men and nations when all are in submission to Christ and his word. So then, if we are to be true to the glorious vision of {142} Isaiah 2:2–4, we must earnestly contend for the crown rights of our LORD Jesus Christ and the absolute authority of his law-word.

After relating the prophecy of the future exaltation of the “mountain of the LORD’s house,” the prophet Isaiah gave an exhortation which we who live in the last days should surely take to heart. “O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the LORD” (Isa. 2:5). May the vision of Isaiah 2:2–4 give light to our path and inspire in each one of us a new courage and a new fervor to serve Christ and advance his kingdom.

RECONSTRUCTING POSTMILLENNIALISM

Martin G. Selbrede

Purging Out the Old Leaven: Cleaning House on Exegetically Unsound Pessimism

Postmillennialists have expended considerable effort over the last few centuries carefully dissecting scriptural passages alleged to teach that the church age will see a continual increase in apostasy through to its expiry. Proof text after proof text, passage after passage, has been exegeted, debated, argued, fine-tuned, until very little is left to which the pessimillennialists can appeal. What remains after this purging process is an imposing confluence of Scripture that points to total victory for the gospel, for Christ's church, for the Great Commission, and the granting of the petition that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven. However, a fly remains in the ointment. Notwithstanding this Herculean effort to finally set biblical hermeneutics on a defensible foundation, postmillennialism ironically occupies the position, not of Caleb and Joshua, but of the 38 spies who shrank from embracing God's promise in its fulness.

Having whittled away at the mass of verses cited by pessimillennialists in favor of increasing apostasy, postmillennialists have allowed the few verses not yet adequately expounded to that effect to take on normative dimensions that would be unthinkable if applied to any other tentative theological viewpoint. R. J. Rushdoony, for example, recalled two potential references that were commonly used to ground a final apostasy in history: Revelation 20:7–9, and Paul's discussion of the "man of sin" in 2 Thessalonians. Seasoned postmillennialists (including Rushdoony) will recognize that the latter piece of evidence has

already been dealt with preteristically by exegetes as diverse as B. B. Warfield and the late Greg Bahnsen, leaving only the Revelation verse upon which to build an exegetical case for a final apostasy in human history.

Since it is unseemly to use a brief reference in Revelation 20 to build an entire argument for the ultimate dissolution of gospel {147} victory (especially since we invariably upbraid premillennialists for building their normative model of historic development on this particular vision of John's), postmillennialists had a choice: they could finish what they had started, completing the exegetical drive with a figurative touchdown—or they could punt. Postmils punted.

Thankfully, not all of them punted. Warfield, for one, finished the job. There is no room for a final apostasy in Warfield's eschatology, and he says so. Building on the approach of Kliefoth and Milligan, Warfield arrived at an interpretation of Revelation 20 that upended the notion that a final apostasy is therein taught. But few have followed Warfield's lead. The majority of postmils set Warfield aside: he was the postmil who got a little too carried away, you see. He often receives flattering acknowledgements (e.g., "his optimism was unbounded"—Gary North) that hide the basic conflict between his position and that of today's postmils. This contrast is best expressed by admitting that "our optimism IS bounded."

With an alleged final apostasy haunting postmillennialism, it was inevitable that someone would attempt to account for this anomalous feature in an otherwise optimistic eschatology. The most arduous effort to date was Gary North's *Dominion and Common Grace*, a sustained defense and justification for not only retaining, but almost glorying in, a final apostasy sweeping the world to close history. An analysis of North's book-length argument will be included in this article, but some key points are worth highlighting up front.

First, although North advertises that postmils are under an exegetical burden to accept the final apostasy doctrine, the actual evidence offered is threadbare. For a book of this length, this weakness is telling. Apart from Revelation 20:7–9, North offers only Isaiah 32 and occasional glances back at the Parable of the Wheat and Tares. Presumably, he would also include Matthew

24:36ff., inasmuch as most postmils today, who generally preterize Matthew 24, tend to follow Kik's division of the Olivet Discourse, which as we shall see in the following discussion is almost certainly untenable.

Although one may be tempted to protest that a doctrine need not have more than one proof text to be biblical, that is not a {148} legitimate way to treat the final apostasy doctrine. This conclusion follows from the consideration that the final apostasy doctrine is in tension with virtually every positive Scripture supportive of postmillennialism in the first place. Even postmils who hold to it feel its inappropriate character, if not outright incompatibility, with the sweeping statements of Scripture concerning gospel victory. David Chilton, for example, once commented that he would have liked nothing better than to get rid of the final apostasy idea, but couldn't see clear to do so as yet. Accordingly, the final apostasy doctrine should be scrutinized in light of the passages that it is alleged to contradict. These passages comprise a vast multitude of verses, the combined testimony of which necessarily places the burden of proof on advocates for a final apostasy. Oddly, the reverse is true today: the 38 spies have placed the burden of proof on Joshua and Caleb.

The Long Drought

If there were any eschatological universalists after Warfield was gathered to his fathers in 1921, they certainly concealed it well (Pr. 12:23 perhaps?). Boettner was arguably the first to recommit to eschatological universalism, and he did so in an extraordinary way: he revised his original 1957 volume, *The Millennium*, in 1984. The nature of the revision consisted wholly in this: Boettner had adopted the view of Warfield without apology, editing and removing some of the final apostasy discussions (to the surprise of his publisher) and adding an entirely new chapter at the end of the book devoted at debunking the final apostasy doctrine.

Anyone who has compared the two editions of Boettner's book will see the "scars" left by this surgery. The publisher, trying to maintain the same page count, inserted large amounts of interparagraph spacing to take up the room gained when Boettner had sliced away comments and asides reflecting negatively on

Warfield's view. An asterisked footnote directs the reader to the new twenty-second chapter. The newly typeset paragraphs don't match the original typography particularly well, but Boettner plowed ahead. He felt this effort was an important one to make. Up until this point in time (1997), the 1984 revised edition is still {149} the only book published that actually commits to this form of postmillennialism.

Of the original edition, Boettner wrote:

I wanted to accept Dr. Warfield's position that there would be no final apostasy. And in my own mind it just did not seem reasonable that after all the thousands of years that God had been winning the world back to Himself, and after all of the sacrifice that had been made, there should be a final apostasy, even for a short time. And yet Revelation 20 seemed to say that after the thousand years the Devil would be loosed for a short time to renew his activities in this world, and that he would lead a great rebellion that would all but overwhelm the saints. I just could not get around that (letter to the author, Feb. 6, 1982).

In the same letter, Boettner recounts the circumstance that Warfield's views "have been a puzzle to many theologians and . . . have lain dormant for some 60 years."

Studying several preliminary essays this author had asked him to review, Boettner took another step. "If there is occasion for another edition of my book *The Millennium*, I hope to make use of those ideas" (letter to the author, Feb. 19, 1982).

The die was cast 18 months later. Boettner wrote:

My publisher has informed me that the present edition of *The Millennium* is practically exhausted and that a new edition should be ordered. I am holding up the order as I would like to include some changes that have been inspired by your articles on Dr. Warfield's position concerning the millennium.

I have done a rather novel and unusual thing. I have developed a new article, composed almost entirely of material from your articles, "In Defense of Warfield," and "Revelation 19:11–20:15," about 25 pages, double spaced type. My own expressions come out in places, especially near the beginning. No doubt you will recognize your material quite easily. [Boettner ends by noting the importance of "presenting a really consistent postmillennial position."] (letter to the author, Aug. 3, 1983)

In a letter dated May 15, 1984, Boettner made these prescient comments: “This interpretation surely will eventually be recognized {150} as a tremendous service to the church. It may be a long time before this explanation is accepted as the true solution, but I am convinced that it will come. Such changes do come slowly.” He may have been quite surprised that not only would such changes come slowly, but that modern postmillennialism would shortly thereafter intensify its commitment to a final apostasy and head in the opposite direction entirely, all the while waving the Warfield flags and banners.

Who, then, are intended by North’s comment that “there may be a few isolated postmillennialists who deny that this prophecy [Rev. 20:7–9] refers to a rebellion at the end of history ...” (Dominion, x)? He evidently intended Warfield, Boettner, and any others who take these two scholars seriously. Although their views aren’t hidden in a footnote, Dr. North only allocates a single sentence to their views in his nearly 300 page effort. These “isolated” postmils seem to be mentioned to the end that they may be summarily dismissed. Yet, as of 1984, thirty four thousand copies of Boettner’s book had been sold. From the viewpoint of the postmillennial publishing industry, these numbers hardly connote isolation.

The present author researched the extent of present-day advocacy for Warfield’s eschatology within the theological community in 1981, calling nearly a dozen Reformed seminaries, including Westminster and Reformed Theological Seminary, to interview their eschatology experts. Advocacy was zero, unless one included Dr. Norman Shepard’s intriguing answer. He felt that “Warfield’s arguments were very persuasive, and that the interpretation, far from being inadmissible, is in fact quite plausible.” He informed me that he did indeed mention Warfield’s view in class at Westminster, classifying it as both possible and plausible. I suppose it could be argued that Shepard is among the isolated, perhaps in more than one way. Nonetheless, the virtual eclipse of Warfield’s view by 1981 was a phenomenon that proved empirically verifiable.

It would appear that the reopening of the issue by this author in 1981 set in motion the actual public recovery of Warfield’s view, a recovery that did not pervade the Reconstructionist community per se, although Rushdoony was more than favorably inclined

in {151} this direction. (Rushdoony thought highly of Warfield's views when he first read them as a young scholar, but peer pressure from the theological community tending to discredit Warfield led to tentative reservations in his thinking and writing that weren't finally dispelled until the early 1980s, when his reassessment of Warfield led to a return to his earlier convictions regarding the totality of gospel victory.) Boettner took the first major steps to publicly reenfranchise the full Warfield theory. *JCR* editor Dr. Douglas F. Kelly was the first to accept articles and reviews favorably disposed toward Warfield, beginning in 1982, while Boettner labored on the revision of *The Millennium* between 1982 and 1983. More articles and reviews promoting Warfield's model by this author appeared throughout the 1980s.

Nonetheless, those Reconstructionists who focused on eschatology in the 1980s were unmoved: their models were already in place, their systems already systematized, and a radical rethinking was nearly out of the question. (David Chilton, almost alone, made it clear that he did not regard his published works as canonical, explicitly stressing his willingness to entertain any level of revision necessary to reshape his work to better conform to Scripture.) Bahnsen affirmed his commitment to tradition with his usual clarity: there would be a final apostasy, and that's final, "Warfield was simply mistaken." North's commitment to the final apostasy doctrine can be tracked simply by following the metamorphosis of his work on eschatology and common grace, which first appeared in the *Journal of Christian Reconstruction* Symposium on the Millennium in 1977, later surfacing in 1987 as both Appendix C in David Chilton's *Days of Vengeance* and, by way of expansion, as an entire book in its own right, *Dominion and Common Grace*, also 1987.

Five years later, Dr. Kenneth L. Gentry Jr.'s full-scale treatment of postmillennial eschatology, *He Shall Have Dominion*, exhibits the same strains of thought, affirming that Satan will be loosed at the end of the church age: "During this short period of time, he is allowed to gather a sizeable force of rebels, who will attempt to supplant the prevailing Christian majoritarian influence in the world (Rev. 20:7-9)" (418). The lone footnote documenting this affirmation directs the reader to consult Gary North's *Dominion* {152} and *Common Grace*. Something very similar can be found in

Chilton's discussion of Revelation 20:7–9 in his *Days of Vengeance*, wherein the reader is directed to North's essay on common grace (526), which is included as an appendix to that volume (623–64) in case the reader doesn't have easy access to the *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*.

It would therefore be safe to say that a decade and a half after Warfield's work had been resurrected, it has yet to filter into mainstream postmillennialism, corroborating Boettner's prediction that change would be slow in coming.

(No historical treatment of this issue would be complete if it failed to include the key bridges between Warfield and Boettner, particularly Samuel R. Craig, a discussion of which must remain for a future occasion. The role of publisher advocacy in twentieth-century theology has been highly significant, and merits an entire study in itself.)

The Footnote Within a Footnote

In the course of surveying the mid-century decline of postmillennial advocacy, Dr. Greg Bahnsen drew attention to the manner in which J. Barton Payne's *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* deals with postmillennialism: relegation to a mere footnote (53). In this same article, Bahnsen observes that "a few postmillennialists have not taught an apostasy at the very end of history" (61). This brief acknowledgement is, itself, positioned in a footnote. Accordingly, whereas postmillennialism had been relegated to footnote status, its current defenders have done the same with eschatological universalism. The view defended here is, then, something of a footnote within a footnote.

Dr. Loraine Boettner devoted 15 pages to the issue of the final apostasy in the original 1957 edition of *The Millennium*, offering both his own observations synthesized from his diligent study of Reformed sources (65–71) and those of J. Marcellus Kik (723). He then makes a bold move: he recounts the Warfield alternative with a rather full citation of the Princetonian's treatment of Revelation 20 (73–75), ostensibly for the sake of completeness. His comment on the extended Warfield citation is significant, "While we are not able to agree fully with this view, we do believe that the views of {153} such a distinguished theologian must be given consideration

in any comprehensive treatment of this subject..." (75).

What happened between 1957 and the rise of Christian Reconstruction? Whereas Boettner gave the requisite consideration to Warfield's view, such academic courtesies have essentially disappeared in the following decades. North's full-scale treatment, *Dominion and Common Grace*, is totally silent about Warfield's approach to the final apostasy. This concession is couched in a peculiar circumlocution: "His optimism was unbounded ..." (268). In contrast, North's optimism is manifestly bounded, as his book is intended to document. He feels obligated to put in a good word for Joshua and Caleb, as it were, on condition that any citations casting the 38 spies in a bad light be either muted or carefully nuanced.

Eschatological universalism has, thus, remained a footnote within a footnote, for it departs from prevailing theological agendas.

Systematizing the Final Apostasy: Dr. Gary North

In criticizing Van Til, North makes the following comment: "He builds his whole theory of common grace in terms of his hidden eschatology, probably never realizing the extent to which his seemingly philosophical exposition is in fact structured by his assumptions concerning eschatology" (*Dominion*, 15). The irony is that the *same thing can be said of North himself*. His model of common grace is built on his explicit eschatology, and is structured by his assumptions concerning eschatology, specifically, of a postmillennial advance concluding in a final apostasy. Then, North appeals to the resulting common grace doctrine he has constructed to prove the final apostasy: "Does the postmillennialist believe that there will be faith in general on earth when Christ appears? Not if he understands the implications of the doctrine of common grace: it leads to a final rebellion by covenant-breakers" (243). Hardly surprising that a doctrine custom-designed to defend and justify a final apostasy would be compatible with its defining template, but it is logically fallacious to offer it as independent proof, since so doing involves a gross *petitio principii*.

North's volume starts out with a textbook specimen of "cavalier dismissal," a logical fallacy that D. A. Carson helpfully characterizes

{154} for us: “The fallacy in this instance lies in thinking that an opponent’s argument has actually been handled when in fact it has merely been written off” (120). Even this is something of an improvement over his previous approach to the full Warfield model: omitting it altogether.

What about the strength of a common grace apologetic for a final apostasy? The author has addressed this issue in his review of North’s *Unconditional Surrender*, appearing in the 1982 double-issue of the *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*. Recapitulating that reply briefly, it must be recognized that common grace and common curse are operating categories that have evident utility today. But there is no basis for elevating them to the status of immovable doctrines. Common curse, for example, is clearly lifted for the final generation, since the men then living will not die. Likewise, common grace serves no more purpose as an explicating factor if there are no more unregenerate men upon whom God can have his sunlight shine. It would follow that common grace disappears entirely, in parallel with the eventual disappearance of its beneficiaries as they die out or leave elect offspring. There simply aren’t any unregenerate people around to whom a gradually increasing epistemological self-consciousness will be granted, leading to a final rebellion, because the numbers of the unregenerate, as a percentage of the world population, will be steadily decreasing down to zero.

Essentially, a theological abstraction (a specific common grace model) has been given preeminence over all exegetical considerations to the contrary. Elsewhere, North is critical of overstating a case: “There is an old debater’s trick that says: ‘When your argument is weak, pound the podium and shout’ (Dominion, 42). He says of Van Til’s common grace discussions, “These are assertions, not arguments” (43). By argument, North means a contention that is “systematically exegetical” (43). But nothing answering to this rigorous description is to be found in the volume holding up this academic standard, regardless of whether or not Van Til was mistaken. North’s case seems to falter under scrutiny, its putative supports proving equivocal and ambiguous.

In his 1987 essay “Christianity and Progress,” North describes premillennialists as those who “regard as totally mythological the idea that God’s word, God’s Spirit, and God’s church can change

{155} the hearts of *most* people sometime in the future” [emphasis in original] (3). Note the striking symmetry: North himself regards as totally mythological the idea that God’s word, God’s Spirit, and God’s church can change the hearts of *all* people sometime in the future. The paragraph containing North’s observation also derides premillennialists for “assuming (without any clear biblical support) that Revelation 20:7–10 describes a final rebellion in which *most people on earth rebel*, despite the fact that only one-third of the angels (“stars”) rebelled with Satan, and only one-third of the earth is symbolically brought under God’s wrath in the book of Revelation’s judgment passages (Rev. 8:7–12; 9:15,18).” North seems to extract proportions from visions that, on his own preterist principles, would be applied to the Jewish War of the first century. The angelological angle is extremely speculative, but at least it isn’t internally inconsistent. It merely pushes an analogy without warrant. Two issues press themselves upon us: Are we to understand from North’s analysis that the great culmination of the salvation of the world is to save two-thirds of the then living population? Are we to understand that the proportions of the rebels to the saints will be one rebel for every two saints? What’s to prevent citing all manner of verses to compute the alleged proportion (e.g., [mis]applying Luke 12:52, “For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three”)? If there’s a control principle being resorted to by North, it is neither explicitly revealed nor particularly evident—leaving his reasoning open to the charge of concealing its rhetorical origin, or simply evidencing an arbitrary approach.

North’s discussion of the “inside man” led this author to regard the term *Iscaiotism* to be the single most appropriate term for the proposed mechanism underlying the alleged final apostasy. Just as Satan entered into Judas Iscaiot to inspire his misdeeds, North’s reading of Revelation 20:7–9 traces a worldwide parallel phenomenon. Now, if one out of three is lost (i.e., is a son of perdition) during the supposed great rebellion at the end of the church age, we’ve surely misgauged the Great Commission’s final issue—such proportions as here contemplated seem inconsistent with all the postmillennial chatter about a “converted earth.” {156}

Warfield's Vision of Victory: Truncated and Misappropriated

The 28-page appendix to North's *Dominion and Common Grace* is entitled "Warfield's Vision of History: Lost and Found." Originally a stand-alone essay (a manuscript copy came into this author's possession in 1985), its utilization by North in a book defending a final apostasy at the end of the church age is something of a minor outrage, since Warfield didn't accept such a view. North steers around that fact, chatting about creationism, apologetics, and the historic line of succession from Warfield to the present, never once alluding to the collision between Warfield and himself. Warfield's "vision of victory" is misrepresented by way of omission: a truncated model, somehow sanitized to make it more presentable. It is no longer recognizable, and if enough new reconstructionists learn about Warfield only through essays like North's, the truth about Warfield's views will become increasingly difficult to recover.

Consider the implications of an essay that heralds the recovery of Warfield's vision of victory. Why would it omit Warfield's vision of victory? Perhaps had it been called "Warfield's Vision of Victory: Lost, Found, and Quickly Reburied," there'd have been a modicum of truth-in-advertising here.

North's book concludes with this potentially inappropriate appendix, but it is helpful to recall the claim made on the book's very first page, "that 99.9 percent of all Bible-believing Christians" agree that Revelation 20:8-9 refers "to the events immediately preceding the final judgment" (ix). Why not inform the reader that you were planning to close the book with a back-slapping episode praising Mr. 0.1 percent himself, B. B. Warfield? And why should numbers matter to postmils anyway, whose *sola Sriptura* stand made them the laughingstock of Christendom for most of this century?

Perhaps the answers to these questions are suggested by Dr. North himself. Elsewhere in a different context, he counsels that the warning bells need to go off any time "a fringe opinion gets tacked onto another fringe movement in the name of shared presuppositions." Warfield's view is therefore not only a footnote within a footnote, it would be a fringe attached to the fringe

according to this classification. {157}

Reconstructionism: Youthful or Mature?

The “assured results” of systematization are sometimes not so quickly pinned down. Gary North himself draws attention to the march of time and the slow advance of progress. “Look at the Apostles’ Creed. Then look at the Westminster Confession of Faith. Only a fool or a heretic would deny theological progress” (Dominion, 101). Presumably, the incremental fine-tuning between the apostolic age and the Council of Chalcedon likewise represented progress toward a Christological capstone. Nonetheless, modern Reconstructionism has exhibited a sycophantic tendency to treat its eschatological pronouncements as definitive. North could not refrain from the following praise for David Chilton’s *Days of Vengeance*: “This book is a landmark effort, the finest commentary on Revelation in the history of the Church” (Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, 24). Such injudicious language not only implies that there’s no place to go but down, but also that final codification of a much-debated locus of theology had been achieved in record time, whereas all others who passed this way before have signally failed.

That Christian Reconstruction is still in its infancy is nearly beyond dispute. North’s recounting of the slim resources available at its nativity in the mid-1960s should alert us to be circumspect in evaluating its pattern of growth: in 1967, he and Rushdoony had “Van Til’s presuppositional apologetic method, outlined in Rushdoony’s *By What Standard?*, traditional postmillennialism (but no writings, other than Boettner’s 1958 book, *The Millennium*), and the traditional Calvinist doctrine of predestination,” (Christian Reconstruction XI:1). Notice the eschatological component: Dr. Boettner. It would seem that the final apostasy idea within Reconstructionism could with justice be traced back to Boettner’s treatment of the relevant verses. The difference, of course, between then and now is that even in the 1950s Boettner cited the competing view of Warfield, giving it equal time. Whereas in the 1990s Warfield is omitted entirely and his view deemed the myth of the isolated. Modern postmils took Boettner’s 1958 ideas and ran with them, while Boettner’s

continued scriptural examination of the issue led him to revise his book in 1984, readopting Warfield's view and {158} rejecting the final apostasy. Somebody surely missed the boat. But who? Today's optimillennialists? Or Dr. Boettner?

Are today's reconstructionists ready to close ranks on so broad a range of controversies so early in the movement's history? Not only is this unlikely on the face of it, there are explicit signs that full harmony may be decades or centuries away as yet. Why those promoting the notion that the twentieth-century church is still the primitive church should balk at such diversity is unclear, but the impetus to systematize and codify runs strong among the youthful. The disagreement over applying preterism to Revelation is not likely to be resolved any time soon. If so fundamental a question is still undetermined (unseemly posturing to the contrary aside), how can dogmatic certainty over three verses late in Revelation be justified?

Plausibility Issues

Dr. Gary North's handling of Warfield's view merits some attention, given that the attack is not exegetical, but rather a shot across the bow of Warfield's credibility. North indicates that the Warfield view (which he describes generically rather than by direct attribution) "makes little impression on anyone who reads Revelation 20. Those who accept the plain teaching of Revelation 20 must admit that a rebellion occurs at the very end of history" (Dominion, x). The ironies struggling to escape from these two short sentences are legion.

Consider how J. Marcellus Kik dealt with the first half of Matthew 24. The parallels are striking. Critics could easily affirm that "Kik's view makes little impression on anyone who reads Matthew 24. Those who accept the plain teaching of Matthew 24 must admit that it predicts the world-wide spread of evil precipitating the Second Coming." Kik's critics regard his interpretations as patently absurd on the face of it. They "refute" Kik simply by citing choice verses from Matthew 24. Verse 29 speaks of astronomical cataclysms, verse 30 of Christ coming in the clouds with great power and glory, verse 31 of trumpet blasts and angels traversing the globe to gather the elect, etc. What more proof do Kik's critics

need?

Of course, Kik derives his interpretation from Scripture, and makes abundant use of cross-references and parallels. He *patiently* {159} details how these verses are to be understood. He builds a case. He marshals his corroborating evidence. He opens our eyes to meanings we had negligently excluded from consideration. We learn that the trumpet blast of verse 31 is not the Last Trump, but the Jubilee trumpet proclaiming liberty. We understand the exegetical case for considering the angels of that verse as messengers, given the use of the same Greek term *angelos* for John the Baptist and other men. Virtually all reconstructionists appreciate the service Kik performed for postmillennialism by successfully preterizing the first half of Matthew 24. Similar efforts on behalf of other texts have been mounted by able scholars (most notably 2 Peter 3, preterized by men as diverse as John Owen and Don K. Preston). In all such cases, the “plain teaching” of the texts in question has been shown to be a faulty oversimplification.

Now, let’s look at the modern postmillennialist’s approach to Revelation 20:7–9. For some reason, a “Kikian revolution” is dismissed out of hand, notwithstanding the circumstance that Revelation is at least as figurative in language as Matthew 24 (arguably more so, qualitatively and quantitatively). Why this resistance? Why do we borrow the language and reasoning of Kik’s *critics* when approaching Warfield’s view of Revelation 20? Why are we not embracing a critical reexamination of that text? Why are we being invited to boycott the exegetical debate? Why do we ignore the parallel passages for Revelation 20, given how fruitful such broad integration of the scriptural data has proven in connection with Matthew 24? This dismissive attitude is alarming, and, one would hope, temporary. Reconstructionists should not hesitate to apply the lessons we’ve learned from J. Marcellus Kik and his critics. More pointedly, we reconstructionists, the most prone of God’s children to take up the academic sword, must learn the lesson of Proverbs 29:20, “Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words? there is more hope of a fool than of him.” One of our own summarized it best, calling it “moving too quickly to the argumentative kill” (Greg Bahnsen’s gentle reproof).

Isaiah 32 and Epistemological Self-Consciousness

The most curious Scripture citation proposed by Dr. North in *Dominion and Common Grace* is Isaiah 32, which he regards as {160} predicting an age of “epistemological self-consciousness” (734). This supposedly provides an important link in the logical chain for North, for the achievement of epistemological self-consciousness ignites the final rebellion at the end of the church age “as epistemological self-consciousness increases, satanists feel a greater need to rebel” (157). God is said to “restrain . . . the anti-Christian’s epistemological self-consciousness until the final rebellion,” something akin to holding the leash of a berserk Rottweiler and finally letting it go (157).

North supplies the correct meaning of Isaiah 32 only in passing, “Men will eventually identify churls and generous people accurately” (78). Otherwise he engages in all manner of extra-textual discussions about churls (they won’t be converted, they’ll always exist until the second coming, etc.) (74). The supreme irony here is that his whole case for the “inside man” runs afoul of Isaiah’s prediction that churls will be readily identifiable. North’s chapter on “the inside man” (218–35) derives its ominous aspect from the circumstance that the “inside man” goes undetected: he is called liberal, although he is the exact opposite. God’s promise that “there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the LORD of hosts” (Zech. 14:21) becomes absolutely worthless in North’s model: on the contrary, there’ll be Canaanites aplenty hiding in God’s house.

Yet, North quotes Isaiah 32:1–8 in full, treating it as normative for the closing era of the church age, which manifestly renders void the possibility of successfully concealing one’s true nature before one’s fellow man. One can only imagine that church purity will be so terribly compromised and deprioritized in North’s view of the future that apostates are *openly* welcomed by the flocks at large, with pastoral oversight all but forfeited and Zechariah 14:21 atomized.

George Adam Smith’s analysis of Isaiah 32:1–8 (Nicoll, 3:678–82) stresses the text’s teaching that “capacity to discriminate character” lies at the heart of the passage. “The explosion of social lies” (680) and the advent of “social truthfulness” are intended by

Isaiah's language. "In those magic days the heart shall come to the lips, and its effects be unmistakable" (681). Smith translates Isaiah 32:6a thus: "For the worthless person, worthlessness shall {161} he speak" (681). Smith holds that "the chief obstacle in the way of [character] discernment is the substitution of a conventional morality for a true morality" (681), the correction of which is promised in this passage. But North's conception of the "inside man" requires an inversion of this order, for he holds that feigned external conformity to God's law is the anchor-point for the proposed rebellion—precisely the kind of reversal that Isaiah 32 teaches will be dismantled. "Calling a spade a spade" is something of an understatement of Isaiah 32:4b, for the plain things to be spoken by the stammerer are "startlingly plain things"—for the word literally means 'blinding-white,' and is so used of the sun 'startlingly plain'" (681). Smith holds "churl" to be a wrong rendering of a word better translated "'crafty,'—the 'fraudulent,' 'the knave'" (681).

The other reason the "inside man" can not hide is because his actions are open and obvious—the other primary teaching of vs. 5–8. Calvin teaches that the exposure of "hidden wickedness" is clearly taught in the passage, to the end that the wicked "may no longer deceive or impose upon any one" (Calvin, 7:412). But North teaches that the reprobates who rebel are rather effectively hidden, "Where will that growing army of reprobates be hiding until that final day? In churches probably. They will remain outwardly faithful in terms of the externals of the covenant" (*Dominion*, 249). Isaiah 32 is simply irreconcilable with North's model. Throughout *Dominion and Common Grace*, he desires to build a scriptural case, citing as many verses as he thinks support his model. However, Isaiah 32 was not merely a weak choice, nor was it a poor choice, it was a destructive choice that tears gaping holes in North's model.

What can be said in favor of North's topic, as opposed to his specific *model*, is that one can find echoes of it in Scripture and in the works of established expositors. It would appear that God's pattern of judgment evidences an element of *longsuffering*. There are no better examples than Sodom and Gomorrah, Egypt, and Babylon to illustrate this point. Misreading this phenomenon in terms of an inflexible common grace doctrine led Dr. North to

write his book-length apologetic for an ultimately pessimistic postmillennialism. Elsewhere, one can discover very clear {162} premonitions of Dr. North's general position. One example will suffice.

Dr. James Beverlin Ramsay, commenting on the blessings of Christian civilization being extended into the secular (unsaved) world, makes some important comments:

... society has put on, in a very great degree, the outside dress of Christianity. Under this so-called Christian civilization, with its refinement and science and art, the danger of the church is greater than ever from this evil of worldly conformity. We have arrived at that state in which the effects produced by the church upon the world are in danger of enfeebling the church and arresting its further progress... [secularism] takes up the very language of Christianity and adopts its forms, but neither feels its power nor aims at its spiritual ends... Instead of separation from the world being the result, the bonds that bind the cultivated but unsanctified man to the world are rendered stronger and more plausible just in proportion as they are more refined and intellectual. But this has made the danger of the church far greater. [In the days of ancient Rome] the distance between the church and the world was so great, that the external habits and actions of every man professing Christianity made it visible, as it still does, in heathen lands. Now the world has put on the outside of Christianity to such an extent, without receiving its spirit, that no mere externals of the social or moral habits can at all distinguish between the child of God and of the devil, between the church and the world. (150–151)

What causes Ramsay's view to differ from North's? Ramsay teaches that this trend holds a crucial lesson for the church: "The testimony, therefore, which is now required in the life of every true Christian to prove his separation from the world, is one that must show clearly the real ungodliness that lurks under all the moralities and polish and elegancies of modern civilization." Simply put, when Ramsay observes the "outward conformity of the world itself to the church," he exhorts us concerning "the high spirituality required in the church to meet it" (151). Dr. North's conclusion is quite different: the ungodly will continue to blend in unnoticed until they attack the Christian majority in a great rebellion. Ramsay has ethical import in view; North believes the passage justifies his eschatology. {163}

In summary, although the same biblical facts are marshalled by all parties to this disputed doctrinal issue, the respective “philosophy of fact” (to use Van Til’s phrase) differs so completely from one end of the spectrum to the other so as to yield seriously opposing views. All abstract systematizations (which the doctrine of common grace undeniably is) must be subject to the scriptural data. It is the contention of this author that Dr. North’s doctrine of common grace, as presented in his writings, fails this test. It pushes an abstract idea beyond the biblical data.

Denial of Total Conquest: Postmillennial Pessimism Documented

“The final result, however, is not an each-and-every universalism of salvation. Rather, it is a massive, systemic conversion of the vast majority of men, who then progressively transform the world” (Gentry, 245). It needs to be observed that the term “each-and-every universalism” is borrowed from Warfield, who defines it as universalism in the broadest (and therefore heretical) sense: salvation for Iscariot, Herod, Hitler, Nero, everybody who ever lived or will live. When Warfield contrasts that view to his own, which he calls “eschatological universalism,” he insists that salvation will be universal and total by the end of the church age, in fulfillment of the Great Commission, including all men *then living*. Therefore, Gentry’s citation of Warfield (269) contrasting these two views, leaves a faulty impression of what Warfield actually believed, for it fails to define terms to avoid confusion. Without informing his readers of what Warfield meant by these two universalisms, Gentry’s treatment tends to imply that Warfield favored the final apostasy, particularly when Gentry annexes Warfield’s anti-perfectionism stand to the matter, wholly overlooking Warfield’s clear statement in *Biblical Doctrines*, page 298, that “in this detailed perfection, the law shall be observed. This amounts to a promise that the day shall surely come for which we pray when ... we ask, Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done as in heaven so on earth.’ ... Their lives will be a perfect transcript in act of the law of God, a perfect reflection of the will of God in life. It is for this that Jesus says that He ‘came.’ This powerful reading of Matthew 5:18 will be dealt with at length farther on. {164} Suffice it to say for the

present purpose that Warfield's opposition to the perfectionism of Wesley, Finney, etc., has no actual bearing on the issue at hand here—Warfield should not be distorted, even inadvertently, to teach the opposite of what he has plainly affirmed.

“It is sometimes mistakenly supposed that postmillennialism implies either the ultimate salvation of all men or at least a form of temporal universalism. Evangelical postmillennialism teaches, rather, that ‘the greater part’ of men will have been saved at the outcome of history” (Gentry, 253). Gentry footnotes this comment, directing the reader to Boettner's volume, which, ironically, has been revised to overthrow his point. (Gentry lists Boettner's revised 1984 edition in his bibliography but presumably hadn't read it through sufficiently to realize that Boettner had corrected his earlier version.)

“The scriptural evidence, though clearly expecting Christ's dominion throughout the world, also allows that *there will be a minority who will not be converted to him*. [emphasis in original] There *seems* [e.a.] to be clear evidence for this in the events associated with Christ's return, which includes a brief rebellion, as indicated in 2 Thessalonians 1:7–10 and Revelation 20:7–90 (Gentry, 253–4). The citation of 2 Thessalonians 1:7–10 is inapposite: a rebellion must be read into it where none is *prima facie* mentioned. The destruction and vengeance mentioned by Paul is evidently that of the final judgment, and is termed “eternal destruction from the presence of the LORD.” Meyer painstakingly subverts the notion that anything other than the final judgment is intended, demonstrating that it is the Jewish and gentile persecutors of the 1st century Thessalonian believers who will face the predicted eternal destruction (8:582–5). The idea that the passage describes “fire consuming the ungodly ... are to be discarded ...” (8:583) Calvin likewise sees the final judgment in this passage (21:316–9).

In fact, two insuperable problems face any who desire to press 2 Thessalonians 1:7–10 into the service of a final apostasy doctrine. First, verse 8 specifies that the vengeance is exacted “on them that know not God.” Yet, on postmillennial principles, does not the gospel conquer to the point that “all shall know the LORD, from the least to the greatest,” obviating the need for gospel proclamation altogether. (“And they shall teach no more every

man his neighbour, {165} and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD.” (Jer. 31:34). This verse is cited several times in the book of Hebrews. Isaiah 11:9 further insists that the knowledge of the LORD will become universal.) Where do these people who know not God come from?

This leads us to the second problem (which provides the correct answer to the first): At such time as Christ actually appears at his coming, the saints shall be with him. They along with the wicked dead already have been resurrected. Since death has thus been destroyed, in keeping with the maxim that he must reign from the right hand of the Father until every enemy is destroyed, the last enemy being death, it is certain that a post-general resurrection killing of then-living rebels by fire is manifestly erroneous. Even if the notion of a final apostasy were correct, it would find no support whatsoever in the passage of 2 Thessalonians here cited by Gentry. He is left, therefore, with Revelation 20:7–9, which would not necessarily fall under this *particular* criticism since the fire in *that* passage proceeds from God, not from Christ’s appearing (which will be explained in the context of Warfield’s theory below). Accordingly, the correct answer to the first problem is that those who received eternal destruction away from the presence of the LORD have been *resurrected* to face the LORD Jesus Christ. The appearing of Christ synchronizes with the general resurrection, final judgment, and end of the world. No end-time rebellion is here contemplated by Paul.

“Not every individual Gentile or Jew will be converted” (Chilton, *Paradise*, 129). Chilton sees an analogy here, which he employs to justify this claim. “Even so, when the Gentiles and Israel are converted *as a whole*, this does not mean or require that every last individual in either group will become a Christian. There will always be exceptions.” No supporting Scripture is supplied at this point. The claim is merely affirmed. Elsewhere (200), Chilton writes that “the Bible does not teach that absolutely everyone in the world will be converted. The symbolism of Ezekiel’s prophecy suggests that some areas of the world will remain unrenewed by the River of Life (Ez. 47:11). And we know that both the wheat and the tares will grow together until the harvest {166} at the end of the world (Matt. 13:37–43).” Rehearsing the epistemological

self-consciousness motif, Chilton likewise describes a “last-ditch attempt to overthrow the Kingdom (Rev. 20:7–8)” (200). A fuller review of, and interaction with, Chilton’s position will be provided further on in this study.

[Elsewhere, Chilton cites Warfield favorably, as in *Days of Vengeance* (215): “... in due time the capstone shall be set into its place, and to our astonished eyes shall be revealed nothing less than a saved world.” Yet, if there are sufficient unsaved multitudes from which an enormous army can be amassed, as North has insisted, surely this *is* something less than a saved world! One can’t have one’s Warfield cake and eat it too. Some intellectual honesty is called for here—and about the only scholar who publicly exhibited any was Loraine Boettner, who at least made clear in his 1957 version of *The Millennium* that he couldn’t fully accept Warfield’s point of view at that time.]

“Biblical postmillennialism is not an absolute universalism; nor does it teach that at some future point in history absolutely everyone living will be converted ... the specific purpose of Satan’s deception of the nations is to gather them together for the War” (Chilton, *Vengeance*, 519). The Scriptures provided in support are Revelation 20:7–9, Ezekiel 47:11, and the Parable of the Wheat and Tares. The gathering for War is somehow not thought to conflict with Isaiah 2:4 “... they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”

“Geerhardus Vos ... writes of the postmillennial view with these expressions: ‘ideal perfection’; ‘convert every individual’; ‘universalism in the sense that all generations will be converted’; and ‘sinless individuals.’ I know of no competent postmillennialist who teaches these things, nor is it the teaching of Scripture concerning the millennial blessings” (Kik, 16). If “convert every individual” is construed to mean, convert all individuals who ever lived, Kik is correct. But if it is meant in the sense that Warfield intends it (and presumably Vos was directing some of his firepower at Warfield), Kik may have just declared Warfield to be incompetent. {167}

Referring to the Gog and Magog of Revelation 20:7–9, Kik emphasizes the extent of the rebellion. “It means world-wide. It is an ecumenical movement. Every nation is deceived. The number

of the enemy is as the sand of the sea. It may seem strange that it will be possible to turn a host of happy people, prospering under the blessing of God, into such a world-wide rebellion” (238). “It will be a world-wide conflict. ...The apostasy will cover the earth. Only a remnant represented by The Beloved City will remain faithful” (240–1). Apart from the Revelation 20:7–9 passage, Kik finds support for this construction from two sources: the Parable of the Wheat and Tares, and Zechariah’s pictures of millennial blessings, which allegedly depict the continuance of enemies and unconverted nations throughout that period (207). Oddly, Kik utilizes an argument from silence (245) to tie his view of Revelation 20:9 to 2 Thessalonians 1:7–10, which has been addressed above in connection with Gentry’s citation of that passage.

Finally, Kik appeals to Matthew 24:36–25:30 to show that there would be a “lack of warning and absence of signs” for Christ’s second coming (164), which he believes is described in that span of Scripture. Yet, it would seem that a worldwide war would be a pretty significant sign that would be hard to ignore, at least on modern postmillennial principles. Kik, with consistency, avoids this problem by spreading the final apostasy, rebellion, and persecution over a long period of time (238), although virtually all of his contemporary counterparts think “a little season” presages brevity.

“However, postmillennial teaching actually holds that there will be a massive rebellion at the end of history which will be defeated only by the return of Christ in fiery judgment” (Christian Research Journal, Winter/Spring 1988, page 27. Quote footnoted to show that the source is North’s *Dominion and Common Grace*, ix-xvi).

Amillennial writer William E. Cox, in harmony with his general perspective on matters eschatological, sees Revelation 20:7-10 in similar terms:

Satan, whose power was limited (bound) by our Lord’s victory on the cross, will have his complete power restored in the very {168} end of the millennium, and will begin a full-scale warfare against the church... John saw that when the battle reached its very height, then fire from heaven would destroy all the enemies of the saints (Rev. 20:9)... Satan ... will have led an unprecedented warfare against the Christian church, only to have been defeated by the glorious appearing of the Christ (167–70).

The jarring collision of such statements with Isaiah 2:4, 9:7, etc., is not commented upon.

William Lee's approach is more even-handed, as evidenced in his setting De Burgh's view (which parallels North's view) against that of Duesterdieck (which parallels Warfield's view):

De Burgh (366): "That enemies will be suffered to exist during [Christ's] reign, for the exhibition of His power, is intimated in other Scriptures (Ps. cx. 2, 3). The only question is, Why should this be permitted?—To prove the undoubted security of the Saints ... as also finally to consummate the guilt of the enemy himself." And yet, as Duesterdieck objects, "Millennarians generally consider that all ungodly nations and rulers had already been annihilated (ch. xix:21)" (Cook, x:800).

Lee supplies the mode for Satan's deception as well: "How Satan accomplishes his deception at this stage, has been explained by commentators generally by a reference to ch. xvi:13" (799). Of course, *that* would be problematic for those who have adopted a preterist view of Revelation, for in their view Satan has been bound so as to be unable to deceive at the time that the deceptions predicted in Revelation 16:13 occur. (The idea that the impeding of gospel progress constitutes the mode of Satan's deception had not yet been formulated in Lee's day. Had it originated that early, the sharper Calvinists of the period would have speedily targeted its implicit Arminian basis and the idea would never have been carelessly integrated into Christian Reconstruction.)

Moses Stuart observed that "the war, which had been fierce and seemingly successful on the side of the enemy (inasmuch as they have come to the investiture of the capital city), is brought to a speedy and final termination" (2:368). Far from literalizing the picture, he makes clear that it signifies that "the last mighty struggle against Christianity will be made by many barbarous nations, who {169} will put forth most strenuous efforts to destroy it, and will actually bring it into great danger" (2:368).

Charles Hodge says of the conversion of the Jews that "their conversion may be national, although some may remain obdurate" (Systematic Theology, 3:792).

In Christian Reconstruction's infancy, Rushdoony likewise adopted the traditional view and integrated it (at least as early as 1970) with the concept of epistemological self-consciousness

(although he privately held Warfield's variant to be a plausible alternative):

... the gospel age sees the false prophet and beast destroyed in their Babylonian dream in the explicit revolt of Satan against Christ's kingdom. The tares and the wheat each becomes manifest, in that the harvest time is nearing. There is an epistemological self-consciousness in evil as it makes the last stand against the Lord by attacking his church. This attack is world-wide... Gog and Magog, i.e., prince and people, unite in open and avowed hatred of God. It is no longer masked as Christianity, no longer offers a paradise on earth, no longer offers any pretension. In its final thrust, it is openly satanic and it is simply a naked hatred for God. It fails, and God destroys forever the power of Satan" (*Thy Kingdom Come*, 213).

It is noteworthy that later volumes from Rushdoony's pen strongly imply Warfield's view in so many words: "The Second Coming ... shall be preceded, Paul tells us, by the destruction of all his enemies except death (1 Cor.15:24–26). However, there can be a *very* long time-span between the world-triumph and His coming again" (Systematic Theology, 2:880). The world-triumph is synonymous with a fully saved world (no enemies unconverted by the gospel); the gap between that point and the destruction of death presumably involves the extension of that triumph into sanctification, in light of Warfield's view of Matthew 5:18 discussed elsewhere in this article.

Rev. Andrew Sandlin's formulation in "The Creed of Christian Reconstruction" adopts the traditional view as well: "A Christian Reconstructionist is a Postmillennialist ... [who] has faith that God's purposes to bring all nations—though not {170} every individual—in subjection to Christ cannot fail." Inasmuch as the creed has appeared on the inside front cover of the *Chalcedon Report*, its perspective has been widely disseminated. The question addressed here is directed toward the *source* of that statement—the exegetical/theological history behind the assertions embedded in that general statement of current reconstructionist dogmatics.

(As Milligan pointed out, "Numerous doctrinal statements enter into the ordinary idea of a Creed upon which not only are Christian men not agreed, but upon which no agreement can be looked for" [Ascension, 320–1]).

Dr. Joseph C. Morecraft likewise declines to embrace total

universalism: “Problem: Many make millennium synonymous with utopia. But this is not so. Revelation 20 tells us clearly that the millennium includes gospel-prosperity, but it is also a time of battle as well (20:9)”(30). Dr. Morecraft (31) cites the works of Bahnsen, Gentry, and Kik favorably as primary source material for his position. As an interesting sidelight, Dr. Morecraft adds that the release of Satan by God “has all the earmarks of God taunting his enemy by demonstrating once and for all the impotency of Satan” (34). On general principles, however, one would have thought that wearing an unbreakable chain for so long would have sufficed for that purpose given the traditional view, not to mention the indignity of being trampled underfoot by the saints (Rom. 16:20).

Addressing the specific question “why will Satan be loosed?” (35) Dr. Morecraft offers five reasons (presumably reflecting the general content of a resource he highly recommends, Dr. Bahnsen’s cassette tape discussing this specific topic). These are as follows:

To demonstrate even more spectacularly the victory of Christ;

To vindicate the righteous judgment of God; (C) To magnify the grace of God which continues to sustain and preserve his people; (D) To cause Satan to experience the full-effect of his defeat at Calvary—even at his release the world does not fall into chaos; and (E) God destroys and restrains Satan at every turn, thereby crushing him and establishing eternal redemption for humanity” (35). {171}

Let us indulge in a mental exercise and examine these five points in a somewhat different light.

Let us assume (for the sake of argument) that Warfield is correct, and that the world is to be totally saved to every last individual then living, and that the law of God will eventually be kept in all its particulars at some particular point in history, whereupon the destruction of death itself occurs and the dead in Christ rise to join the living saints who are transformed in a twinkling of an eye to put on the incorruptible. Now, holding that scenario in mind, let’s reexamine the five reasons for the unleashing of Satan upon the earth as envisioned by traditional postmillennialism.

Is Warfield’s view insufficiently spectacular? Should spectacle be the determining factor? Did Christ not come to save the world, rather than destroy it? Did he not rebuke the disciples who desired

to call down fire on his enemies? It seems that the defeat of Satan is far more significant when it is the work of the Cross that triumphs over him, rather than a divine flamethrower. Note the defeat of Satan recorded in the book of Job: not long on spectacle, but stupendously profound in actual depth. The “pageant of the conquest of death,” as Warfield calls it, is a spectacle in itself, to be sure—the capstone of his victories from the right hand of the Father. The final promised universal keeping of the law of God that had been broken continually for so many centuries by so many millions occurs: what greater victory could be conceived against Satan? More could be said in this connection, but the general idea is clear.

Is the righteousness of God incompletely vindicated in Warfield’s model? Would the saved world think God had dealt unfairly with Satan, the “murderer from the beginning,” by taking away his dominion? Would biblical scholarship have deteriorated to the point that such ideas could hold sway over a Christianized world? Does God need to justify his final banishing of Satan to his people, after having his own Son sacrificed on the Cross to break Satan’s power, of whom John himself said that “the whole world lieth in the evil one”? Has not God, by sacrifice of his Son, justified for all time, to infinite degree, his righteous decree concerning {172} Satan’s fate? Do God’s people have short memories? Do the demons?

Is not God’s grace sufficiently magnified when it has spread as far as the ends of the earth, and like his word, not returning unto him void? Is God’s grace better magnified by dispensing it partially, letting Satan loose, turning the rebels into charcoal, and then drawing history to a close? Is that more a triumph of grace than the salvation of the entire world would be?

Does not Satan experience the full effect of his defeat at Calvary when Christ has finally taken away the sin of the entire world? Is it not the New Testament burden that the breaking of the power of sin is the breaking of Satan’s power, since his domain is the ethical realm of unbelief? How does giving Satan a huge army to play around with let him experience the full defeat of Calvary, given the fact that Calvary is superfluous to the fiery destruction rained upon the alleged rebels, echoing pre-Calvary judgments at Sodom and Gomorrah, or against Gog and Magog in Ezekiel

38–39? In point of fact, Hebrews 2:14 seems to militate against this idea entirely, for it asserts “that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.” It is Christ’s death that *directly* gains him the victory over Satan, through the salvation it purchased at so great a price. What we should focus on is the full effect of Calvary. Notions of an end-time rebellion intended to demonstrate that effect are inconsistent with the entire purpose of the Cross and its relation to Satan’s defeat in time and history, whereby God uses the weak to confound the strong. As Elijah learned, the LORD was not in the wind, or the earthquake, nor in the fire (1 Kin. 19:11–12).

It is unclear what the relationship of Dr. Morecraft’s fifth reason is to the issue at hand. The point appears to derive from the general proposition that Satan is no loose cannon, that God is the binding and loosing agent and destroys and crushes the prince of the power of the air at his good pleasure. Yet, this is also true of the Warfield model, with an intriguing exception: in Warfield’s model, the church successfully completes the Great Commission even though Satan is loose, whereas in traditional postmillennialism the church cannot complete the Great Commission even though Satan is bound. Which sounds like a more resounding defeat for Satan? {173}

Now, admittedly, there is a significant rhetorical component to both Dr. Morecraft’s five reasons and the five responses herein offered. (Any given point may seem persuasive, but it must nonetheless be submitted to the court of Scripture prior to full acceptance.) For this reason, the above interchange should be recognized to lie beyond exegetical dimensions entirely, so far as its explicit content is concerned. However, inasmuch as the intended purpose of the review is to evaluate Dr. Morecraft’s reasons *on their own principles*, the responses do indeed carry inductive weight, serving as they do as an internal critique of the proposed justifications.

Dr. Morecraft concludes with a warning against complacency (a root cause for the fertile soil from which the proposed final rebellion springs). This is an intriguing application of Revelation 20:7–10. Generally, we derive lessons from *history* in order to avoid repeating past mistakes. But here we are told that the church is hurtling toward a future era when complacency will be king,

so we today should avoid complacency (“Therefore, beware of complacency”) [p. 35].) Don’t make the same mistakes the saints of the future will make, which will supply Satan with his biggest army ever assembled! (Don’t Christians in the future read Scripture? One has to wonder sometimes. Supposedly, the future saints will be epistemologically self-conscious [Morecraft, 34], so one wonders how complacency can reign in such an environment. The speculative nature of “accounting for a hypothetical final apostasy” is evident on the face of it. We get profoundly moving Reformed verbiage in support of the traditional view, but close examination proves such arguments to be equivocal at best, unsupportable at worst.)

Dr. Morecraft was singled out for critical examination *not* on account of any greater weakness in his position than that of other postmillennial scholars, but rather because he presents the traditional position with exceptional clarity and cogency—he structures his arguments logically, and makes a comprehensive and sincere effort to deal with the difficulties. Clarity in formulating an eschatological option is always to be commended, even if that option is later opened to exegetical challenge. God’s church is far better served by precision than vagueness. Of all the defenses mounted for a final apostasy, Dr. Morecraft’s formulation was {174} perhaps the only one that materially advanced the controversy closer to a resolution.

The Fullness That Is Partial

The handling of the eleventh chapter of Romans seems to evidence a consensus on one key point: the word *pleroma*, “fulness,” as applied to the gentiles in the phrase “the fullness of the Gentiles,” does not mean a full fulness, but rather a partial fulness. (Likewise the “all Israel” that is saved does not denote “all” at all.) Note the general expositional trend among the following representative exegetes, who teach that *pleroma* does not necessarily *mean pleroma*, nor does *pas* necessarily mean “all”:

The “fulness” of the Gentiles constitutes a definite but immense number, whom God foreknew, called, and justified in the manner previously described by the apostle. St. Paul, here, asserts the Christianization of the globe, prior to the Christianization of

the Jews. In neither case, however, is it necessary to suppose the regeneration of every individual without exception (Shedd, 348).

Pas must be taken in the proper meaning of the word: "Israel as a whole, Israel as a nation," and not as necessarily including every individual Israelite ... So the words of St. Paul ... do not mean that every Israelite shall finally be saved (Sanday, 3356).

[*pleroma*] does not mean the totality of the Gentiles... [it does not mean] that all the Gentiles who may be alive when the Jews are converted, shall be true Christians. All that can be safely inferred from this language is, that the Gentiles, as a body, the mass of the Gentile world, will be converted before the restoration of the Jews, as a nation ... [The Jews'] restoration, although in like manner national, need not be assumed to include the salvation of every individual Jew" (Hodge, *Romans*, 3734). Hodge repeats this idea in his *Systematic Theology* (3:803).

Bishop Moule advises that "we are not obliged to press the word 'all' to a rigid literality" (Nicoll, 5:593).

The fulness of the Gentiles' is their full number. On this expression, too, debate is needlessly centered. Only an exegete would surmise that the totality of Gentile nations is referred to, and then think that the Jewish nation would come in as the last and final nation. Nor does "fulness" mean all the Gentiles in the world (Lenski, 720). {175}

More encouragingly, Robert Haldane not only does not qualify *pleroma* at Romans 11:25, he comes out in favor of the idea that all Israel really does mean al/Israel: "Such expressions as that 'all Israel shall be saved,' are no doubt, in certain situations, capable of limitation; but as no Scripture demands any limitation of this expression, and as the opposition here stated is between *part* and *all*, there is no warrant to make any exception, and with God this, like all other things, is possible" (541). Note the kind of warrant Haldane stipulates for limiting "all": the teaching of another passage in Scripture that would require such a limitation to harmonize properly. But it could be quite legitimately pressed that, in the case of eschatological universalism, interpretation of Romans 11:25–26 is being conditioned by other passages (and, in point of fact, perhaps only one passage: Revelation 20:7–9). Odd, again, that Revelation 20 would remain our controlling principle

(an approach that we would not hesitate to criticize if adopted by a dispensational scholar).

That *pleroma* is conditioned and limited by non-exegetical considerations is further demonstrated by Bishop Moule in his exposition of the passage: “Does [Rom. 11:25b] mean that the stream of Gentile conversions shall have *flowed* and *ceased*, before the great blessing comes to Israel? Certainly the Greek may carry this meaning; perhaps, taken quite apart, it carries it more easily than any other. But it has this difficulty, that it would assign to the ‘salvation’ of Israel no influence of blessing upon the Gentile world [citing vss. 12 and 15 of the same chapter]” (Nicoll, 5:592). Moule’s view of the meaning of Romans 11:15 supplies the rationale for limiting Romans 11:25b. If his view of Romans 11:15 is wrong (which it almost certainly is), his reservations become immaterial.

David Brown offers the same rationale as does Moule for rejecting *pleroma* and *pas* as reflecting totalities, citing Romans 11:15 as the conflicting passage (Jamieson, 3:2:261). Or, more accurately, he offers as evidence what he thinks Romans 11:15 “seems to speak.” Again, Romans 11:15 requires separate exegesis, and if a conflict arises, the question must again become “which text conditions our understanding of the other?”

Lange, while aware of the competing hypotheses surrounding the meaning of *pleroma*, refrains from endorsing the “striking” view {176} of Meyer: “As the Apostle could not have meant an indefinite mass of Gentiles, nor yet all the Gentiles down to the last man, he evidently had in view an organically dynamic totality of the heathen world, in which he unquestionably bethought himself of the conversion of the heathen world” (Romans, 369). He likewise says of *all Israel* that it “is not spoken of all Israel in isolated examples, nor of the ‘totality’ without exception” (370). Lange’s view of *how pas* should be taken is conditioned by how he believes *pleroma* in verse 25 should be taken as well: since fullness is not literally full, neither should allness be completely all.

Lange does deprive his fellow partialists of Romans 11:15, defending what he calls the “literal view” of the text, which he calls “the oldest ecclesiastical explanation” (366), namely, that the resurrection from the dead is intended by Paul at that point. The present author contends for that view, regarded as plausible and possible by Warfield, and necessary and proper by Meyer. The

latter writer supplies an impressive list of expositors who are like-minded: “The *proper* sense has been held by Origen, Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret, Anselm, Erasmus, Toletus, Semler, Reiche, Gloeckler, de Wette, Nielsen, Fritzsche, Rueckert, Reithmayr, Bisping, Hofmann, Beyschlag, and others ...” (5:438). As we expand on Romans 11:15 and its meaning, its relevance to verses 25 and 26 will stand out the more clearly: verse 15 is no ground upon which to place limitations on verses 25 and 26.

Gifford, commenting on the idea of all Israel being saved, states that “neither ... must the universality of the expression be exaggerated so as to mean the whole nation *without any individual exception*. The words must be taken in their natural unexaggerated sense...” (Cook, 9:199). It turns out that Gifford is concerned to undermine the attempts of some to build an unscriptural universalism from it (postulating the saving of all men, dead or alive, wicked or good, from Adam to the end), as well as to withdraw fuel for Zionist fires (199). Again, the very point in question is assumed to be true, so we get no nearer to answering the foundational question: are eschatological universalists exaggerating the meaning of *pleroma* and *pas*, or are their opponents limiting their natural meaning? Each new citation indicates that the cross-references used to forward the former conception have invariably evaporated, leaving us again with the bald text with which to deal. {177} Bernhard Weiss mirrors Gifford’s treatment, holding Romans 11:15 to be referring to the general resurrection, while equivocating on the meaning of *pleroma* and *pas*. “... until the totality of the Gentiles should have entered into the congregation of the redeemed. The Apostle is naturally thinking only of the Gentile world as a whole, which does not say that individuals among them were not to continue in unbelief, and therefore not to enter. However, the Apostle intentionally omits to say this here” (3:110). That last sentence tells us quite a bit—it is an admission that the restriction placed on *pleroma* is not found in this text, but elsewhere. (This “natural” understanding is precisely what needs to be challenged: from whence cometh it? If eschatological universalism is correct, one would have to answer “from unbelief”) Weiss deals with verse 26 similarly: “Here it becomes perfectly clear that the Apostle is thinking of the redemption of Israel as a nation, however many individuals

in it may yet continue in unbelief...” (3:110) The grounds of this “perfect clarity” are obscure, and not provided.

Dr. Kenneth Gentry makes an uncharacteristically inexact comment about Romans 11:15: “Eventually the vast majority of Jews and Gentiles alike will be converted, leading to the ‘reconciliation of the world’ (Rom. 11:15)” (House Divided, 230). In point of fact, it is the *casting away* of the Jews that leads to the reconciliation of the world, as explicitly taught in Romans 11:15a (which, in fairness, is properly laid out by Dr. Gentry in *He Shall Have Dominion*). The only clue to Dr. Gentry’s view of Romans 11:15b is his assertion that the mass conversion of the Jews “in turn will lead to further Gentile conversions” (House Divided, 217). This view implies two things: (1) that Gentry does not regard “life from the dead” in verse 15 to refer to the general resurrection, and (2) that Gentry does not hold that the *pleroma* of Romans 11:25 means totality, else he would not posit continued gentile conversions based on his reading of Romans 11:15. (Incomplete index make it difficult to track his citations—e.g., he cites Romans 11:12–25 on page 206 of *He Shall Have Dominion*, but this is omitted from the book’s indices. Strictly speaking, this same problem occurs on page 217 of *House Divided*. Accordingly, it is possible that full justice is not being done to Gentry’s position here due to indexing deficiencies originated by his publisher.) {178}

Warfield treats *pleroma* as fulness, pure and simple: totality. The only evasion he foresees that may be available to his opponents is to hold that the “coming in” of the fulness of the gentiles means merely nominal conversion rather than true conversion (Biblical Doctrines, 624) which he regards as the bare minimum meaning of the text. “All Israel” means precisely that, however. Warfield does not involve himself in the exegesis of the term “coming in,” a service performed elsewhere by other exegetes who have shown it to be a technical term reserved for coming into the kingdom of God by being born-again.

Meyer’s exegesis is important, representing as it does the high watermark of 19th century exegetical achievement. Odd’s efforts to marginalize his views have multiplied, offering opposing views already addressed in advance by Meyer. If one were to disagree with a scholar who has offered rebuttals-in-advance, one would be obligated to mount, at the very least, a detailed counter-rebuttal,

and not merely rehearse objections pre-refuted by that scholar. How often have we seen such similar shoddy scholarship, most notably among the writings of those critical of theonomist Greg Bahnsen, a thinker whose distinguishing characteristic was a near-exhaustive effort to anticipate objections in advance and address them with rigor? There is, then, no warrant for reconstructionists engaged in eschatological debate to follow the lead of Bahnsen's *critics!*

Meyer states, "The conversion of the Gentiles ensues by successive stages; but when their *totality* shall be converted, then the conversion of the Jews in their *totality* will also ensue" (5:447).

There would have been no offence taken at the full sense of the *pleroma ton ethnon*, as well as the correlate *pas Israel*, v. 26, and there would have been no occasion to seek artificial limitations of the fulness of these notions, had it been sufficiently considered that Paul is speaking *apocalyptically*, in virtue of his *prophetic contemplation* of the last sacred-historical development before the *Parousia*. . By a restrictive explaining away and modification of these utterances the prophetic character and spirit suffers a violence foreign to it, against which the simple and clear words do not cease to offer resistance. (5:447) {179}

Meyer shows that *pleroma* could not mean the "full number" contingent to the Gentiles, showing that Paul would have adopted the phrasing of Romans 11:12 (to *pleroma auton*), and then proceeds to dismantle the "artificial limitations" imposed by Theophylact, Augustine, Oecumenius, etc. Meyer speaks of expositors (e.g., Hofmann) who "seek to get rid of" the *prima facie* meaning of the text by collapsing "fulness of the Gentiles" into simply "the Gentiles" (5:448). How this unfolds is highly illuminating and deserves close attention:

Thus there would result [under Hofmann's view] as the sense: until *no people* of the Gentile world is any longer found outside the church. This is decidedly at variance with ver. 12, and with the whole context down to its evident concluding verse (ver. 32), according to which not the *peoples as such* (in the lump, as it were), but all *persons* who compose them, must be the subjects of the entrance into the church and of the divine mercy. The above interpretation is a process of *rationalizing*, artificial and far-fetched, and contrary to the language and the context, by interpreting what is said of the

individuals as applying to the *nations*. (5:448)

Notice that the *exact opposite* idea is represented in the writings of most well-known postmillennial thinkers of today, North, Bahnsen, *et al.* They speak of *national* conversion, but insist that there is *no individualistic component* to Paul's teaching. Our modern notions, however, are exegetically unsound, and bespeak eschatological bias against Warfield's vision of victory.

Meyer, moving on to verse 26, goes further yet:

This notion, so definitely expressed, of the *totality of the people* is in no way to be limited; the *whole* of those are intended, who, at the time that the fulness of the Gentiles shall have come in, will compose Israel. All Israelites who up to that time shall be still unconverted, will then be converted to salvation, so that at that term [sic] *entire* Israel will obtain the saving deliverance; but comp., as to the quite unlimited expression, the remark on ver. 25. Limitations from other interests than that of exegesis have been suggested..." (5:448) {180}

What are these non-exegetical interests? Meyer cites dozens in a massive footnote, starting with the Reformers, who "were induced to depart from the literal sense of the apostle, not by exegetical, but by dogmatic considerations..." Of such tactics, Meyer concludes that "it is self-evident that thus all the *elements* which form the points properly so called of [such] interpretation[s] are forced upon the text..."

It would appear that eschatology, having taken three steps forward, took two steps backward. So-called exegetical arguments are actually dogmatic arguments reflective of pre-existing biases against the notion of eschatological universalism. When Lenski scornfully noted that "only an exegete" would take Paul literally, the implicit concession in that criticism is quite astonishing, suggestive of the power of dogma over exegesis when once we've grown accustomed to confusing the postmillennial "traditions of men" with the word of God written. It is time that reconstructionists jump the final hurdle. This would not be a precipitous step, exegetically considered. Courage should mark our adherence to Scripture. Recall how Dr. Bahnsen dealt with the "imminent any-moment return" of Christ: "Postmillennialism never claimed to salvage the doctrine of the any-moment return

of Christ: indeed, distinctive to it is the *denial* of the imminent physical return” (North, JCR, 59–60). It is time to deal similarly with the final apostasy doctrine: time to demote it as a doctrine altogether, in plain language, without apology.

It has been this author’s contention that postmillennialism is in the enviable position of actually being the eschatology capable of taking more Scripture literally than any other system—but this result obtains only upon abandonment of the final apostasy. Then, and only then, the grand promises of the Old Testament prophets can take on their full, unqualified meaning, and the tables can be turned on the so-called “literalists” of today. So long as postmillennialism drinks from its enemies’ cisterns, it will remain enfeebled and compelled to rationalize as frequently as its competing systems must do. So long as this continues, the people of God will be deprived of the actual teaching of Scripture. This is all the more grievous when one considers that the support for the “long settled” doctrine of a final apostasy is, at heart, the mere {181} assertion that it is “long settled,” letting stand a rationalistic structure of raw guesswork improperly labeled as “unassailable exegesis,” thus cutting short new and searching inquiry into the matter that might challenge it in favor of more scriptural formulations. As Paul said, and as Dr. Bahnsen was so fond of quoting, “Let God be true, but every man a liar.”

The Case Against Eschatological Universalism

In general, apart from the occasional stab at an exegetical challenge to eschatological universalism, the case against Warfield’s views is generally prosecuted along one of several lines.

The most common tactic (as can be verified by reviewing the postmil writers quoted earlier) is simply to assert that “all” does not mean all, and “every” does not mean every, and “no more war” does not mean no more war, etc. All such expressions are classified as hyperbolic, as exaggerations. Having taken away all the words that would be used to describe eschatological universalism, the modern postmil then wisely intones, “[T]here is obviously no scriptural support for Warfield’s view.” If this isn’t poisoning the scriptural well, what is?

Another tactic is the analogy: God’s kingdom is held to be

analogous to many other things, like a woman cleaning house (North's favored analogy), or Israel's rejection (Chilton's view in *Paradise Restored*, 129), or the sanctification of the individual Christian. In fairness, the latter analogy was mentioned first by Warfield (*Biblical Doctrines*, 663), but he does so hypothetically, and contrasts the force of that analogy with "the tremendous emphasis laid on the overthrow of all of Christ's enemies, which must mean precisely his spiritual opponents—all that militates against the perfection of his rule over the hearts of men." Warfield therefore makes it clear that the analogy is pitted against the representations of Scripture itself. We must ask ourselves, then, which of the two should we regard as normative? Models that point to man's sinfulness as a brake on any form of eschatological universalism run the risk of falling into the trap described by John Howe. "An arm of flesh signifies a great deal, when the power of an almighty Spirit is reckoned as nothing" (Murray, 243). {182}

The third tactic is to make the final apostasy a necessary consequence of an associated theological model. This tactic has seen universal deployment by dispensationalists: all dispensations must end in failure, the millennium no less so than the previous ones. In reconstructionist circles, the attempt to incorporate the final apostasy as part of a particular view of common grace marks the contribution of Dr. Gary North. The final apostasy is explicitly taught to be a direct implication of his common grace model: "Does the postmillennialist believe that there will be faith in general on earth when Christ appears? Not if he understands the implications of the doctrine of common grace: it leads to a final rebellion by covenant-breakers" (243). Since there *is* no common grace if there are no unregenerate people (no grace in common between believer and unbeliever), North holds that the unregenerate must remain embedded in culture so as to permit common grace to operate. He might as well have said the same for the Great Commission, insisting that there must always be nations requiring discipling, or else the Great Commission will have become vacated by way of completing its charter. Although North claims his argument is exegetical, we have seen that he has both omitted to interact exegetically with an opposing view of the target Scriptures allegedly teaching a final apostasy, and he has given but the weakest scriptural support for his own case. This is

all but given away in his opening paragraphs, where appeal is made to gross numbers favoring his view (an *ad populum* fallacy), not to the biblical texts in question, precipitating his veiled poisoning of the well against Warfield.

Similar to the prior tactic is taking a prevailing theory concerning the millennium itself and applying it to the final apostasy. This form of argumentation reduces to the construction of syllogisms, the validity of which is assured but the soundness of which is open to direct exegetical challenge. Accordingly, North and Warfield occupy the same logical space structurally speaking, but not substantively speaking. The conclusions are only as good as the constituent premises, and whereas Warfield's are defensible, North's are not. Sadly, this general trend has marked the writing of many fine authors, most notably Greg Bahnsen. So committed was he to his view of Revelation 20:1–6 that he was compelled to {183} accept the final apostasy as a corollary of it. Yet, this powerhouse logician recognized the contour of his argument to be conditional.

One would think that after all the negative criticism that Reformed writers have hurled at premillennialists throughout the last few centuries for basing an entire doctrine on so short a stretch of admittedly figurative Scripture, we would have been alert to avoid stepping into the same trap. No such luck. Revelation 20:79 is the *locus classicus* for the final apostasy. Ironically, this passage “constitutes a part, and confessedly an obscure part, of one of the most figurative books of Scripture” (Strong, 1011). No wonder some disdain to acknowledge critics of the final apostasy. The “doctrine” is simply too weak to hold up under even casual scrutiny.

The parable of the wheat and the tares (explicated in this article under the heading of “Chilton Reviewed”) is likewise integrated into the prevailing model. Note, however, that in itself it falls short of justifying a final apostasy. It supposedly provides background justification for holding that the final days of the church age will see unregenerate individuals sufficient in number to form a huge army. But reading armies and rebellions into the parable is *eisegesis*, pure and simple. Moreover, the counter-explanation offered in this essay for that parable should be evaluated in light of its concord with the rest of Scripture. If the reader has gained anything from this exercise, it should be the realization that the

Scriptures used to support the final apostasy are surprisingly few in number, conflict with the combined testimony of the rest of Scripture if interpreted “traditionally,” and are generally stretched to fit the agenda of the expositor.

After *all*, if it were systematically exegetical arguments that North sought in 1987, why didn't he interact with this author's intramural (and friendly) challenge to David Chilton? Why didn't he address the exegetical necessity that the reign of the Christians terminates as his little season of rebellion begins? A substantive response should have been issued by Dr. North in the intervening 15 years. He is obviously capable of mounting an exegetical argument given a sufficient body of corroborative data with which to work. It must charitably be concluded that his *Dominion and Common Grace* falls little, if anything, short of a marathon podium-pounding session. {184}

What remains then is the argument from Matthew 24, particularly in light of the general reconstructionist trend to follow J. Marcellus Kik's division of the Olivet Discourse at the so-called transition text, Matthew 24:36 (cf. *Eschatology of Victory*, 6773). This would permit allocating the following verses to the period in time just prior to the second advent. Intriguingly, Gentry's *He Shall Have Dominion* does not address any verses between Matthew 24:36 and Matthew 25:5 at all—so we are at pains to know his view on this matter from his major eschatological opus. The book he co-authored with Dr. Greg Bahnsen, *House Divided*, comes down favorably on the side of Kik (270, 274), but these passages are written to signal documentation errors committed by the dispensationalist targets (House and Ice), and not necessarily to convey unabashed advocacy for the position described (especially in light of Gentry's later omission of the last half of Matthew 24 from *He Shall Have Dominion*).

What is certain is that Dr. Bahnsen heartily defended the Kik hypothesis, even well after having been made familiar with the published challenge mounted by this author in 1989 as well as dissent from other reconstructionist authors. This author had then made the following parenthetical remark concerning the matter: “This reviewer has long maintained that Luke 17:34–37 forbids subdividing Matthew 24 at its 34th verse: the Olivet Discourse apparently refers to ancient Jerusalem all the way up to Matthew

25:30, *contra* Kik *et al.* Matthew 25:31ff., paralleling Revelation 20:11ff., describes his Coming as synonymous with the end of the world and final judgment.” It was to be later learned that dissent was not limited to West Coast reconstructionists: Gary DeMar, commenting on James Jordan’s division of Matthew 24 at verse 34, wrote that “I disagree with Jim on this point as do other postmillennialists” (letter to the author dated Dec. 7, 1989). At the very least, claims of a postmillennial consensus on this matter are quite premature!

No more eloquent spokesman for Kik could be found than Dr. Bahnsen, who discussed this issue in the course of a seminar taught in England in the early 1990s. It was later released by Covenant Tape Ministry (now renamed Covenant Media Foundation) as a 3-cassette series entitled “Postmillennialism and the Pessimistic Passages.” In the course of the seminar, an attendee {185} posed the kind of question this author would have posed regarding the significance of the parallel passages in Luke (which, as touched upon in the preceding paragraph, would rearrange our understanding of Matthew 24 and preterize the entire chapter and half of the next chapter as well). It wasn’t often that Bahnsen gave a weak answer replete with hand-waving (in fact, virtually never!), but such was the case here. He enlarged upon his in-depth studies of the relationship of Luke to the other gospels, the synoptic problem in general, Luke’s internal structure, etc., without specifically answering the question. He concluded by cheerily observing that anyone willing to study Luke as heavily as he had done would see that it presents no problem to the Kik division of Matthew 24. This came dangerously close to saying, “Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain!” It then became crystal clear to this author: there really isn’t a cogent response to that challenge, and there never was. The Lucan parallels were either ignored or dismissed or covered over with imposing verbiage and abstruse generalities.

What had hitherto been affirmed as scriptural proof of general decline prior to the second coming was again put on shaky ground. Matthew 24:37ff. no longer stood as an insuperable barrier to a totally Christianized world, and no longer could function as an unchallenged proof text of spiritual decline prior to the second coming. Dr. Bahnsen had read this author’s challenges to the Kik hypothesis as early as 1982, yet a decade of pondering the matter

hadn't led him to a rebuttal worthy of the name. Evidently, he had hit something of a dry well: his reply in England was not exegetical, it was text-critical and embarrassingly tenuous. If as skilled an exegete as Bahnsen misses the target, it may well be because "the cat is in the other tree."

Recapitulating, the second coming of Christ occurs at the end of the world, meaning that Jesus did not begin his answer to Matthew 24:3b until Matthew 25:31. This author was later to learn that this division of the Olivet Discourse had its early defenders, including Lightfoot, Wetstein, Flatt, etc. [Meyer 1:430]. Barring a more effective explanation of the cross-references in Luke, postmillennialists, inclined towards Kik's general position, would do well to move the suggested line of demarcation to the point at which Revelation 20:11ff. and Matthew 25:31 converge. {186}

Theonomy vs. the Final Apostasy

Warfield's view of theonomy's famed *locus classicus*, Matthew 5:17–20, deserves separate attention, and that on several grounds. On its own merit, his exposition should be permitted to contend with the prevailing exegesis of Bahnsen, so that our era will at least be able to evaluate both viewpoints side by side, rather than being spoonfed one to the exclusion (and deliberate omission) of the other.

More importantly, the bias against Warfield's view is quite interesting: it is an eschatological bias, a bias that proceeds from those postmillennialists who hold to a final apostasy. Why should this be so? Because Warfield's treatment of Matthew 5:18 not only shows that the text teaches eschatological universalism (the total victory of the gospel) but also the total victory of God's law over the conduct of those made in his image—the most thorough-going form of theonomy on the market. Accordingly, his exegesis is not rejected on exegetical grounds, but on eschatological grounds proceeding from, of all places, the 20th chapter of the book of Revelation! Revelation 20 is regarded as normative, controlling the exegesis of Matthew 5:18. Somehow, the inverse proposition (that Matthew 5:18 should condition our understanding of obscure passages in Revelation) is quietly swept under the rug as we are informed about the "majority opinion" of today's theonomic

postmillennialists (which may well simply reflect all those influenced by, and uncritically repeating, Dr. Bahnsen's *magnum opus* argumentation).

Warfield taught the abiding validity of the law in exhaustive detail (and more consistently than did Dr. Bahnsen). Writes Warfield:

... the whole law in all its details, down to its smallest minutiae, remains permanently in force and shall be obeyed ... it is asserted with an emphasis which could not easily be made stronger, that the law in its smallest details remains in undiminished authority so long as the world lasts. Jesus has not come to abrogate the law—on the contrary the law will never be abrogated, not even in the slightest of its particulars. Jesus declares that while the world lasts no jot or tittle of the law shall pass away—until they all, all the law's merest jots and tittles, shall be accomplished. {187} He means to say not merely that they should be accomplished, but that they shall be accomplished. The words are very emphatic. The "all," standing in correlation with the "one" of the "one jot" and "one tittle," declares that all the jots and all the tittles of the law shall be accomplished. Not one shall fail. The expression itself is equivalent to a declaration that a time shall come when in this detailed perfection, the law shall be observed. This amounts to a promise that the day shall surely come for which we pray when, in accordance with Jesus' instruction we ask, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done as in heaven so on earth." So far from coming to abrogate the law, He comes then to get the law kept; not merely to republish it, in all its reach, whether of the jots and tittles of its former publication, or of its most deeply cutting and widely reaching interpretation, but to reproduce it in actual lives, to write it on the hearts of men and in their actual living... In a word, we do not understand the nature of the mission which Jesus here ascribes to Himself until we clearly see that it finds its end in the perfecting of men. His purpose in coming is not accomplished in merely completing the law: it finds its fulfillment in bringing men completely to keep the completed law. (*Biblical Doctrines* 297–8)

Needless to say, Warfield holds that observance of the Greatest Commandment must be unfeigned, i.e., universal conversion is a prerequisite for fulfillment of Matthew 5:18.

He Must Be Loosed

Strangely enough, this is the point of agreement between the two camps. The difference is this: traditional postmillennialists hold that Satan is not presently loosed, but that he must be loosed later. Warfield's view, as well as that of his predecessors, holds that Satan must be loosed, and accordingly, is loose on earth right now. Accordingly, the objection that Satan must be loosed loses all force once it is understood that the eschatological universalist has already fulfilled this requirement of the Revelation text. Satan must be loosed for a little season—and the little season is understood to be the entire interadvental period. Notwithstanding Satan's continued presence, Warfield shows that he will lose the entirety of his wicked dominion, a defeat culminating with the salvation of every man living at the end of the church age. Notice the contrasting {188} approaches to victory in the two models: in the traditional view, the church fails to complete the Great Commission even though Satan is bound; in Warfield's view, the church completes the Great Commission even though Satan is loose. Which perspective sounds more triumphant? Think of it from Satan's sardonic perspective: would he not exult that Christ couldn't save the world, even with Satan all tied up? Jesus would hardly have had any excuse not to prevail, given that his enemy was out of the picture! Now reverse it: Satan is allowed to do his worst, and Christ nonetheless conquers the world right under Satan's nose—and Satan has no excuse (like the ones he pulled on God in Job 1:9–12 and 2:4–5). God has taken a world, the entirety of which “lieth in wickedness” or “lieth in the evil one” (1 John 5:19), and conquered it through the cross of his Son. This answers better to the scriptural notion of triumph: Christ drawing all men unto himself in the face of Satan's full, unbridled opposition.

Now, it is to be admitted that part of the strength of the preceding paragraph is in its rhetorical sweep, and it would be manifestly improper to contrast the two views with such an approach alone. What is legitimate is to (1) contrast these rhetorical recastings with the *primary message* of volumes such as David Chilton's *Paradise Restored*, where the victory motif is hammered home so resoundingly that the final apostasy is nearly lost amid all the gospel conquest, and (2) to contrast the rhetorical paraphrases

with the victory message of Scripture itself. Between these two procedures, it would be possible to discern, respectively, internal consistency and general correspondence with Scripture.

Fire from Heaven

Odd that the theological camp most noted for correctly understanding the idioms of Scripture would suddenly literalize a stray verse from Revelation 20. The fire from heaven simply indicates God's providential judgments meted out from his throne. This is stated theologically in most instances (e.g., Rom. 1:18: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness"). Elsewhere, the imagery of fire is utilized. "He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit, and with fire" (Matt. 3:11). {189} "A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him..." (Dan. 7:10). "Great is the rage (literally, *glowing fire*) of the LORD which has poured itself upon us, because our fathers have not observed the word of the LORD, to do according to all that is written in this book" (2 Chron. 34:21). (Credit goes to E. W. Hengstenberg for rendering the Hebrew literally.)

The sea of glass under God's throne (Rev. 15:2) was mingled with fire as well. Revelation 8:5 depicts fire being poured on the earth—symbolizing a concept so scripturally universal that the general idea found its way onto the colorful dust-jacket of David Chilton's *Days of Vengeance*. The Messiah "is like a refiner's fire" (Mal. 3:2), an activity hardly to be restricted to the last day of history. The "refining" continues through history until it achieves its end: the total purging of dross from the world.

In short, it is here urged that the burden of proof rest on those who propose that Revelation 20:7–9 speaks of a literal incineration of wicked men living at the last day, and is not simply a restatement of a well-known idiom depicting God's wrath in execution through his providential governance over the affairs of men and nations. (This is not to mention the insuperable problem faced by the traditional view if there are, in fact, no wicked people living to incinerate on the last day of history.)

Purging the Threshing Floor

Matthew 3:12 offers the position of John the Baptist, who taught that the Messiah was presently holding his winnowing fan in his hand, and would thoroughly purge his threshing floor (“thoroughly purge” being a single Greek term—*diakatharizo*—denoting complete and total purging). The meaning of the threshing floor is not difficult to ascertain. Micah 4:12 says of the nations of the earth that “they do not understand his plan, that he has gathered them as sheaves to the threshing floor.” The nations of the world occupy the threshing floor of God, which his Son will thoroughly purge with the winnowing fan presently in his hand.

When premils read that Christ was already holding his winnowing fan in his hand twenty centuries ago, they insist that he continues to wait before using it. Jesus just keeps holding onto it year after year, century after century. When postmils read that {190} Christ is thoroughly purging the threshing floor of all chaff in order that only wheat may remain, they seem to imply that our LORD isn’t particularly meticulous or thorough, inasmuch as their model holds that a large amount of chaff remaining on the partially-purged threshing floor will rebel against its LORD.) Expositors who treat the threshing floor as merely the land of Israel have generally failed to do full justice to God’s promise to Abraham and its pervasive parallels—if these are kept in mind, this alternate exposition harmonizes equally well. In this light, Daniel 2:35 is clearly relevant: “All [these kingdoms] were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.”

Where are the Wicked?

The wicked and their works of darkness are abundant today. John Owen and Benjamin B. Warfield both saw the present reality clearly, and depicted it with unbending honesty. The question here is: where are the wicked at the end of the church age? Are they still alive and well, hiding out for the great rebellion? Or has the entire earth been converted, leaving no unregenerate men or women? Why Christians find the concept of a fully-converted

world somehow undesirable is a great mystery. It is the triumph of dogma over faith, of being slow to believe all that the prophets have uttered.

Once one is committed to a view of common grace such as that advanced by Dr. North, one needs to retain wicked people on the earth upon which God's common grace must operate. The dogmatic tail wags the exegetical dog. Powerful *a priori* assumptions undergird the traditional view, recasting large stretches of Scripture in terms of its guiding dogma.

Nonetheless, a good part of the Bible resists such revisionism. The 37th Psalm gives little comfort to the proponents of increasing common grace:

For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight {191} themselves in the abundance of peace... For the arms of the wicked shall be broken: but the Lord upholdeth the righteous. ... But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the Lord shall be as the fat of lambs: they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away... For such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth; and they that be cursed of him shall be cut off... For the Lord loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved forever: but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off... I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found. Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace. But the transgressors shall be destroyed together: the end of the wicked shall be cut off. (Ps. 37:9–11, 17, 20, 22, 28, 35–38)

Such promises are incompatible with Dr. North's common grace idea—even the *seed* of the wicked is cut off, i.e., their posterity. The latter idea is expressed explicitly in the 109th Psalm: “Let his posterity be cut off; and in the generation following let their name be blotted out” (v. 13).

Although North claims that “there will also be peace on earth extended to evil men” (Dominion, 170), this flatly contradicts Isaiah 57:21: “There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.” As such, the promise of ever-increasing peace flowing from the

Messiah (Isa. 9:7) is incompatible with (1) the continued existence of wicked men and (2) a final war against God's church at the end of the church age. These points have been belabored elsewhere in this essay.

Dr. North holds that "it is imperative that Christians scrap the concept of 'earlier grace' and adopt a doctrine of common (crumbs for the dog) grace" (Dominion, 92). This imperative allegedly springs from the supposed conflict between Van Til's view of common grace and Rushdoony's postmillennialism. Says North, "Obviously, they can't be reconciled." Given that North had already scrapped Warfield's eschatology at the outset, it is no surprise that reconciliation evades him. One could just as easily affirm that the reason Van Til is correct is that the *numbers of the unregenerate are dropping down to zero*. Under *that* model, one could theoretically reconcile both contentions. This author is not arguing for Van Til's {192} view, but merely demonstrating that the alleged inconsistency is something of a straw-man. Carson would classify North's treatment as a fallacy of question-framing (107).

Not by Might, Nor by Power, but by My Spirit

It would be tempting indeed to simply let the testimony of this concept, taken from the 4th chapter of Zechariah, stand unembellished. If the church of God is the antitype of the temple being built by Zerubbabel and Joshua (Zech. 3), then Zechariah 4:7 supplies presumptive evidence for eschatological universalism. Zerubbabel "shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it." The conquest of grace, and of the Holy Spirit, is clearly and explicitly presupposed. Paraphrasing the oft-quoted remark by C. H. Spurgeon, the Holy Spirit would never let the imputation rest on his holy name that he was unable to convert the world (Murray, 258).

There appears to be no way to avoid the conclusion that the final apostasy model inverts Zechariah's order: not by the Spirit, but by might and power. At what point, then, will we finally say of the final apostasy doctrine, "Take away her battlements, for they are not the LORD's" (Jer. 5:10)?

Henceforth Expecting: Hebrews 10:13

There is no “refuge of ambiguity” to be found when Hebrews 10:13 is brought to the table. Its clear message, dovetailing so well with its source Psalm, previous intra-epistle argumentation, and related passages such as 1 Corinthians 15:24–28, places the second coming *after* earthly opposition to Christ has been quelled. What proves intriguing in this connection is the exposition by Gottlieb Lunemann (Meyer’s collaborator), who sees an extreme tension between Hebrews 10:13 and 1 Corinthians 15. Lunemann, as well as de Wette (with whom he interacts), understand the Hebrews passage to teach the subjection of the world to Christ prior to the Parousia, whereas they hold that 1 Corinthians 15:22–28 reverses these events: the Parousia precedes the subjection of the world to Christ. Notice how Lunemann treats de Wette’s attempt at harmonizing this tension: {193} [Heb. 10:13] involves for the rest the supposition that the destruction of the enemies of Christ is to be looked for even *before* His Parousia. The author accordingly manifests here, too, a certain diversity in his mode of viewing the subject from that of the Apostle Paul, since the latter (comp. 1 Cor. xv.22–28) anticipates the destruction of the anti-Christian powers only after the time of Christ’s Parousia. [LXX *b* 11, 12.] The supposition, which de Wette holds possible for the removal of this difference, that the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews “thought only of the triumph of the gospel among the nations, even as Paul also expected the universal diffusion of the gospel and the conversion of the Jews before the appearing of Christ,” has little probability, considering the absolute and unqualified character of the expression here chosen: *hoi echthroi autou*. (Lunemann, in Meyer IX:645)

Lunemann means to tell us that Hebrews 10:13 can in no way be harmonized with the supposed teaching of 1 Corinthians 15:22–28. Of course, postmillennialists have generally understood the Corinthian passage to explicitly *teach* the pre-consummation victory of Christ over his enemies. Lunemann himself evidences an odd bias with respect to the Corinthian passage, while “staying the course” in terms of the exegesis of Hebrews 10:13. The Hebrews passage, no less than 1 Corinthians 15, teaches that Christ remains at the right hand of the Father until no enemies of his remain alive on earth. He returns to a saved world awaiting the conquest of the final enemy, death itself. Every presumed “eschatologist” who

teaches that Christ departs from his seat at the right hand of God to destroy his enemies flies in the face of Hebrews 10:13 and its Old Testament and New Testament parallels. Lunemann understands this, and makes no apologies for it, although he can find no way to fit it into his pre-existing eschatological model. Will we be subject to the word of God, or will we attempt to explain it away?

Even a cursory glance at Psalm 110 confirms that Hebrews 10:13 properly reflects its teaching (no matter *how many* doctoral dissertations on Psalm 110 are on file at Dallas Theological Seminary). The Father, speaking to the Son, issues an instruction to sit at his right hand until he has made the Son's enemies his {194} footstool. The footstool is part of the seat, needless to say, so Christ remains seated in heaven during the "construction of the footstool," so to speak. Were the Son to rise from his seat before the footstool (composed of *all* Christ's enemies) is completed, he would be in obvious *disobedience* to his Father, a clear absurdity in light of the fact that Jesus does that which pleases the Father always.

The session from God's right hand is the period in which the world is conquered to Christ in its totality. Pessimistic postmillennialists have not properly estimated the actual weight of the exegetical evidence favoring such unbounded optimism. How curious that the Scriptures quoted most often by postmillennial scholars actually oppose their views about the final days of history: familiarity has not proven to be synonymous with understanding. Perhaps a renewed commitment to the unadorned word of God will reverse these puzzling trends. All the talk about exegesis, all the intense training in that skill, should have given rise to an exegetically sound postmillennialism by now. Apparently, our eschatology is getting in the way of our exegesis, no less now than in the past (as the record has repeatedly shown). We evidently need to go back to square one.

Taking Away the Sin of the World

In John 1:29, the Baptist said, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." While Isaiah 53 lay at the root of the Baptist's declaration, Daniel 9:24's great transactions were equally subsumed under that heading. What does it mean to

take away the sin of the world, and to do so in the capacity of the Lamb of God? Warfield makes clear that it is Christ's *sacrifice* that effects the blotting out of sins and the inbringing of righteousness everlasting. But the Baptist goes farther: the Messiah's sacrifice of himself doesn't just take away sin in the abstract, it takes away the sin *of the world*. Does this declaration, in keeping with John 12:32, reflect the drawing of all men unto Christ? (Again, this refers to the gradual fulfillment of the Great Commission, and has no bearing on the judgment of the wicked dead who have entered the grave in the preceding millennia—it is eschatological universalism that is defended here, and not the heretical variant denoted by the uncompounded term “universalism.”) {195}

Warfield is something of an embarrassment to traditional postmillennialists in this respect—and Boettner and Rushdoony were later to follow his lead. Warfield often took simple sentences and plumbed them to their depths, to open up the meaning locked in them (locked due to dullness in our spiritual vision, not through any fault of the inspired writers). Of John 1:29, Warfield says that John the Baptist:

Calls upon us to see in Jesus the Saviour of the world. “Behold,” he cries, “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world,”— not “our sin” merely, though we praise God that may be gloriously true; nor “the sin of His people” merely, though that too, when properly understood, expresses the entire fact; but, with clear vision of the ultimate issue, “the sin of the world.” The propitiatory sacrifice which John the Baptist sees in Jesus, is a sacrifice of world-wide efficacy: the salvation which he perceives to issue from it stretches onward in its working until it embraces the whole world. The sin of the world, as a whole, he gathers, as it were, into one mass; and, laying it upon the head of Jesus, cries, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” It is in this universalism, we say, that we reach the height of the Baptist's declaratione (*Saviour*, 88–9)

Warfield swells these observations into a stunning climax when he says that John the Baptist:

... points to Jesus as bearing in his own body on the tree nothing less than the sin of the world ... in the end, when the process is over, no unfruitful trees will be found growing in God's garden, the world, no chaff be found cumbering God's threshing-floor, the

world. The vision he brings before us, let us repeat it, is the vision of the ultimate salvation of the world, its complete conquest to Christ when at last Jesus' last enemy shall have been conquered and the whole world shall bow before Him as its Lord and Redeemer. (*Saviour*, 93–5)

Warfield was realistic about sin: “The world has always been very evil, ever since there entered it, through that forbidden fruit, the sin of man and all our human woes. Throughout all the ages, its sin has gone up reeking before God to heaven.” But he sees {196} Christ through believing eyes as he continues, “But the great fact—the great fact, greater even than the fact of the world’s sin—is that Christ has redeemed this sinful world. In Him we behold the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world. Not, who strives to take it away and fails; not, who takes it away in some measure, but is unable to take it away entirely; not, who suspends its taking away upon a gigantic If—as though His taking it away were dependent on some aid given Him by the world itself— ... No, but who actually, completely, finally, takes away its sin. (96)

This is Warfield’s vision of victory. You will not find it in Dr. North’s lengthy appendix to *Dominion and Common Grace* entitled “Warfield’s Vision of Victory: Lost and Found.”

(Warfield apparently thought his exposition represented some of his best work, since it was one of a half-dozen sermons he submitted “To The Senate and The Faculty of Theology of the University of Utrecht in acknowledgement of the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Theology, December 4, 1913,” as attested by the frontispiece of *The Saviour of the World*. If one were *truly* to recover Warfield’s vision, one would start by reprinting volumes such as this.)

Not Willing That Any Should Perish

2 Peter 3:9 offers the *reason* why the LORD delays his return (assuming the passage speaks of the end of the church age rather than the end of the Jewish dispensation, as some clever preterists have made some inroads in establishing). He delays his return because he is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. The logic is simple enough: if Christ were to return at any time prior to the total conversion of the world, his

return would cause those who know not God to perish. Two events are capable of setting an individual's destiny in concrete: his/her personal death, or the return of Christ. In either case, probation is over and opportunity for repentance revoked. Christ times his return such that none perish by it: it occurs after all people then living have repented. This is the explicit literal meaning of the text—although one is hard pressed to find an expositor who won't go out of his way to rationalize this conclusion away by whatever means are at hand. {197}

In point of fact, it is this ninth verse of 2 Peter 3 that presents the most severe sticking point for the preterist alternatives offered for this passage, for the termination of the Jewish dispensation was explicitly predicted to occur while the generation that heard the Olivet Discourse was still living. Strictly speaking, Peter could simply have pointed out that inasmuch as the generation Christ had spoken to had not yet passed away, the promise of his coming (preteristically conceived) still hung as a sword of Damocles over Jerusalem's head: everything was still on schedule in terms of the timing mentioned at Matthew 24:34. Peter's response to the perspective of the scoffers seems to take an entirely different direction than would be expected on the preterist supposition, strongly suggesting that final eschatology may well have been in his mind rather than the endpoint of the old covenant era. Nonetheless, some of Christendom's most brilliant minds have taken 2 Peter 3 preteristically (most notably John Owen), a consideration that should preclude any hardening of dogmatic positions until the divergence of view has finally passed into a defensible consensus. If the preterist view of 2 Peter 3 should be vindicated, that vindication would follow, and not precede, a compelling explication of verse 9, a task that still remains incomplete after four centuries of inquiry.

This approach to the Petrine passage is corroborated by other expositors. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes mirrors this reasoning for the delay as well (402), citing Chrysostom to the effect that the subjection of Christ's enemies was not immediately executed "for the sake of the faithful that would afterward be born," resulting in what Hughes calls "the prolongation of the day of grace." Inasmuch as Hughes takes up this point while commenting on Hebrews 10:13, its application to the topic at hand is transparent.

The Issue is Election

Eschatological universalism is clearly a subset of Calvinism, and its strongest proponents (e.g., Warfield) were among the most learned of Calvinists. Occasionally, a top-notch exegete will adopt eschatological universalism, even if he is not a Calvinist, by following Scripture where it inexorably leads (e.g., H.A.W. Meyer). But the era of take-no-prisoners exegesis is either over or in {198} abeyance, its champions evidently being in hibernation. Why the connection with Calvinism? Because the engine of eschatological universalism is nothing less than the divine decree of election.

Negatively, this means that attacks on eschatological universalism are also attacks on divine election: constraints on how many people God can elect. Positively, this means that if God promises that all shall know the LORD from the least to the greatest (and presumably everyone inbetween!), he makes good on that promise by way of his electing discretion. What little Dr. North says about Calvinism in *Dominion and Common Grace* (203–4) is directed to serve a poorly-defined concept introduced without collateral argumentation: “*the equal ultimacy of wrath and grace*” (204). The use Dr. North makes of this “doctrine” is curious. It essentially systematizes God into a corner of Dr. North’s making. Whereas Romans 9 does indeed teach that God made two kinds of vessels, Dr. North stretches this to mean that one will *always* find generous proportions of both kinds of vessels all the way down to the end of history. Behold, “*the equal ultimacy of wrath and grace*” becomes a good and necessary inference from this handling of Romans 9 and the contrast between Jacob and Esau.

North’s view slams headfirst into Obadiah 17–21:

But upon mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions. And the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble, and they shall kindle in them, and devour them; and there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau; for the Lord hath spoken it. And they of the south shall possess the mount of Esau; and they of the plain the Philistines: and they shall possess the fields of Ephraim, and the fields of Samaria: and Benjamin shall possess Gilead. And the captivity of this host of the children of Israel shall possess that of the Canaanites, even unto Zarephath; and the captivity of Jerusalem,

which is in Sepharad, shall possess the cities of the south. And saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the Lord's.

(The entire prophecy is apposite.) Paul uses Jacob and Esau as types in Romans 9; Dr. North proposes to infer that they have {199} corresponding antitypes throughout the church age, but it would appear that typology must subserve the biblical data underlying the type. North moves to his *equal ultimacy of wrath and grace* without consideration of the respective destinies of Jacob and Esau and their scriptural antitypes. The respective destinies of the seed of Abraham and the seed of the serpent, of Jacob and Esau, is to be sought in passages such as Obadiah, where a very different story indeed is told: the eventual, but total, disappearance of Esau, and the total possession of all heathen possessions by Jacob. On these broader scriptural grounds, it would be *far more justifiable* to hold to the primacy of grace over wrath in terms of its effects in the earth over time. (Of course, if Dr. North is speaking about God's *attributes*, which *are* equally co-ultimate, then he has simply confused his categories and definitions and misapplied them. In either event, neither strict Calvinism nor eschatological universalism is adversely affected.)

The Immovable Kingdom

Hengstenberg commented on Hebrews 12:27, observing that the verse is often rendered erroneously, and in such a way as to obliterate its telic structure indicative of specific purpose:

The word *bina* has also been incorrectly rendered ecabatically, "so that that which is not moveable remains," instead of "*in order that* that which is not moveable may remain." That the things which are not moveable should remain, is the design of the removal of those things which are; and their continuance, therefore, must necessarily present an irreconcilable contradiction to the establishment of the immovable... Every created thing, so far as it is opposed to the kingdom of God, must be shaken and laid in ruins, that this kingdom may continue to stand. (*Christology*, 941)

Although John Owen treats this passage of Hebrews as having primary reference to the passing away of Jewish rituals (which in itself does justice to the telic rendering of the final clause), he does

not directly exegete the final five words in the Greek text (7:368). This is something of a surprise for so monumentally thorough a treatment of this epistle. Rather, Owen digresses briefly to {200} comment that his primary view should be regarded as a subset of a larger class of fulfillments, and concludes with an intriguing *a fortiori* argument. His digression does better justice to the text than his primary (preterist and anti-Judaical) interpretation:

We shall yet further observe, that although the removal of Mosaic worship and the old church-state be principally intended, which was effected at the coming of Christ, and the promulgation of the gospel from heaven by Him, yet all other oppositions unto Him and His kingdom are included therein; not only those that then were, but all that should ensue unto the end of the world. The “things that cannot be moved,” are to remain and be established against all opposition whatever. Wherefore, as the heavens and the earth of the idolatrous world were of old shaken and removed, so shall those also of the antichristian world, which at present in many places seem to prevail. All things must give way, whatever may be comprised in the names of heaven and earth here below, unto the gospel, and the kingdom of Christ therein. For if God made way for it by the removal of His own institutions, which He appointed for a season, what else shall hinder its establishment and progress unto the end? (Owen, 7:368)

The primary difficulty of preterizing Hebrews 12:25–27 as Owen does is that it involves limiting the scope of the Old Testament citational intent to merely Haggai 2:6, without any reference to Haggai 2:7, which opens with the words, “And I shake all the heathen.” If this portion of Haggai be admitted within the intended scope of Hebrews 12:27, as providing further explication (which is surely not unnatural or forced, given the universality of the expressions “heavens and earth” already employed in Hebrews, and the predication of “shaking” still being extended from Haggai 2:6 through the seventh verse), some significant implications arise. As to timing, the shaking referred to has been in progress some twenty centuries, and will continue until all things shakeable shall be removed. As to mode, it is the *same shaking* that effects the downfall of Christ’s enemies in the past and present that will continue to work throughout the dispensation until by *its specific agency* all opposition to Christ’s {201} kingdom has been dissipated

into nothingness. There is no discontinuity between the beginning of the *seismos* and its consummation: the initial shaking is *utterly sufficient* to remove the opposition to God's kingdom from his world without superadded interventions.

The telic implications brought out by Hengstenberg deserve separate attention. Why, precisely, would it be necessary for all opposition to Christ to be shaken out of the earth? As affirmed earlier, the continued existence of the ungodly poses insuperable barriers to (1) the extension of peace in the full sense of the word as predicted in Isaiah 9:7, Zechariah 9:9–10, etc.; (2) the fulfillment of the LORD's prayer that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven; and (3) that all the jots and tittles be accomplished (Matt. 5:18) as Meyer and Warfield have exegeted that passage. To these could be added a burgeoning suite of collateral subproofs, including the full blessing of all families of the nations (Gen. 12:3 and Ps. 22:28), that would never be completely fulfilled so long as wicked men remain. Political and cultural concussions will cease only when their foreordained object has been attained.

Thy Will Be Done on Earth

Men of faith still stagger at God's promises. The straightforward meaning of this famed petition of the LORD's Prayer has proven elusive indeed. Occasionally, a glimpse of its meaning finds its way through. While the eschatological universalists naturally claim that they alone do justice to this petition, there are some notable exceptions to this inadvertent conceit.

John Calvin's treatment is sound indeed, and is reproduced here at length:

The third petition is, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Though this depends on his kingdom, and cannot be disjoined from it, yet a separate place is not improperly given to it on account of our ignorance, which does not at once or easily apprehend what is meant by God reigning in the world. This, therefore, may not improperly be taken as the explanation, that God will be King in the world when all shall subject themselves to his will. We are not here treating of that secret will by which he governs all things, and destines them to their {202} end. For although devils and men rise in tumult against him, he is able by his incomprehensible counsel not only to turn aside their violence, but make it subservient to

the execution of his decrees. What we here speak of is another will of God—namely, that of which voluntary obedience is the counterpart; and, therefore, heaven is expressly contrasted with earth, because, as is said in The Psalms, the angels “do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word” (Ps. ciii.20). We are, therefore, enjoined to pray that as everything done in heaven is at the command of God, and the angels are calmly disposed to do all that is right, so the earth may be brought under his authority, all rebellion and depravity having been extinguished. (*Institutes*, 2:190)

We notice here the elements crucial for eschatological universalism to gain a footing: *voluntary* obedience to Christ on a world-wide scale so total that *all rebellion and depravity* have been “extinguished.” In modern jargon, it would be proper to affirm that it is the *prescriptive will of God* that is in view in the LORD’S Prayer. The point of comparison is so clear, it is difficult to determine precisely how the equivocating interpretations got off the ground: God’s prescriptive will is to be observed on earth as totally and completely as it is in heaven.

The honest critic should, at the bare minimum, admit that on his grounds, Jesus is asking us to pray for something that actually will never happen (certainly not in the context in which the fulfillment is naturally to be placed). So long as this verse is construed to require a pre-consummation fulfillment, the critic must shake his head and knowingly point out the “apostasy” verses. If resort is had to shifting the petition to a post-consummation setting, its meaning becomes hopelessly garbled: it becomes a prayer that the resurrected saints who’ve put on the incorruptible, heavenly bodies of glory will not disobey God in the eternal state. Since no one is apparently praying to that effect, it must be concluded either that hundreds of millions of Christians have failed to pray the LORD’S Prayer as it was intended, OR the post-consummation setting for the petition is improper and should be abandoned. The latter option is adopted here: simply follow Calvin. {203}

Amillennial Ammunition

It would be hard to imagine a more potent weapon against postmillennialism than the final apostasy “doctrine.” Amillennialists have probed this weak underbelly of postmillennialism for most

of this century; e.g., Louis Berkhof launched his barbs from within his formidable *Systematic Theology*. Our amillennial brethren seem better able to discern this fundamental problem in postmillennial thinking than postmillennialists themselves. A representative citation is in order to illustrate the seriousness of the amillennial challenge—a challenge made tenable because postmillennialists have themselves given their opponents the ammunition they needed:

There will be hordes of ungodly in this postmillennial kingdom, on the admission of even the most optimistic postmillennialists themselves...in their hearts they will hate God. They will be rebels inwardly against the Christ. At the end of the millennium they will rise against the Lord (Rev. 20:7–9)... This will grieve the Reformed amillennialist. If there were but one enemy of Christ in the kingdom, this would grieve him. For there would be in the Messianic kingdom a despising of God's commandments, at the very least in the hearts and minds of the ungodly. And, as the Psalter puts it, "because Thy statutes are despised, with overwhelming grief I weep"... That earthly reign by means of the church, filled with sin, death, and unregenerate reprobates who hate and curse Christ morning, noon, and night, is the climax of Christ's kingdom. Behold ... a dismal flop! If that is the Messianic kingdom at its very highest and greatest, Christ is destined to be displayed publicly as a royal failure (Engelsma, "Defense").

It is precisely this idea of a "dismal flop," a "royal failure," that has given pause to more thoughtful postmillennialists (e.g., Boettner, Chilton, Rushdoony, etc.), who recognized the legitimacy of this challenge, and the internal tension it represented in postmillennialism as traditionally formulated. Recognizing that a problem exists is the first step toward rectifying it. Some have taken to portraying this defect as a beneficial feature (e.g., North), others acknowledged its undesirable aspects but admitted their inability to work past the problem (e.g., Chilton). The only *fully* [204] satisfactory solution to Engelsma's pointed challenge was the one provided by Warfield, the viewpoint defended throughout this study: eschatological universalism. Every single spear thrown by Engelsma can be shown to bounce off Warfield's shield.

There is no "royal failure" in Warfield's eschatology, neither a dismal flop serving as history's capstone. The "stone cut without

hands” suffers no such indignities as Engelsma envisions. God’s law will one day be universally (and voluntarily) observed: no cause of grief as Engelsma rightly charges in the case of traditional postmillennial models. Engelsma’s other primary concern (that postmillennialism de-emphasizes the glories of the consummation and terminates the Messianic kingdom at the Parousia) is likewise handled masterfully in Warfield’s model. In Warfield’s view, as rehearsed at length herein, the last enemy Christ is to conquer is Death itself, which synchronizes with the Parousia and not one minute earlier. The present heavens and earth pass away only on condition that all the law’s jots and tittles have been accomplished in the earth.

Unfortunately, the Warfield solution meant moving toward a more absolute form of postmillennialism that seems to have placed too great a demand on the faith of twentieth century Christians. A compromise with amillennialism was sought, with Revelation 20:7–9 serving as its axiomatic ground. Hence Dr. Rushdoony’s apt observation that the final apostasy doctrine was “an amillennial hangover.” Amillennial thinkers have seen the unstable nature of the postmillennial compromise: it stands on feet made of a mire of iron and clay. Their rebukes have the sting of truth. Perhaps it’s high time to move postmillennialism off its iron/clay feet and back onto the Rock.

(N.B. Recent amillennial charges against postmillennialism [Lubbers 113–32; also Engelsma] stress the tension between the temporal Messianic kingdom taught by postmillennialists and the eternal kingship of Christ taught elsewhere in Scripture. George C. Lubbers regards this “two-fold kingdom” distinctive to be decisively opposed to Scripture. Although it is conceivable that this well-intentioned critic missed the explanations offered in the works of Gentry, Kik, or Bahnsen, it would be surprising if he had been unfamiliar with Warfield’s discussion of precisely this issue {205} in the oft-cited essay, “The Prophecies of St. Paul” (Biblical Doctrines, 625). Warfield summarizes the “ineffable” implications of 1 Corinthians 15:24–28 in the following words:

Suffice it to say that when we are told that Jesus holds the kingship for a purpose [verse 25], namely the completion of His mediatorial work, and that when it is accomplished He will restore it to him who gave it to Him [verse 28], and thus the Father will again become

“all relations among all creations,”—nothing is in the remotest way suggested inconsistent with the co-equal Deity of the Son with the Father and His eternal coregnancy with Him over the universe. Manifestly we must distinguish between the mediatorial kingship which Jesus exercises by appointment of His Father, and the eternal kingship which is His by virtue of His nature, and which is one with God’s own.

Warfield corroborates this “with the uniform representation of the New Testament, which everywhere places Christ’s kingdom before and God’s after the second advent. The contrast in Matt. xiii. 41 and 43 is not accidental.” Inasmuch as Lubbers’s critique (115) recognizes Warfield as a primary source for the postmil view of 1 Corinthians 15:24ff., his “demolition” of postmillennialism’s *crux interpretum/locus classicus* is something of a strawman misfire. Furthermore, as to whether there is such a thing as a pivotal, central passage on which postmillennialism is based, this author is skeptical. Although Engelsma thinks Isaiah 65:17ff. fits the bill (citing North to that effect in the September 15, 1996 *Standard Bearer*), other postmils never mention the passage (present company included). Amusingly, Lubbers contradicts Engelsma, citing Isaiah 2:2 as the definitively crucial text (164)—amusing because Engelsma wrote the foreword to Lubbers’s book. Engelsma insists that postmillennialism is erected solely on Old Testament grounds without any New Testament support to speak of (Engelsma: *Standard Bearer*, 11–15–96: 77–78; Lubbers’s discussion of postmillennial exegeses of New Testament passages seems once again ironic), a charge refutable by simply referring to four centuries of Reformed eschatological research. Dr. Bahnsen specifically singled out this charge for {206} rebuttal in the late 1970s (57–8); this present study is self-attesting in that regard.)

Revelation 20

A half-century ago, Oswald T. Allis observed that the intermediate state model of Revelation 20 “is a comparatively recent one, and has not succeeded in replacing the Augustinian view which it so vigorously attacked” (5). Allis traces this model back to “two German scholars, Dusterdieck (1859) and Kliefoth (1874)” (5). Friedrich Herman Christian Dusterdieck was the

exegete selected to complete H. A. W. Meyer's commentary on the New Testament by writing on the Book of Revelation—accordingly, the thread can be traced back to Meyer, if not directly, then by way of commendation and presumed endorsement. [Dusterdieck was, in fact, personally hired by Meyer and was esteemed as a collaborator by the elder exegete (Schaff-Herzog, 7:360).]

Warfield's relation to this model finds expression in one of Allis's footnotes (287), in which some theological advances are evident. Allis's brief note omits the intermediate thinker between Kliefoth and Warfield (William Milligan), and Warfield himself omits crediting Dusterdieck with originating the idea, citing only Kliefoth as its source. Intriguingly, Milligan himself holds that he first published his model in the September, 1871, issue of *Contemporary Review*, minimally three years earlier than Kliefoth's publication of his Revelation commentary (Milligan, xi).

The difficulty in determining the originator of the position is the circumstance that the earliest citation Allis offers is credited to Dusterdieck in 1859, although that scholar is not known to have published any major work between 1852 and 1865 (Schaff-Herzog, 4:18; Milligan, xviii). If Dusterdieck was indeed the first, two things must be true: his ideas were first published in a contemporary journal or periodical, and he changed his position significantly by the time he wrote his commentary on Revelation. Among the four scholars who developed this approach to Revelation 20 (Dusterdieck, Kliefoth, Milligan, and Warfield), only Warfield was unequivocally postmillennial. About the only uncontroversial thing that can be said about Theodor Friedrich Dethlof Kliefoth, Friedrich Herman Christian Dusterdieck, and their exegetical {207} mentor, Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, is that their names are imposing polynymic structures that challenge the tongue. Beyond that impertinence lie the clouds of theological and historical controversy.

Between Allis's mid-century assessment and the present is very little in the way of full-scale research and rethinking concerning Revelation 20. Rather, our era has simply borrowed—rather uncritically—the work of various popular Bible scholars, and has gone so far as to filter out alternatives to the *de facto* standard of modern postmillennial thinking. In short, Gary North and others have treated the matter of Revelation 20 and a future final

apostasy as a *res judicator* (a matter already settled), presumably because Revelation 20 itself is a *res ipsa loquitur* (a matter that speaks for itself). Since that is precisely the point in question, we have a gross example of *petitio principii*, of begging the question. The premature nature of such sweeping conclusions is best expressed in terms borrowed from Matthew Henry, whose citations of classical Latin maxims fit the present circumstance perfectly: *Quod volumus facile credimus. Quod initio non valuit, tractu temporis invalescit.* (What we wish, we readily believe. That which was originally destitute of authority in the process of time acquires it.) The modern theory of a postmillennial final apostasy readily falls under such indictments—as if reconstructionists were determined to somehow prove Josef Goebbels right that repeating an error long enough and loud enough will effectively establish it in the minds of the people. The question remains: does the emperor have clothes, or not?

What Dr. Bahnsen did for eschatology in general (North, *JCR*, 60–68) must be done for Revelation 20 in particular, namely, completion of a careful cross-mapping of the *distinctive essentials* of the competing positions (*distinctive essentials* is a term coined by Bahnsen, not this author). Failing that, efforts to distinguish between the positions on the merits will be seriously compromised by conceptual inaccuracy. A brief outline of just such an approach will be offered here to temporarily fill the gap. For the sake of completeness, premillennial models will be included among the candidates being categorized.

(Rather than writing Revelation 19:11–21 and Revelation 20:1–10, these will be shortened to Revelation 19 and Revelation 20 throughout this {208} excursus for the sake of brevity. Where specific verses are important, they will be so designated.)

Revelation 19 is taken to be either the second advent (most premils, amils, and postmils), gospel conquest (postmils such as Warfield), or referred by more rigorous preterists (Bahnsen, reportedly) to historic events such as the fall of Rome. Taking each theory in sequence, possible linkages to various Revelation interpretations will be analyzed.

For those who hold that Revelation 19 depicts the second advent, the question arises whether or not Revelation 20 follows Revelation 19 chronologically. If yes, one is a premillennialist by

definition. If no, one must treat Revelation 20 as a recapitulation of sorts (following Augustine's *recapitulo* tactic, where "the order is not observed"). The latter group divide concerning the meaning of Revelation 20—specifically, which of its symbols depicts earthly affairs (if any) and heavenly affairs (if any). Violent contrasts mark expositors: what some apply to the thousand years (Bahnsen, North, Chilton) is applied to the little season by others (Milligan, Warfield, late Boettner). In all cases where the expositor holds Revelation 19 to occur at the end of the world, Revelation 20 backtracks nearly 2000 years—something of a reverse gap theory.

For Warfield, who treats Revelation 19 as a symbol of gospel conquest (as does Chilton), Revelation 20 is treated as a contrasting section of comparative peace depicting the intermediate state (unlike Chilton). The relationship between Revelation 19 and 20 is thus the contrast of war and peace—the propriety of which will be examined more closely below.

A preterist approach that places Revelation 19 within the distant past (treating it as the destruction of the last great anti-Christian empire, generally considered to be Rome) may or may not need to recapitulate at Revelation 20, although traditionally those expositors who champion this approach treat the binding of Satan as parallel to very similar statements at Matthew 12:29 and Mark 3:27, presumably necessitating at least a four century reverse gap at Revelation 20.

An alternative viewpoint treats Revelation 19 neither as a vision of the second advent, nor of the conquest of the gospel (a total one in Warfield's case, a partial one in Chilton's early commentary of 1987), but rather as reflecting the *efficacious* wrath of God as {209} reflected in his Son's rod of iron rule from the right hand of his Father, mirroring Psalm 2:9–12 and Isaiah 11:4. In this model, Revelation 20 follows Revelation 19 neither chronologically, nor by way of contrast, but by way of *causality*. The phenomenon depicted in Revelation 19 has a *logical* relation to Revelation 20 on this hypothesis—the causal relationship between *death* and the *intermediate state*.

Summarizing: the proposed relationships between Revelation 19 and 20 fall into four categories: *chronological* (Revelation 20 follows Revelation 19 in time), *disjunctive* (Revelation 20 has nothing explicitly to do with the second advent—the antichilias

view), *antipodal* (contrasting a state of war and a state of peace), or *causal* (depicting the intermediate state consequent upon depicting death). The dominant *chronological* school is premillennialist in outlook, although preterists who see Imperial Rome as the target of Christ's wrath at Revelation 19 could theoretically adopt this view as well. The *disjunctive* schools of thought are always amillennial and postmillennial, inclusive of those who treat Revelation 19 as depicting the second advent, as well as those who hold that it refers to the fall of Rome. In all cases, Revelation 20 narrates the inauguration of the church age and reflects a reverse chronological gap, and thus a disjunction, at Revelation 20. The *antipodal* model (represented almost exclusively by Warfield, since Chilton's model varies significantly from it) seeks to do justice to the obvious contrast between these two chapters of John's vision.

An additional component to the debate is the proper *source* for extracting scriptural parallels. The treatment of Revelation 20's first resurrection, for example, has led many postmils to John's gospel for explication, rather than back through Rev. itself. The results arising from these two approaches differ significantly in quite a few cases. Among the four models listed here, the *causal* model gives priority to intra-apocalyptic parallels (particularly the parallels found in chapters 6 and 12), which, on the face of it, would be the more natural approach to take with respect to the content of John's visions. The *antipodal* model is something of a halfway house in this respect, utilizing intra-Apocalyptic parallels for Revelation 20 but not Revelation 19. The *chronological* and *disjunctive* models tend to disregard the intra-Apocalyptic parallels entirely, or deny interpretive weight to such parallels due to conflict with a preferred hermeneutic framework being imposed on Revelation. Not surprisingly, discourse between the various adherents has been less than fruitful, a barrenness stemming more from neglect than solid scholarship.

It is intriguing that of all the proposed parallels to Revelation 20 that have been advanced by modern postmillennialists, the position of Franz Delitzsch has apparently gone unadopted (or at least unnoticed). Delitzsch (433–6) felt that no better parallel for Revelation 20 could be found than Isaiah 24:21–23, which appears to lend support to the notion that Revelation 20:7–9 occurs *after* Revelation 20:4–6, rather than concurrently as argued by Warfield,

Kliefoth, and Milligan. As interpreted by Delitzsch, Isaiah 24:22b is *the* definitive verse for a final apostasy, which he fleshes out (435) for his readers. (The verses in question read, “And it cometh to pass in that day, Jehovah will visit the army of the high place in the high place, and the kings of the earth on the earth. And they are imprisoned, as one imprisons captives in the pit, and shut up in prison; and in the course of many days they are visited. And the moon blushes and the sun turns pale: for Jehovah of hosts reigns royally upon Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before His elders in glory.”)

The “escape clause” for eschatological universalists is two-fold in this instance. First, Delitzsch, speaking of these three verses in Isaiah, admits that “the prophet does not arrange what belongs to the end of all things in a ‘chronotactic’ manner” (433). This alerts us to guard against dogmatic assertions regarding the chronological relationships among the narrated events. Second, the subsequent “visitation” which Delitzsch equates with the little season of Revelation 20:7–9 could just as easily be applied to the final judgment. This, too, Delitzsch touches on when observing that “what the apocalyptist of the New Testament describes in detail in Rev. xx.4, xx.11 sqq., and xxi., the apocalyptist of the Old Testament sees here condensed into one fact” (435). The collapse of separated events into a single prediction by Isaiah suggests that eschatological universalists are unlikely to come under any serious or immediate pressure from expositors intent on resurrecting the views of this learned 19th century expositor.

On the matter of intra-Apocalyptic parallels to Revelation 20 (Rev. 6:9–11 and Rev. 12:12), it should be noted for the sake of {211} completeness that a text-critical issue arises with the former parallel. Hengstenberg (Revelation, 1:271–2) shows that the competing variants to *plerososi* at Revelation 6:11 have no parallel passage support, whereas *plerososi* provides a meaning loaded with conceptual parallels (Acts 20:22–24; 2 Tim. 4:6–8; Rom. 15:19; Luke 9:31; Acts 8:35, 12:25, 14:26; and Heb. 9:39–40). On text-critical grounds, *plerothosi* is numerically dominant while *plerosontai* has been difficult to defend; the former reading forces the introduction of the word *arithmos* (“number”) into the verse, and even this emendation produces a “hard reading” (Hengstenberg, 272, n.1) unsupported by any scriptural parallels.

(The valiant attempt to find two such parallels put Moses Stuart on very shaky ground.)

Nonetheless, the parallelism between Revelation 6 and Revelation 19–20 is remarkably strong and corroborative of Warfield’s thesis. Both visions depict Christ on horseback, followed by death-dispensing instrumentalities (paralleling Ez. 14:11–21) sent for vengeance, followed by scenes of disembodied souls in a state of peace against which a contrasted *chronon mikron* (little season) is opposed in which the battle of the still-living saints is placed. (Since these are concurrent in Revelation 6 and 12, eschatological universalists hold they are concurrent in Revelation 20 as well, thereby nullifying an end-time apostasy.) Oddly, this multi-layered parallel, and its clear echo at Rev. 12:12, remains almost totally ignored by the rank and file preterists of the late twentieth century. Perhaps these parallels are resistant to incorporation within that agenda.

[Dr. Frances Nigel Lee reportedly does not hold to a final apostasy at the end of history, but his interpretation of Revelation 20 would not be readily classifiable according to the schema suggested under this head. All serious students of eschatology would do well to include consideration of this learned postmillennialist’s exposition of Revelation 20 if any pretence of completeness is to be made good.]

The Counsel of Peace: Our Priest’s Drawing Power

The priesthood and kingship of Christ are coterminous (Ps. 110:1–5 and Zech. 6:13). Christ “shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne: {212} and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.” This tight binding of these two offices generates a host of implications and consequences affecting all schools of eschatology. Note, for example, how fatal this binding is to premillennial conceptions of the Messianic reign in light of Hebrews 8:4, which teaches that “if he were on earth, he would not be a priest.” Since Christ is a priest upon his throne, and sits and rules upon that throne, the throne cannot be a terrestrial one but rather the heavenly one at the Father’s right hand. If Christ ruled from Jerusalem, he could not be a priest

upon his throne—yet, he is a priest forever after (Ps. 110:4) and is explicitly said to be a priest while sitting on his throne. Since the Scripture cannot be broken, the uniting of the two offices of priest and king in Christ’s person demands that his kingly rule extend from a heavenly throne only. Premillennialists simply don’t realize that placing Christ in physical Jerusalem necessarily atomizes his priesthood. This internal tension comes to a head in passages like Ezekiel 48:11ff. when compared against Hebrews 8:4.

However, the result of Christ’s priesthood is laid out in John 12:32, the traditional translation of which is exposed to several objections. Milligan has argued (Ascension, 78) that the original Greek reads far more strongly than our Authorized Version, and should be rendered thus: “And I, if I be lifted up on high out of the earth, will draw all men unto Myself.” Meyer is in general agreement, noting that the text supplies no limit to the final expansion of Christ’s kingdom (which expansion simultaneously deflates the boundaries of Satan’s dominion, mentioned in the preceding verse). Meyer declares that *all* means “not merely adherents of all *nations*, or all *elected* ones and the like, but all *men*, so that thus none remain belonging to the prince of this world” (3:376).

Gentry’s treatment of John 12:32 evidences the kind of ambiguity Meyer contends against: “The massive influence of Christ’s death is to be experienced in history through the drawing of all men so that the world as a system might be moved back to God... The final result, however, is not an each-and-every universalism of salvation. Rather, it is a massive, systemic conversion of the vast majority of men, who then progressively {213} transform the world” (245). Precisely where in John 12:32 do we find the kind of provisos that Gentry has inserted here to limit the extent of Christ’s drawing power? In point of fact, we emphatically do not find “as a system,” “systemic,” “vast majority,” and other eisegetical refinements. Meyer, in opposition, points out that “the *fulfillment* of this promise is world-historical, and continually in process of realization, until finally the great goal will be reached, when all will be drawn to the Son, and form *one* flock under *one* shepherd (x. 16). In this sense *pantas* is to be left without any arbitrary limitation...” (3:376).

Gentry directs his readers, via footnote 27, to a subsequent

discussion of the word *kosmos* appearing on pages 263–267, which seems relevant given Gentry’s evident endorsement of Calvin’s understanding of the word *krisis* (judgment) in John 12:31. By taking *krisis* as “reformation” rather than “condemnation,” Gentry thereby gains an apparent foothold in verse 31 for limiting verse 32. This is achieved only at considerable exegetical cost: Calvin reverts to the meaning of the Hebrew *mishpat* without reference to the actual context of the verse. In fact, the citation from Calvin offers no exegetical evidence whatsoever to illuminate the Greek text of John 12:31–32. From exegetical and narrow contextual considerations alone, *krisis* can only mean judgment in the sense of judicial condemnation, leading naturally to the complete extermination of the devil’s dominion. We don’t read, “now the ruler of this world will be *mostly* cast out.” He will rather lose his entire dominion, for the *krisis* against him and the world of unbelief is a total one. So Meyer: “[The devil’s] dominion must have an end, because the death of Jesus effected the reconciliation of humanity, by which reconciliation all were to be drawn away from the devil by becoming believers, and placed under the spiritual power of the Christ exalted to glory, v. 32 ...” (3:375). In short, the argument against total victory cannot be exegetically sustained: it can only be mounted from other angles ... and angles they are indeed.

In any event, Gentry’s citing of Calvin on John 12:31–32 is a two-edged sword. After stating his preference of how *krisis* should be understood, Calvin immediately points out that “this proper arrangement cannot be established in *the world*, until the kingdom {214} of Satan be first destroyed, until the flesh, and every thing opposed to the righteousness of God, be reduced to nothing” (18:36). Is not Calvin here saying what was later urged on exegetical grounds by Meyer, *contra* Gentry? At the very least, promoting an evenhanded biblical scholarship would entail acknowledging the conflict between Calvin’s ideas and what one purports to erect upon those ideas. If ambiguity arises, exegesis should prevail. If exegesis is to prevail, the drawing of all men to Christ as he himself promised must be understood as literally true. Vacillation is excluded.

Chilton Reviewed

In a book review of Chilton's *Paradise Restored* published in 1985, this author drew attention to the internal conflicts of a postmillennial eschatology that included a final apostasy. Rather than reinvent the wheel, the pertinent portion of that review, which bears repeating, is reproduced in the following thirteen paragraphs:

Chilton's analysis of Rev. 20 sets forth a traditional Reformed setting of the passage. It is, therefore, shot through with paradoxes. Chilton wisely avoids any phrasing that suggests that Satan is bound so as to allow the gospel to progress unimpeded (that popular theory representing pure, unadulterated arminianism, for it places the determining soteriological factor in the created order [Satan], rather than in the Creator—in contrast, the Scriptures clearly place the determining factor for the gospel's success in the Holy Spirit's being poured out on all flesh). Yet, Chilton's alternative to the Calvinists' careless Arminianism has difficulties of its own: he seems to indicate that the preaching of the gospel *itself* is the efficient cause of Satan's binding. If so, Satan's alleged release could only be consequent upon the cessation of gospel preaching; but Christ's promise corresponds timewise with the command to preach ("Lo, I am with you, even unto the end of the world"); this is, therefore, a rather strained interpretation.

Chilton derives the gospel motif of Rev. 20 from his understanding of Rev. 19 (with commendable consistency), thus preserving logical continuity in John's narrative; yet, even assuming his view of Rev. 19 is correct, where does John's vision of the conquering Christ speak about the cessation of the gospel? Besides, there are more possible cause-effect scenarios between {215} Rev. 19 and 20 than Chilton has outlined. Besides the well-known premillennial scenario (Rev. 19 to 20 = Cause and Effect = Second Coming and Millennium), and Chilton's view (Rev. 19 to 20 = Omnipotence of Gospel and Temporary Worldwide Victory), could surely be added the logical Rev. 19 to 20 = Death and Intermediate State. This last view preserves logical continuity between the two visions, accommodates the parallel passages within the Apocalypse (as well as with the Psalms and Isaiah), and, for the Calvinist at least, avoids any unwelcome admixture of Arminian elements.

Most Christians would be surprised to find out that they are

actually beheaded souls reigning on thrones, but beheaded we are in this millennial interpretation. Kik had difficulty dealing with this element of Rev. 20:4 as well (being forced to redefine *psuchai*, souls, in the process, which Chilton omitted to do, 195). Chilton, far from advancing a possible solution, ignores the problem by focusing on the *first resurrection*. The question remains, *which* element in the narrative conditions the understanding of the others: the *souls*, the *first resurrection*, or the *second death* of vs. 14? Chilton jumps to a conclusion (196) that superficially short-circuits opposing testimony, but Meyer returns fit for tat against Chilton: a resounding rebuttal from Rev. 20:14.

The reasoning becomes somewhat blurred (Chilton is in good company) when considering the termination of the 1000 year reign. The last battle, as he calls it, does not constitute the end of the millennium. It is specifically placed *after* the 1000 years have ended. However, when the thousand years end, the saints no longer reign on their thrones as priests and kings with Christ: John limited this activity to the thousand years with great specificity. Now, there assuredly *is* a time in history when the saints cease to rule with Christ, but that occurs only when Christ gives the kingdom over to the Father, that the Father might be all in all. But that means the alleged last-battle of Rev. 20:7–9 is a grossly misunderstood phenomenon: how could Satan be released to assemble Gog and Magog after the Father has become all relations among all creations? This problem is doubly troublesome for premillennialism (exegetically, Christ *must* abdicate his alleged throne in Jerusalem during Satan's little season—apparently the reason why he can't "speak peace to the nations," but must wait for the Father to blast Gog and Magog from the heavens). {216} Most scholars (excepting Milligan and Warfield) have ignored the parallel references to Satan's little season (Rev. 6:11 and 12:12), generally with great detriment to our understanding of Rev. 20 (but cf. *The Millennium*, by Loraine Boettner, revised 1984). The little season is the church age from the perspective of the church militant, whereas the 1000 year reign is the same period as viewed by the church triumphant reigning in the intermediate state. The thrones of Rev. 20 are to be identified with that in Rev. 3:21; further, it is evident that John equates "to overcome" with being "faithful unto death" (Rev. 2:26), the latter verse teaching that the authority over nations is given to the saints *after* they die. This *particular authority* (cf. 1 Cor. 6:3) can obviously be exercised only in the

intermediate state (which is in no way antithetical to the authority and reign of the saints in *this* life as taught elsewhere in Scripture). When considering the relationship of Rev. 6:11 to Rev. 20:4–6, it becomes apparent Chilton is not always able to consistently follow his stated policy of letting Scripture interpret Scripture. However, at least one of the other preterist commentators presently working on a Revelation commentary is attempting to properly incorporate the implications of these important parallel passages.

There is a fundamental inconsistency in postmillennialists holding to a final apostasy. On the one hand, Chilton speaks of a complete and total victory of Christ, with which I heartily concur.”We have been given the responsibility of converting the whole world” (213). “Someday, people everywhere will know the Lord” (218). “The nations will worship and obey the one true God, and will cease to make war” (221). “The Kingdom ... is now in progress and will increase until the end of the world” (224). “God’s people will inherit all things, and the ungodly shall be disinherited and driven out of the land” (54). “The entire Gentile world will be converted to faith in Jesus Christ ... Genetic Israel will be converted to faith in Jesus Christ” (129). “The conversion of Israel will result in an era of great blessings for the entire world...so much so that ... it will be like life from the dead ... God’s Holy Mountain will have encompassed the world” (131). “Christ’s present reign will witness the *gradual* (emphasis added) abolition of *all* (emphasis added) enemies, the *progressive* (emphasis added) defeat of every remnant of Adam’s rebellion, until only one thing remains to be destroyed: Death” (147). “As the gospel progresses throughout the world it will win, and win, and win, until all kingdoms become the kingdoms {217} of our Lord, and of His Christ” (192). As a friend of mine would say, the King of Kings puts the pedal to the metal.

On the other hand, Chilton adds that “there will be a final conflict. The Dragon will be released for a short time, to deceive the nations one more time in a last-ditch attempt to overthrow the Kingdom” (200). Is this scriptural? Is that the teaching of Rev. 20:7–9? How can that possibly harmonize with Chilton’s statements cited in the preceding paragraph? If Chilton’s interpretation of Rev. 20:7–9 is correct, Isaiah 2:4 must be dead wrong: “No nation will raise a sword against another, or train for war anymore (Beck); Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (RSV). The host Satan allegedly raises up near the end of the Kingdom Age is as the sand of the sea in number. We, therefore,

aren't talking about a minor exception to Isaiah's clear prediction: so great is the number of warriors that John is compelled to add that "they marched up over the breadth of the earth."

As Berkhof observed (*Systematic Theology*, 718), postmillennialists invariably attempt to minimize this alleged apostasy. But no matter how we sanitize it, Isaiah, Zechariah, and Co. refuse to have any part in our sophistries. "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit ... and some fire and brimstone when the Spirit can't hack it?" "Of the increase of his government and of peace, there shall be no end ... until just after the millennium, when peace goes out the window." "From Sabbath to Sabbath, all men will come and worship before me" ... meaning that Satan has only six days left before the next Sabbath in which to (1) deceive Gog and Magog, (2) beat pruning hooks and plowshares back into swords and spears, and (3) mount a massive offense against the camp of the saints?! So much for God's promise to destroy the veil that covers all nations (Isa. 25:7)!

I agree with Chilton that God is not a Marxist, but I have trouble believing that the Most High might be an Indian-giver. "He will not fail or be discouraged til he has established justice in the earth" (Isa. 42:4). But according to Rev. 11:15, "rebellious Gog and Magog" cannot be mere kingdoms of this world, but kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ. *That*, brethren, *is* discouraging: John 10:27 notwithstanding, it looks like Satan snatched them out of Christ's hand ("This is the will of Him who sent Me, that I should lose nothing of all that He has given Me ... ask of Me, and I shall give thee the nations as Thine inheritance ... all that the Father gives Me will come to Me; and {218} him who comes to Me I will not cast out ... a stranger they will not follow, for they will flee from him" John 6:39, Ps. 2: 8, John 6:37, John 10:5).

This doctrine of the final apostasy, as Rushdoony has observed, is an amillennial hangover. It is irreconcilable with postmillennialism, and postmils are beginning to turn away from it and back toward Warfield's view. (Among these are Boettner, Rushdoony, Saunders, McElhinny—even amillennialist Van Til granted this as scripturally possible. Moreover ... *The Counsel of Chalcedon*, February 1985, has just republished a Spurgeon sermon that in no uncertain terms predicts the future universal conversion of the entire world, extending to *every single individual* then living: this is biblical postmillennialism with a vengeance, and it *is* coming back.)

Chilton follows the majority trend in today's postmillennialism on this point, so we can only add that his book is indeed representative of today's postmillennial thinking. But his postmillennialism has no capstone, as Dr. Boettner would put it. Perhaps I expect a lot from Chilton, but then again, so does Chilton expect a lot from his readers (and rightfully so). We *still* need to find out if anyone besides Dr. Boettner has the nerve to resurrect Warfield's eschatology in a major book. But all told, what is a formal weakness (Chilton's casually brief encounter with Rev. 20:7–9) is a pragmatic strength (through emphasis on the assured victory rather than on the apostasy that will allegedly mark history's end). The inconsistency is thereby partially alleviated, since Chilton generally steers clear of incidental doctrines and controversies, among which the final apostasy option is clearly numbered.

I do not agree with Chilton's view of Ezekiel 47:11, a verse which he believes puts a limit on the gospel's success. It is, after all, the *sea* that is made pure and brought back to life, veritably swarming with fish (fish representing men in gospel symbology). Whatever the salt marshes represent (cf. *Dietary Law* in this issue), human soteriology is not in view.

Finally, the Parable of the Wheat and Tares teaches the opposite of what Chilton claims. The parable expressly indicates that the final generation will be all wheat (completely converted). Our problem stems from our insistence that the field must refer to the world as we see history (sequential succession), and not as God sees history (simultaneously). In this light, the cryptic reason for not pulling out the tares (because the wheat would thereby be uprooted as well) finally makes sense. Had the tare, Terah, {219} been gathered while his son, Abraham, was still in his loins, *Abraham would have been uprooted as well*: he would never have been born. Thus, every unsaved man will either (1) eventually bear elect offspring in a future generation (hence the emphatic warning to leave the tares alone), or (2) have his posterity cut off (Ps. 37). The relational logic reduces to a syllogism, assuring a fully converted earth by the end of time. (Twelve years after this review of Chilton's book was written, this author came to learn that no less a theologian than Augustine had paved the road for acceptance of this hypothesis when he said "that they who today are tares may to-morrow be grain" ["Ut qui hodie sunt zizania, cras sint frumentum"] [Meyer, 1:258]. Warfield, drawing on Christ's explanation at Matthew 13:37–43, places the separation at the Final Judgment [the *sunteleia*, the full end of all

things], again delegitimizing the final apostasy doctrine.)

Ezekiel 47:11 Reconsidered

It should be noted that the “final apostasy” interpretation of Ezekiel 47:11 does not flow compellingly from the actual text, despite Gardiner’s early confidence (5:342). Scholars have taken several different approaches to this verse. A review of some representative interpretations illustrates that compelling alternatives to the “traditional postmillennial view” have been in circulation for several centuries.

John Owen regards the water flowing into the Dead Sea to be a symbol of the gospel, and treats the “miry and marshy places” as people who reject the gospel and who are thus “given unto salt” (9:179–97). Those people “given unto salt” begin with the contemporaries of Christ (181) and Paul (182), and extend into the present. Owen regards this as a judgment “unto barrenness” and “fruitlessness.” At no time does Owen treat this passage as limiting the *ultimate* success of the gospel, but rather as accurately characterizing the ages prior to that point. The verse (given Owen’s position that the healing waters symbolize the gospel) is understood to teach that God condemns those who fail to be healed by the gospel to eternal barrenness and fruitlessness. Ethics, not cosmic eschatology, is Owen’s focus.

A more exegetically sound exposition can be found in Patrick Fairbairn’s treatment (492). Rather than treating the waters as {220} provisionally efficacious (as Owen does when he identifies the waters with the gospel), Fairbairn treats them as utterly efficacious: “This stream of life, flowing from the dwelling-place of God, images the regenerating efficacy of His grace and Word upon a dead world, represented by the barren region through which the stream flows, and the salt waters of the Dead Sea, into which it empties itself” Fairbairn’s analysis bears repeating:

The general result is such, that the barren soil becomes in the highest degree fertile, and even the salt waters of the Dead Sea are sweetened and made capable of sustaining the greatest abundance of fish. But certain parts in the neighbourhood—pits and marshes, such as the region is known to possess, and which it is to be understood the stream from the temple does not reach—remain

still unhealed, and are therefore given to salt.” Fairbairn holds that the regions not reached by the waters “remain in their originally bad state—unhealed.”

Clearly, there is no textual warrant, in either Owen’s or Fairbairn’s expositions, to insist that the situation described extends to the final outcome of the “Spirit being poured out on all flesh.” That contemporary realities are in view is indisputable. That the ultimate proportions of the saved and lost on the last day of history are supposedly taught at Ezekiel 47:11 is (1) a *non sequitur* if Owen is correct, and (2) impossible if Fairbairn is correct. Although Owen has crafted a strong sermon based on Ezekiel 47:11, the nod must go to Fairbairn for doing justice to the actual *description* of the water’s healing power at Ezekiel 47:9 (“everything lives whithersoever the water goes”). These particular waters are *efficacious*, and not contingent in their effect. The contrast between earlier and later developments in the stream’s progress are all but belabored in Ezekiel 47:3–6 (meaning that the very vision in question stresses the growth through time of the stream’s width, depth, and extension). Fairbairn’s view of Ezekiel 47:11 finds additional corroboration in the commentaries of C. F. Keil (361) and G. Currey (Cook, 6:202).

Fairbairn essentially paraphrases the position of the eschatological universalists (493) in dealing with this chapter of Ezekiel: {221} The evils and disorders of nature are rectified; peace and order reign where before were the favourite haunts of wretchedness and crime; the very field of judgment becomes a region of life and blessing; until at last corruption itself is changed into incorruption, mortality is swallowed up in life, and the earth, which God has cursed for men’s sin, is transformed into the inheritance of the saints in light.

Evidently, Fairbairn understood that he was under no “exegetical necessity” to squeeze a final apostasy out of this eleventh verse, the verse so often quoted by modern postmillennialists to justify ultimate pessimism regarding the end of the church age. (Characteristically, he vacillated between traditional and universalistic postmillennialism, as evidenced by his lengthy analysis of the final apostasy written five years after his Ezekiel commentary was published [Interpretation, 284–93]. Such Spurgeonesque reversals in Fairbairn’s eschatological views were commented on by Albertus Pieters in 1932 [xx]. In Fairbairn’s

mind, the fire in heaven is symbolical of a revival that finally drives carnality out of the world [p. 490]. A return to strict chronology and placement of the millennium on earth, combined with a studied refusal to literalize John's visions, resulted in this odd amalgam of ideas. In this, Fairbairn was not entirely consistent in following the foundational principles he annunciates in the opening chapters of this seminal volume. His principles are sound, but his application of them is occasionally uneven.)

Concluding Remarks

Eschatological universalism is unquestionably a micro-minority opinion among the great schools of eschatological thought. If it proves to be biblical, this circumstance would mirror in our age the observation Hodge made of theology in the ages before Christ entered the world: "... of all the hundreds of thousands to whom these predictions of the Hebrew Scriptures were made known, not a single person, so far as appears, interpreted them aright..." (Systematic Theology, 3:791). This is not a terribly attractive or comfortable view, that even the best theologians of our age have missed something so clearly revealed in Scripture, but the possibility must be admitted, for the precedents, as "ensamples unto us," are legion in number. {222}

That the conversion of the total population of the world is manifestly impossible has been taught for centuries. "Let us then face with fresh boldness this impossibility" (Warfield, *Power of God*, 117). The time has come to shed eschatologies built on the sand, no matter how many others in centuries past have built in the same location, and build on the Rock, no matter how few have sunk foundations in that rugged terrain. Then let the storms of theological debate come.

Bibliography

- Alexander, Joseph Addison. *Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978 [1953; 1865].
- Allis, Oswald T *Prophecy and the Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1945.
- Bahnsen, Greg L. and Kenneth L. Gentry Jr. *House Divided. The Breakup of Dispensational Theology*. Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989.

- Berkhof, Louis. *Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1939.
- Boettner, Loraine. *The Millennium*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1957, revised 1984.
- Calvin, John. *Calvin's Commentaries*. 22 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979.
- _____. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981. Trans. Henry Beveridge.
- Carson, D.A. *Exegetical Fallacies*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984.
- Chilton, David. *The Days of Vengeance*. Tyler, TX: Dominion Press, 1987.
- _____. *Paradise Restored*. Tyler, TX: Reconstruction Press, 1985.
- Cook, F. C., ed. *The Bible Commentary*. 10 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981 (1881).
- Cox, William E. *Biblical Studies in Final Things*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980 (1966).
- Delitzsch, Franz (with C. F. Keil). *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*. Volume 8: Isaiah. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983 reprinting.
- Engelsma, David J. "A Defense of (Reformed) Amillennialism—10. A Spiritual Fulfillment of Isaiah 65:17ff." *Standard Bearer*. Oct. 1, 1996: 7–8.
- _____. "An Open Letter to Gary North (Part Two)." *Standard Bearer*. March 15, 1996: 269–272.
- Fairbairn, Patrick. *An Exposition of Ezekiel*. Minneapolis, MN: Klock & Klock, 1979 (1851).
- _____. *The Interpretation of Prophecy*. London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1964 (1856).
- Gardiner, Rev. F. "Ezekiel." *Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible* 8 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, n.d.
- Gebhardt, Hermann. *The Doctrine of the Apocalypse*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1878.
- Gentry, Kenneth L. Jr. *He Shall Have Dominion*. Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1992.
- Haldane, Robert. *Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans*. London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1958 (1852).
- Hengstenberg, E.W. *Christology of the Old Testament*. 2 vols. Mac Dill AFB: MacDonald Publishing Company. n.d. (Reprint)
- _____. *Commentary on the Psalms*. 3 vols. Cherry Hill, NJ: Mack Publishing, n.d. (Reprint)
- _____. *The Revelation of St. John, Expounded for Those Who Search the Scriptures*. 2 vols. Trans. Patrick Fairbairn. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1851.
- Hodge, Charles. *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1947 (1886).

- _____. *Systematic Theology*. 3 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981 (1878). Hughes, Philip Edgcumbe. *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977.
- Jamieson, Robert, A.R. Fausset and David Brown. *A Commentary Critical, Experimental, and Practical on the Old and New Testaments*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1973 edition.
- Keil, C. F., and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*. Vol. 9: Ezekiel & Daniel. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983 reprinting.
- Kik, J. Marcellus. *An Eschatology of Victory*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1978.
- Lange, John Peter. *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, n.d.
- Lenski, R.C.H. *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1936.
- Lubbers, George C. *The Bible Versus Millennial Teachings: An Exegetical Critique*. Grand Rapids, MI: Lubbers, 1989.
- Meyer, H.A.W. *Commentary on the New Testament*. Winona Lake: Alpha Publications, 1979. 10 vols. Originally published by T.&T. Clark in 1883.
- Milligan, William. *The Ascension of Christ*. Minneapolis, MN: Klock & Klock, 1980. Originally published by MacMillan and Co., Limited, London in 1891.
- _____. *The Revelation of St. John*. New York: Macmillan and Co., 1887.
- Morecraft, Joseph, III. *Triumphant Christianity: Outlines on Biblical Eschatology*. Xerographic copy of a comprehensively developed outline of the postmillennial position by a noted reconstructionist pastor. 44 pages. 1980.
- Murray, Iain. *The Puritan Hope*. Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1971. Nicoll, W. Robertson, ed. *The Expositor's Bible*. 6 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1982 (1902).
- North, Gary. *Dominion and Common Grace*. Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987.
- _____, ed. *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction* 3:2, 1976–77.
- _____. "Christianity and Progress." *Christian Reconstruction* 11:3, May/ June 1987.
- Owen, John. *The Works of John Owen*. 16 vols. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965 (1850–53).
- Ramsay, James Beverlin. *The Book of Revelation*. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1977 (1873).
- Rushdoony, Rousas John. *Systematic Theology*. 2 vols. Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1994.
- _____. *Thy Kingdom Come*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970.

- Sanday, William, and Arthur C. Headlam. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. New York: Scribners, 1903. Sandlin, Rev. Andrew. "The Creed of Christian Reconstruction." Inside front cover of *Chalcedon Report* 1995-present.
- The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*. 12 vols. New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1909.
- Shedd, William G. T. *Commentary on Romans*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980 (1879).
- Stuart, Moses. *Commentary on the Apocalypse*. London: Wiley & Putnam, 1845.
- Warfield, Benjamin Breckenridge. *Biblical Doctrines*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1929.
- _____. *The Plan of Salvation*. Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1918.
- _____. *The Power of God unto Salvation*. Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1902.
- _____. *The Saviour of the World*. New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1913.
- Weiss, Bernhard. *A Commentary on the New Testament*. 4 vols. New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1906.

THE ESCHATOLOGICAL *A PRIORI* OF THE NEW TESTAMENT: A CRITIQUE OF HYPER-PRETERISM

Vern Crisler

Introduction

Many of us were shocked by the death of David Chilton on March 7, 1997 from complications resulting from a heart attack.¹ Yet as troubling as this event was, it was no greater than our distress to learn that Chilton had gone through a “last minute” conversion to the heresy of “full-preterism”—the belief that the second coming or parousia of Jesus Christ took place in AD 70, concomitant with the destruction of the city of Jerusalem by the Roman general Titus. Our distress was due to the fact that Chilton had formerly declared such a belief heretical:

I have emphasized this point [the final judgment] because it has become popular in some otherwise apparently orthodox circles to adopt a heretical form of “preterism” that denies any future bodily Resurrection or Judgment, asserting that all these are fulfilled in the Resurrection of Christ, the regeneration of the Church, the coming of the New Covenant, and the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70... Whatever else may be said about those who hold such notions, it is clear that they are not in conformity with any recognizable form of orthodox Christianity. The one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church has always and everywhere insisted on the doctrine of the Last Judgment at the end of time. Its inclusion into all the historic

1. Andrew Sandlin posted the following on Joseph Bell's Ch-Recon E-Mail list Fri., March 7, 1997: “RJR[ushdoony] and I just got word (c. 10:45 pm. PST, Fri.) from Pastor Jim West that David Chilton died of a massive heart attack this evening. We are deeply saddened by his death, particularly in light of recent developments...”

definitions of the Faith is a universal testimony to its importance as an article of belief.²

It may have been that Chilton's conversion away from the orthodox view of the parousia was a "soft" sort of conversion; and that his denial of the futurity of the last judgment still appeared to be a novelty, as though he were unsure of his ground, and needed to respond to his critics with emotional outbursts and anger rather than with the calmness of the convinced heretic.³

Most of us realized that Chilton's earlier heart attack on January {226} 4, 1994, and the resulting neurological trauma, probably affected his judgment more than he realized. Still, his remaining wisdom allowed him to admit in one email letter:

From now on, anytime I say something that looks weird, ask me if I mean it! Of course, that makes you run the risk of having me blast you back and say: *of course, you jackass!* But anyway, my aforementioned Brain Injury has resulted in about 30 personality and behavioral differences (that I've counted so far!), and makes me a bit difficult to deal with occasionally. I keep telling [my wife] that since the first one on the list is Short-Term Memory Loss, God won't hold me accountable for my sins if I can't remember them! She doesn't buy it, and doesn't think God will, either!⁴

In another post, he said:

I made a list of about 30 differences between me and the *other* David Chilton, about half of which are personality changes; the other half are weird other things, like I can see in the dark now, etc... I had what the doctors called the equivalent of a barn fire in my brain, and lots of things got completely wiped out!... I had about 20 out-of-body experiences that I haven't written about at all, but Jay Adams said "it's OK so did Saint Paul!" I said, "Well, I didn't get quite as far as he did!"... I've done pretty well: now off of all

2. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, TX: Dominion Press, 1987), 531.

3. Chilton responded to email criticisms of his views by using capitalized letters and needless exclamation marks in his posts. Capitalized letters in an email forum signify either that one is advertising something or that one is shouting. Overuse of exclamations is the hallmark of a) bad writers (which Chilton was not) or b) one who cannot restrain his emotions, but must pound the table and declaim every word he utters, regardless of how important they are to his overall argument. We have changed Chilton's capitals to italics for easier reading.

4. Email, Sat., Feb. 15, 1997, Ch-Recon list, owner Joseph Bell.

prescriptions but aspirin, I got an A for the semester's Logic course I took at the local college, jog 10 miles a day, eat really *low-fat* ... am back to speaking and writing (36 lectures in a month in Australia last year), have gone through interesting theological changes, and am working on some new books!⁵

Little did we know what those “interesting theological changes” were.⁶ “Simply put,” said Chilton, “I now believe that Christ's Second Coming occurred in AD 70.”⁷ Moreover, “But I am convinced by Scripture that what Christ and the Apostles *meant* by His Second Coming occurred in AD 70.”⁸ Gary North responded to Chilton's “conversion” in his characteristic way: “As the publisher of *Days of Vengeance* and *Paradise Restored*, let me say, without hesitation, that the post-1994 David Chilton is indeed a heretic who has denied the Church's historic creeds and confessions on the question of the Second Coming of Christ and the Final [227] Judgment.”⁹ He went on to say, “I bought orthodoxy. I will not relinquish it in order to turn it over to a man who has literally lost his mind, the mind of Christ.” Further, “[Chilton] is crippled now, and I do not think it is fair to beat him up in public. It is also unlikely to change what is left of his mind... He is not the man we used to know, as he has admitted here. That man died in 1994, he says. I agree. So, let us say now, David Chilton, RIP” There were some who counseled restraint and compassion due to Chilton's medical history, but by then it was too late. Chilton was no longer responding to “reconstructionists,” either in public or in private. Whether he would have eventually listened to his friends, and those who cared for his soul, is not possible to determine. Whether his faith would have restored his confession

5. Email, Mon., Feb. 17, 1997, Ch-Recon list.

6. Apparently, Chilton did not intend to reveal his hyper-preterist views so soon. In a personal “snail-mail,” he said, “Now since, without my realizing it, that message went out to the *group* [Ch-Recon list] and not just *you*, a couple people asked, *What* theological changes?! So I had to write to Andrew Sandlin about my Preterism, which probably means you'll never see my name in *The Chalcedon Report* again! But that's OK... Soon, I'll have an article in [Ed Steven's] magazine *Kingdom Counsel* explaining my ‘paradigm shift,’ and I'll be out of the closet for everyone to see!” (Letter to V. Crisler, Feb. 28, 1997).

7. Email reply to James Jarrell, Ch-Recon list, March 2, 1997.

8. Email reply to Colin Tayler, Ch-Recon list, March 3, 1997.

9. Email, Ch-Recon list, March 4, 1997.

as Peter's eventually did is a matter beyond our knowledge, though we certainly believe in a merciful God, and are confident that the LORD will be kind to one of his servants who was afflicted beyond his measure.

Chilton's last minute conversion to heresy will be exploited by the remaining full-preterists, but they will only be exploiting a debilitated man's eccentricities, not his healthy and mature judgments. The heresy of full-preterism poses much danger for those who are trying to find an alternative to premillennial speculation, but who aren't satisfied with any of the current alternatives. It is troubling to watch those who have been faithful all their lives turn to this new gospel, this new "forgetting" of the promise of his coming. As R. J. Rushdoony said long ago:

[H]istory refuses to terminate on man's orders, because it runs on God's time, and not in terms of man's myths. As a result, the final orders which men build have an inevitable habit of decay, and the order which claims to be final ensures its own destruction as the movement of history crushes it underfoot in its unrelenting march to epistemological self-consciousness. Man's "final" orders come in with pride and go out in shame and destruction, but Jesus Christ "shall come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead; Whose kingdom shall have no end."¹⁰

2 Peter 3

Some readers might be surprised that we don't consider 2 Peter 3:1–18 as the New Testament eschatological *a priori*—that is, the {228} text or doctrine by which all New Testament eschatological interpretations stand or fall. Still, its importance should not be underestimated for a proper understanding of the New Testament's view of the "last things." Therefore, we have given St. Peter's text in full.

1. Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder),
2. that you maybe mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles

10. *The Foundations of Social Order: Studies in the Creeds and Councils of the Early Church* (Fairfax, VA: Thoburn Press, 1978), 177.

of the Lord and Savior,

3. knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts,

4. and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.”

5. For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water,

6. by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water.

7. 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.

8. But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

9. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is long suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

10. 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.

11. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,

12. 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?

13. Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

14. Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; {229}

15. And consider that the long suffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to

him, has written to you,

16. as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.

17. You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked;

18. but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen. (NKJ)

We must confess our surprise that anyone would have the audacity to interpret Peter's words in an exclusively symbolic or spiritual sense, and restrict this text to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Yet this is precisely what a sect of Bible interpreters who call themselves *fullpreterists*, but whom we call *hyper preterists* attempt to do. These hyper-preterists (hereafter HPs) believe that the second coming or parousia of Jesus was *completely* fulfilled in God's judgment upon the nation of Israel in the first century. From their perspective, there is no future judgment in the sense of a catastrophic eschaton that breaks into the world in a material, physical, global way. The only "world" that HPs believe was subject to judgment was the socio-political system of first century Judaism, a system that no longer served any purpose in the plan of God. "Peter's world was the world of Judaism!" says Don K. Preston, one of the leaders of this movement.¹¹ In striking contrast to this de-materialized view of the second coming, Peter's words above speak of the global parousia of Jesus—a noisy, world-historical, ontological, time-smashing destruction of the cosmos. His words cannot be restricted to some sort of local, symbolic, sociological parousia involving God's judgment upon Israel's moral and ethical system.

The restriction of the last judgment to a sociological parousia is contrary to Peter's use of the terms "heaven" and "earth." The context suggests that they refer primarily to the material creation.

11. Cf., II *Peter 3: The Late Great Kingdom* (Shawnee, OK, Shawnee Printing Co., 1990), 121.

This does not mean they cannot be used elsewhere in a symbolic sense; e.g., their use in Old Testament prophecy for various micro-eschatons—judgments on local city or nation-states of the ancient world—but whether or not they are interpreted symbolically or literally depends upon the context in which they are used. An unprejudiced reading of Peter *in context* shows that his prophecy of a “collapsing universe” at the last judgment cannot be taken to refer only to a moral or localized judgment on the nation of Israel. Indeed, Peter’s words have a “metaphysical” ring to them, not merely a moralistic ring: {230}

For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which *the world that then existed perished*, being flooded with water. 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 (emphasis added).

Notice the connection Peter makes between the heavens and the earth originally created by God, the heaven-earth complex destroyed by the flood, and the contemporaneous heaven and earth reserved for fire. Since the creation was global (meaning universal), and the deluge was global, it will take a great deal of linguistic legerdemain to *localize* the final judgment. That this has been attempted by HPs does not render the resulting interpretation any less absurd.¹²

Moreover, the HP localization of the parousia is counter-intuitive in that it does not convincingly answer the skeptics who had (mockingly) asked, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.” Not only did these skeptical “demythologizers” deny the Noachian deluge, they also denied

12. Ron McRay says, “When we think of the world, we think of a heaven and earth. In [2 Pet. 3:6] the heaven and earth (world) *that then was*, was overflowed with water and perished. Obviously, the world, the heaven and earth, was not the physical planet! For it was not destroyed. The *world*, or this *heaven and earth* was the people. The people were overflowed with water” (cf., *The Last Days?* [Bradford, PA: Kingdom Press, 1990], 117). Contrary to McRay, however, Peter does not say that the planet was *obliterated*; only that it *perished*. See Morris & Whitcomb’s, *The Genesis Flood: The Biblical Record and Its Scientific Implications*, for the devastating hydraulic and geological effects of the flood upon the physical earth (and heavens) (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Pub. Co., 1961).

the final judgment. If the HPs are right in saying that the final judgment was only a local judgment upon Israel, the skeptics' question makes very little sense. Local judgments on Israel had happened often enough in that nation's checkered history; why should there be any skepticism about *another* local, moralistic, non-metaphysical judgment on the nation of Israel? Indeed, some of the skeptics might have welcomed such an ethical cleansing of their nation, but a global parousia? From their rationalistic point of view, that would be as absurd as a global flood. {231}

Moreover, in 2 Peter 3:7, it cannot be the old covenant or Jerusalem in one breath, then the physical cosmos in the next. If one sides with HPs, then by his use of the words, "the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment..." Peter is saying that:

A—[Jerusalem] is now preserved by God's word; and

B—[Jerusalem] is reserved for fire until the day of judgment.

The orthodox paradigm interprets Peter's words in the following way:

A^o—[the physical cosmos] is now preserved by God's word, and

B^o—[the physical cosmos] is reserved for fire until the day of judgment.

To see which view makes more sense, one should consider the previous verses, and see which substitution makes more sense in context: "For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens [ouranoi] were of old, and the earth [*gee*] standing out of water and in the water, by which the world [kosmos] that then existed perished, being flooded with water" (2 Pet. 3:5–6). To be consistent, the HPs would have to interpret Peter's words as follows:

C—that by the word of God [Jerusalem] was of old,

D—that by the word of God [Jerusalem] was standing out of water in water,

E—that by the word of God [Jerusalem] perished, being flooded with water.

It is absolutely essential for HPs to reduce the "heavens and earth"

to the land of Israel or to the old covenant order or to Jerusalem, but it seems clear from a proper exegesis of Peter's words, that he had no such limitations in mind, nor is there any evidence that he was going back and forth between a local and universal "world." It is more than a little clear that the physical cosmos provides the only consistent substitution instance for Peter's phrase "heavens and earth." {232}

The Ascension of Jesus

Another verse that is important for an understanding of the return of Christ is Acts 1:9–11:

Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."

Attempts by HPs to turn this into a "spiritual" or "symbolic" ascension find no support from the text. The language used here stresses visibility rather than invisibility. Why do HPs find it necessary to speak of a symbolic or "poetic" ascension? The answer is obvious if we pay close attention to the text: "This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, *will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven*" (emphasis added). The HPs realize that the angel is saying that the parousia of Jesus will be "in like manner" to his ascension. This "like manner" refers to the previous calendar event of the ascension: "[W]hile they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight." Jesus was *visible* as he ascended and became *invisible* the higher up he went (enveloped by a cloud). Following the angel's analogy, Jesus is presently *invisible* to the world as he sits at the right hand of the Father. At his parousia, he will, in like manner to his ascension, become *visible* to the world once again. This is what the Bible teaches, and it has been the consistent testimony of the Christian church from its beginning. It is saddening that some Bible interpreters would seek to overthrow the orthodox faith, as well as the plain teaching of the Bible regarding Jesus' second

coming.¹³

Unfortunately, these HPs have had support from the scholar, Randall Otto, whose book, *Coming in the Clouds: An Evangelical Case For the Invisibility of Christ at His Second Coming*, argues for a “poetic,” non-physical ascension.¹⁴ Otto had to interpret the ascension as “poetic” in order to deny the visibility of the global parousia of Jesus. But his re-interpretation of the ascension has grave consequences for his interpretation of the resurrection of {233} Jesus. The church has always affirmed, based on scriptural testimony, that Jesus’ resurrection was a visible, tangible, non-ghostly event in calendar history. If Otto finds it necessary to deny this based on his view of the ascension and parousia, then perhaps there is something wrong with his view of the ascension and parousia.

“[Apparently], Otto’s eschatological *a priori* is that Christ’s parousia was completely fulfilled in AD 70. “[If this is what he believes, then] this affects everything he says—all the way back to the resurrection, and finally to the incarnation.” As you might expect, our argument is that the true eschatological *a priori* is the real, physical, visible, and permanent incarnation of the Son of God in time and in history as the man, Jesus of Nazareth. If the incarnation was physically real, there is no *a priori* reason to deny that the resurrection was physically real, or that the ascension was physically real, or that the parousia will be physically real. It can be seen that Otto’s *a priori* is a rationalistic scheme forced upon Scripture. He denies the obvious meanings of many New Testament texts in order to support the deductive consequences of his *a priori*. The correct way to interpret the Bible, however, is by comparing Scripture with Scripture, by letting the texts speak for themselves, not by imposing a pre-conceived framework on the Bible in order to support a pet theory of eschatology.

Hyper-preterism is not a new heresy in the church. In fact, it was one of the first. In 2 Thessalonians 2:2 and 3:6–15, St. Paul mentions that the Thessalonians were apparently receiving forged

13. For a discussion, see Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1992), 275–81.

14. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 1994, 254.

apostolic letters, claiming that the final parousia had already taken place:

Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. (2 Thess. 2:12)

In another letter, Paul mentions two of these forgers by name, Hymenaeus and Philetus, who taught that the final resurrection had already occurred: {234}

But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some (2 Tim: 2:16–18).

HPs often ask how any of the early Christians could have been fooled by these heretics. If the final resurrection was going to be a noisy, visible, global occurrence, how could anyone have been persuaded that it had already taken place? Don K. Preston, for instance, says; “If the day of the LORD is, as you and I have always been taught, a time ending, universe destroying event, how in the world could the Thessalonians ever have been convinced, as they obviously were, that the day of the LORD had *already come*?”¹⁵ This is an odd question to ask, given that Paul’s point is that it *is false* to believe such a thing, that those who believe it have “strayed concerning the truth.” But Preston goes on to draw a conclusion from the Thessalonians’ false belief “The point is, Paul did not challenge the teaching concerning the *nature* of the day. He only challenged the chronology.”¹⁶

Later in his book, Preston argues that the Thessalonians had an old covenant concept of the coming of the LORD, that when the LORD comes, he himself is not visible, but his historical judgments on nations are visible. These historical judgments upon nations are described in the Old Testament using cosmic imagery—the destruction of the heavens and of the earth—but they are still *geographically* limited. Hence, the Thessalonians did not have a

15. *How is This Possible: A Study of the Coming of the Lord* (Shawnee, OK: Shawnee Printing Co., 1991), 1.

16. *Idem*.

belief that the parousia would be a visible invasion of Jesus into the terrestrial realm. They had, according to Preston, a correct understanding of its nature—a geographically localized and symbolic judgment—but not of its time. Preston apparently thinks the Thessalonians were being bothered by a sect of ‘Jehovah’s Witnesses,” who were saying the parousia had already occurred; so that Paul’s primary mission to the Thessalonians was to correct their *timing* of the parousia, not their view of its nature as an invisible, symbolic judgment on Israel in AD 70.¹⁷

Is this true, however? Was Paul only interested in challenging a false chronology? Or did his challenge to the false chronology {235} rest upon a certain conception of the nature of the parousia? Preston only gives verses 1 and 2 of chapter two of Paul’s second letter to the Thessalonians; but what do the very next verses say?

Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.

It is true in these verses that St. Paul is correcting the Thessalonians’ chronology, arguing that certain things—the great apostasy and the parousia of the Antichrist, had to happen *before* the LORD’s parousia. Since these things haven’t happened, argues Paul, the parousia of Jesus—the final resurrection—could not have taken place yet. Nevertheless, Paul does more than give chronological signs of the *imminency* of the parousia. He also provides a description of the *nature* of this parousia. Paul does provide chronological cues (or signs) to show when the parousia is near, but he does not pinpoint the exact day, for the actual day will have no cues or warnings, but will come as a thief in the

17. *Ibid.*, 12–13.

night. What will the parousia itself be like? Paul says, “And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the LORD will consume with the breath of His mouth and *destroy with the brightness of His coming*” (emphasis added). Here Paul gives an indication of the nature of the parousia, and Preston is simply wrong to suggest that the apostle’s concern was only to limit the Thessalonians’ metric freedom. It matters a great deal that the Thessalonians had a truncated conception of the nature of the parousia, for it was the basis of their false chronology. Indeed, everything about these verses indicates that Paul is concerned primarily with *correcting* such a view of the final resurrection, both in its timing and in its nature. {236}

If, in Paul’s mind, the parousia “the coming of our LORD Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him” (v. 2) had reference only to the destruction of Jerusalem, why didn’t Paul simply have the Thessalonians go on a tour of the still standing city of Jerusalem?¹⁸ Of course, it would not have occurred to him, for he did not regard the final parousia as an invisible or symbolic judgment. Notice how he describes the nature of the parousia in the following texts:

[A]nd to give you who are troubled rest with us 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, because our testimony among you was believed.¹⁹

I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His *appearing* and His

18. As Grover Gunn once pointed out in a review of the orthodox preterist Kenneth Gentry’s book, *He Shall Have Dominion*. Gunn’s review can be found in *Contra Mundum*, No. 9. Fall 1993, and also on the Internet at the web site: http://www.wavefront.com/Contra_M/cm/reviews/cm09_rev_postmillennialism.html. It must be emphasized that though Gentry might accept some parousia-texts as referring exclusively to Jerusalem, and others as referring to the final judgment, he *vigorously* disagrees with hyper-preterists regarding the futurity of the final resurrection and global parousia.

19. 2 Thess. 1:7–10; emphasis added.

kingdom...²⁰

These texts can hardly be restricted to the proleptic parousia on Jerusalem in AD 70; they must be referred to the final, oblate parousia that ushers in the final form of Jesus' kingdom.

Christology & Eschatology

As bad as denying the future judgment might be, denying the incarnation of Jesus is worse, for it is the *ultimate* heresy. St. John says very clearly that the spirit of the Antichrist is recognized by its denial of the incarnation: "[A]nd 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 coming, and is now already in the world."²¹ It should be no surprise then that the early church sought to avoid the spirit of this eschatological monster by safeguarding the doctrine of the incarnation against heresies.²² St. John gives us the basic eschatological *a priori* of the New Testament: {237}

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.: And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.²³

After the controversies surrounding the nature of the Trinity had run their course during the second and third centuries, questions about the nature of Christ's incarnation arose. Theologians influenced by gnosticism and docetism held that Christ was only a man in "appearance" and not in reality. Christ's humanity could not be conceived of in a real, permanent, substantial sense, but only in a fleeting, evanescent, instrumental sense—a mere channel for the being of pure Spirit. Against this view, the orthodox position was represented by the Creed of Ignatius, who taught that

20. 2 Tim. 4:1; emphasis added.

21. 1 John 4:3.

22. For an overview of the Christological controversies, see Harold Brown, *Heresies: The Image of Christ in the Mirror of Heresy and Orthodoxy from the Apostles to the Present* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1984).

23. John 1:1–3, 14.

Jesus was born, suffered, died, and rose again as a man, “truly, and not in appearance.”²⁴

Nevertheless, some theologians were still embarrassed by the humanity of Christ due to their characteristic Greek denigration of the material world in favor of some variation of Plato’s world of pure ideas. They thus emphasized Christ’s divinity to the exclusion of his humanity, for in ancient Greek philosophy humanity is considered to be the realm of evil and change, and God could not be a subject of evil and change. The heretic Marcion, for instance, went so far as to deny the reality of the parousia because he could not allow God to come into contact with the changeableness and materiality of world history. Brown says, “Marcion did not believe in a real incarnation, and consequently there was no logical place in his system for a real Second Coming.”²⁵ The modern neo-orthodox scholar Bishop John A. T. Robinson, agrees with Marcion:

[I]t would be an equal misunderstanding to take the picture of the Last Things as *historical prediction* as it is to view Adam and Eve as personages of whom birth-certificates might theoretically be produced. In neither case is the truth of the myth in any way bound up with the belief that its events did literally take place or will do so::: The incidents are not actual occurrences in the past {238} and future, but are representations to interpret present realities in all their primal and eschatological quality.²⁶

In the fourth century, two main views of how to interpret the incarnation—how the Word “became flesh”—are discernible. First, the “Alexandrian” theologians held that the pre-incarnate Word took the place of the human soul or mind and animated the body of Jesus when he was born. This resulted in a view of the incarnation that made Christ only half a man, missing the human soul. Reacting to this, the “Antiochene” theologians held

24. One could also point out that the vaguer the humanity of Christ was held to be, the more clearly collective man (the state) could emerge as the new savior of humanity. (Cf. Rushdoony, *Foundations*, 11.)

25. Heresies, 65.

26. *In the End God* (New York, NY: Harper & Row Publishers, 1968), 79. In a footnote, he says, “The New Testament never pictures the Parousia ... as another incarnation, Jesus coming again within the sequence and boundaries of history as we know it... “ (78).

that the Word took on a complete humanity. Rather than taking on just the body of a man, the Word took on both the body and soul of a man.²⁷ This view, though an improvement over the other position, had a tendency to double the personalities in Christ, giving rise to the danger of two contradictory wills in Christ, and a failure to preserve his unity as a person. Curiously, it also tended to agree with the docetics in viewing Christ's humanity in a purely instrumental sense, a temple of the divine Logos. The Antiochenes thus were in danger of placing Jesus on a par with the prophets of the Old Testament, making him only an inspired man, who was merely the instrument of the Logos. The reaction of the Alexandrians to this danger was to *fuse* Christ's divine and human natures. This led some of them (such as Apollinaris) to believe that Christ's human nature was a proper object of worship, and that it infused divinity into those who were (sacramental) partakers of his flesh.²⁸ Thus, in Apollinaris' Christology, the Eucharist became the means for the deification of the human race.²⁹

Some might think preoccupation with the person of Christ, and how his divine and human natures are brought together, is a waste of time and departs from the simple gospel found in the Bible, or departs from the "primitive" church's conception of the lowly carpenter. But this is a wrong way of looking at the creedal and theological testimony of the early church. The concern for orthodoxy on the part of creedal theologians was not an attempt to move *away* from the simple gospel, but an attempt to *recover* it. The orthodox were not trying to embellish on what the primitive or ancestral church believed. Indeed, their creedal formulations represent a *successful return* to the primitive church, a rescue of the clear light {239} of the gospel from the accretions of heretics. Accordingly, the Council of Chalcedon met in AD 451 to recover the simple gospel, to do battle with the spirit of Antichrist, and to repudiate the divinization of humanity.³⁰ Chalcedon stressed

27. Cf., J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row Publishers, Rev. ed., 1978), 153–58; 301–09.

28. *Ibid.*, 295.

29. For the statist implications of such a view, see Rushdoony, *Foundations*, 63 ff.

30. For a defense of Chalcedon against the charge of novelty, see Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Person and Work of Christ: Christological Studies* (Philadelphia, PA:

the “completeness” of Christ’s divinity and of his humanity. He is recognized in two natures, “without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.” The divine nature of Christ was not fused with his human nature, and yet at the same time his human and divine natures found their unity in the one person of Jesus.

[T]he distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ...³¹

In his book, *The Foundations of Social Order*, Rushdoony strikingly entitles his chapter on the Creed of Chalcedon, “Foundation of Western Liberty.” Recognizing the political implications and importance of this aspect of Christian theology, he explains:

The Council of Chalcedon met in 451 to deal with the issue as it came to focus at the critical point, in Christology. If the two natures of Christ were confused, it meant that the door was opened to the divinizing of human nature; man and the state were then potentially divine. If the human nature of Christ were reduced or denied, his role as man’s incarnate savior was reduced or denied, and man’s savior again became the state. If his humanity and deity were not in true union, the incarnation was then not real, and the distance between God and man remained as great as ever.³²

Chalcedon affirmed what was inherent in the New Testament, that “there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the *man* Christ Jesus,”³³ and that this man was also the Word who was with God and who was God. “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”³⁴ {240}

Presbyterian & Reformed Pub. Co., 1970), 211 ff.

31. *Foundations*, 66.

32. *Ibid.*, 65.

33. 1 Tim. 2:5, emphasis added.

34. John 1:14.

Randall Otto's Affirmation of Orthodoxy

In his book, *Coming in the Clouds*, Randall Otto gives us a basic summary of the orthodox position, and appears to accept it:

Although the Son did not give up any of his divine glory or dignity in the incarnation, it is equally necessary to affirm that he became fully human, not a mere phantasm, as was taught by the Docetists (from the Greek *dokeo* meaning “to seem” or “to have the appearance of”), the precursors to Gnosticism against whom John regularly inveighs in his first epistle. That the Word “became flesh” entails a number of things, as set forth in the year 451 in the classic statement of the incarnation, the Symbol of Chalcedon... Therefore, as the orthodox confessions all teach, the two perfect natures, God and Man, were joined together in the one person of Jesus Christ, never to be divided. From the point of the incarnation, the person of Christ is a *perpetual* union of the divine and human natures. He “became [aorist tense] flesh.”³⁵

Otto goes so far as to quote Westcott on the meaning of the word, “dwelt” in the phrase, “dwelt among us.” “[T]here can be no doubt,” says Westcott, “that it serves to contrast the Incarnation with the earlier ‘Christophanies,’ which were partial, visionary, evanescent, and at the same time to connect the Personal Presence of the LORD with His earlier Presence in the Tabernacle which foreshadowed it.”

Incarnation-lite: Randall Otto's Denial of Orthodoxy

Nevertheless, it is possible for a man to give lip service to the orthodox creeds, then deny them through faithless re-interpretation. We shall see that this is precisely what Otto does, for his eschatological *a priori* forces him into a docetic understanding of the incarnation that robs Jesus Christ of his essential humanity, reducing him to the status of a merely evanescent, ghostly Christophany.

We are off to a bad start already when Otto says:

Certainly, the main point of *contrast* between Old Testament theophanies and the incarnation of God in Christ is the permanence {241} of the dwelling of God in the ... person of Jesus Christ... On

35. Otto, *Coming in the Clouds*, 137–38.

the other hand, the chief point of *agreement* between the Old Testament theophanies and the incarnation of God in Christ is that the Divine Glory of God is necessarily concealed in both instances from the eyes of humanity.³⁶

In a footnote he agrees with Heinrich Frick who attributed this view to the Reformers: “[P]erceptibility must be renounced, and the glory of Christ conceived as a hidden reality; only thus does this glory transcend the relative sphere and achieve divine majesty”

What can be said about an interpreter of the Bible who boldly denies the plain meaning of the Scripture? What does John say? “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” There is nothing here of “hiddenness” or imperceptibility. Yet Otto can say, “Thus, when John says, ‘we beheld his glory,’ what he most assuredly does *not* mean is that he or anyone else has seen with the physical eye the unveiled glory of God in Jesus Christ.”³⁷ What Otto is arguing then is that it was not really God’s glory that John or the disciples beheld, but only a sort of “veiled” glory. Jesus’ humanity was basically a veil over God’s glory, so that the disciples wouldn’t die when they saw it. Christ’s humanity is then primarily an *instrument* for hiding the glory of God—“revealing through concealment.” That this conception of Christ’s humanity is so far removed from John’s conception can be seen by merely re-reading the text. John did not say he beheld a veil that was keeping back the glory of God, or that he only saw a part of the glory of God, or a diminished version of it. He says very clearly that he and the other disciples beheld the *glory* of the Word of God, the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. Christ’s physical humanity cannot be seen then as a mere instrument of the glory or *shekinah* of God, but must be seen as the real and permanent incarnation and physical expression of the glory of God. In order to deny this clear teaching of John, Otto resorts to a liberal or neo-orthodox locution, agreeing with W. F. Howard that while certain historical events were seen by the disciples, the primary way they saw Christ’s glory was through the

36. *Ibid.*, 139.

37. *Ibid.*, 141.

“eye of faith”!³⁸ {242}

Otto goes on to say, “The Scriptures provide precious little insight into the manner by which the Word became flesh, for the *purpose* of his incarnation far outweighs the manner by which it occurred.” As if the birth narratives had never been written! Of course, Otto’s view is very similar to the neo-orthodox treatment of the book of Genesis, that its historical reality is not the important thing, but rather its meaning. This disjunction of meaning and history, however, finds no support in the Bible.³⁹

Throughout his discussion, Otto erroneously sees the incarnation as a means whereby God hides or “veils” his divine glory, whereas, for St. John, the incarnation is the means whereby God *unveils* his divine glory in the physical person of Jesus Christ the LORD. Jesus is the *revelation* of the glory of God, not its concealment.

Resurrection-lite: Otto’s Further Denial of Orthodoxy

Otto’s eschatological *a priori* does not allow him to rest content with depriving Christ’s incarnation of its substantial reality. He must go on to deprive Christ’s resurrection of its substantial reality. Otto is one of a number of so-called evangelicals who deny that Jesus rose again from the dead in the same physical body with which he died. Otto speaks of a “mysterious alteration of the corporeity and of the appearance of Jesus...”⁴⁰ We are suspicious when Otto begins to speak about an “alteration” here; for having experienced his exegesis of other New Testament texts, we wonder if the alteration is really in Jesus or in the plain meaning of the Bible. Otto does not disappoint us in our suspicions. He quotes Luke 24:36–37:

Now as they said these things, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, “Peace to you.” But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit.

38. *Ibid.*, 142.

39. See, Cornelius Van Til, *Christianity & Barthianism* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Pub. Co., 1962) for a critique of this notion. Also, for an overview of modern theologians’ attempts to remove revelation from the realm of history into the realm of the personal, see Simon Fisher’s, *Revelatory Positivism? Barth’s Earliest Theology and the Marburg School* (Oxford University Press, 1988), especially his discussion of Wilhelm Herrmann, 123 ff.

40. *Coming in the Clouds*, 239.

Commenting on this, he says, “Obviously, the risen Jesus had here a very evanescent and vaporous quality which forbade recognition of his face or voice.”⁴¹ We do not know where Otto found this confident term “obviously,” for nothing at all in the text [243] supports the notion that Jesus had any kind of “evanescent” or “vaporous” quality about his resurrection body. Indeed, he specifically denies having those qualities:

And He said to them, “Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.” When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. But while they still did not believe for joy, and marveled, He said to them, “Have you any food here?” So they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb. And He took it and ate in their presence (Luke 24–38–43).

It would seem that no text could be plainer than this regarding the permanent physicality of the LORD’s resurrection. However, Otto casually disregards the plain meaning of the verse, and actually tries to prove his ridiculous thesis: “Jesus commands the disciples to look at (idete, ‘behold’) his hands and feet, which having now materialized to approximate his pre-resurrection appearance, bore the distinctive marks of his crucifixion.”⁴² *Approximate* his pre-resurrection appearance? The text says that the disciples did not believe for joy, but if Otto had been around to guide them, they would have had no trouble at all. It is easy to believe in an “approximate” savior, a savior visible to the eyes of “faith.”

There are some idealistically inclined physicists who have developed what is called an Uncertainty Principle. This principle tells us that the *less* an object or event at the sub-atomic level can be observed or verified, the *less real* it is. We can also speak of Otto’s Uncertainty Principle; it is the inverse of the physicists’: the *more* an object or event can be observed or verified, the more *unreal* it becomes. Call it the hyper-preterist Copenhagen interpretation: the more Jesus is observed by eyewitnesses, and his physical existence verified, *the less real he becomes*. Otto gives us a

41. *Ibid.*, 242.

42. *Ibid.*, 242.

fine example of his Uncertainty Principle in his interpretation of “handle me”: “Jesus’ subsequent command, ‘handle me,’ probably does *not* indicate, however, that the materialized body of Christ remained substantially the same during his appearance, [244] for the word translated ‘handle’ is *pselaphao*, which means ‘to feel about for something’ or ‘to grope after something.’” Otto’s translation of the Greek is selective here; the word *pselaphao* literally means *to verify by contact*, and only figuratively to search for, to grope after (as when one’s eyes are dim or blinded). The same Greek word is used in Hebrews 12:18: “For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched [pseelafeesaté] and that burned with fire...” The Israelites did not have to, out of respect of their poor eyesight, keep from “feeling around” for the mountain of fire; rather, they could *touch* it if they chose, and suffer the consequences (Ex. 19:12–13).

Otto seems to think that Christ took on material form as an accommodation to the weakness of the disciples. Regarding Christ’s appearance to Thomas, he says, “Jesus has here once again apparently assumed his pre-resurrection appearance in accommodation to the need of his disciples to know that it is in fact he... As with the prior appearance to these disciples, we may well surmise that a glimpse of the Divine Glory was manifested through the tenuous body of the risen Christ ... thus evoking the great confession of doubting Thomas.”⁴³ We may well surmise anything we like, if we do not wish to listen to the plain teaching of the Scripture. Thomas’ doubt was whether the same Jesus who had died had truly risen from the grave. Thomas could entertain the possibility of a ghost dropping in from time to time—an evanescent, fleeting appearance that could be there one second and then gone the next. But in order to believe, he wanted to see a real, physically resurrected Jesus. The account is recorded in John 20:26–29:

And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, “Peace to you!” Then He said to Thomas, “Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but

43. *Ibid.*, 243.

believing.” And Thomas answered and said to Him, “My LORD and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” {245}

The confession of Thomas was brought about because he saw Jesus with his own *eyes*, not because he saw him with the eyes of *faith*. It was precisely Jesus’ *humanity* that brought about Thomas’ great confession, “My LORD and My God!” Far from being a veil for the divine glory, Jesus’ *humanity expressed* it, a fact recognized by doubting Thomas, but not, apparently, by Randall Otto.

Otto’s error is in assuming that a physical being cannot appear or disappear at will and retain his essential humanity. Thus Christ’s capacity to make himself visible or invisible implies that there could be no sameness of quality between his pre-resurrection and post-resurrection body. Implicit in this view is that the pre-resurrection Christ could not have made himself invisible. Physicality thus negates invisibility, and only a resurrection can add this power. Of course, there is no support in Scripture for the notion that the pre-resurrection Christ lacked the power to become invisible. Otto implicitly assumes this, but nowhere argues for it. Indeed, given the power that Christ displayed at his transfiguration, such a limitation seems absurd. Otto says, “In the days following his resurrection, Jesus was normally invisible to men, for his body, having now participated in his glorification, was spiritual and incapable of being seen except by the rest of the spiritual realm. The invisibility of his body also rendered his glory invisible.”⁴⁴ Further, “Although [Jesus] did manifest himself with varying degrees of substantiality, even eating with his brethren on several occasions (Luke 24:41–43; John 21:12–13; Acts 10:41), with [Murray J.] Harris we affirm the basically immaterial and invisible nature of Christ’s glorified resurrection body.”⁴⁵ Having aligned himself with heresy up to this point, we are not surprised to find Otto aligning himself with the heretic, Murray Harris, who has denied that Jesus rose with the same body with which he died. Both Otto and Harris have, to use the words of Norman Geisler, denied the “numerical identity and essential materiality” of the

44. *Ibid.*, 246.

45. *Ibid.*, 248.

pre- and post-resurrection body of Christ.⁴⁶

Otto is not the only hyper-preterist to adopt a heretical view of Christ's resurrection. Given the exegetical connections between the incarnation and resurrection, the resurrection and ascension, and the ascension and parousia, HPs have little choice but to dematerialize Jesus Christ all down the line. Thus, the denial of a {246} visible parousia is not an innocent thing, not a benign quest to understand New Testament prophecy. It leads inevitably to the denial of the resurrection of Jesus, then further, the reality of his incarnation. Notice how one hyper-preterist, Ed Stevens, affirms the orthodox faith only to deny it with his qualifications (I have emphasized the tell-tale signs of dematerialization):

Jesus is the firstfruit of the resurrection harvest. He was the first one to receive a "glorified, spiritual, immortal, incorruptible, heavenly" body. It had continuity with His *mere fleshly body* in the sense of personal identity and the ability to reappear in a tangible visible form for evidential purposes, but as Murray Harris well points out, it was much more than just a *mere physical body*... But he is the firstfruit of *new kind of resurrection*... Paul teaches that the body (the seed) which is planted in the dust of the ground (physical death) *is not the body which is to be*, but that God will give the seed *a new kind of body* which arises out of the inside of the seed (not from the outer shell). The *outer shell of the seed (the physical part of the body) dies and decays in the ground*, while the quickened germ of life within the seed body sprouts into *a new kind of body* fitted for its heavenly existence.⁴⁷

Of course, Stevens contradicts St. Peter, who quotes the Psalmist, "[H]e, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption."⁴⁸ Jesus' flesh (his body) did not see corruption, did not decay; therefore, there is no need to stretch the metaphor of putting off the "outer shell" into an heretical direction—to receive

46. "The Battle for the Resurrection: An Interview with Dr. Norman Geisler" (*Christian Research Journal*, June 30, 1994). See also, Geisler's essay, "I Believe ... in the Resurrection of the Flesh" (*Christian Research Journal*, Summer 1989), 20. This essay can also be found on the Internet at: <http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/crj/crj-jrnl/crj0056a.txt>.

47. Ch-Recon E-Mail list, Feb. 27, 1997.

48. *Acts* 2:31.

a “new kind of body.” Jesus rose with the same body he died with, the same body he was born with, the same body that he will appear with at the parousia, the resurrection, and the final judgment—indeed, the same body he will have for eternity. To be sure, his body is *more* than it was prior to the resurrection, but then again, it is *no less* than it was prior to the resurrection. The orthodox faith has always affirmed both parts of that sentence, but HPs, in the interests of their eschatological *a priori* must affirm only the first clause and deny the second. For there is no other way to have an invisible, non-material, non-physical, non-global parousia other than by making Christ less than he was, by robbing him of his essential humanity. {247}

The Fullness of the Godhead Bodily

Colossians 1:15 says, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.” Hebrews 1:3 says, “[W]ho being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high...” One might think these verses derail Otto’s program of reducing Christ to a mere mental hologram, but no, “Christ is said to be ‘the image’ of the invisible God. The word ‘image,’ it should be noted, does not require *physical* visual representation; it may also have to do with mental representation... [T]he question remains open as to whether this *visibility* is *physical* or *mental*.”⁴⁹ Mental visibility? Otto gives us paradox where Paul gives us clarity; but Otto anticipates such an objection. He goes on, without warrant, to refer the above passages to the pre-incarnate Christ. He seems to think that because John 1:1–2 speaks of the pre-incarnate Word taking on flesh, that Paul in the above verses must also be speaking of the pre-incarnate Word. But John clearly says, “In the beginning,” whereas Paul’s reference is to the *current* state of affairs. That Paul had no hesitation in regarding the body of Christ as the physical image or representation of the invisible God is clear in Colossians 2:9, “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily...”

Otto’s de-materializing interpretation of these verses, as well

49. *Coming in the Clouds*, 125.

as many others, shows a cavalier unconcern for orthodoxy, and for the history of the church's struggle with heretical views of the incarnation: His view is that Jesus was merely an *instrument* to veil the glory cloud. Compare this, however, with Meredith Kline's orthodox view:

[t is from the face of Jesus that the light of the divine Glory now shines, the face which in the transfiguration parousia shone like the sun... When *Christ's parousia* is spoken of as a revelation in glory, as it is repeatedly, what is in view is the specific idea that Jesus is the embodiment of the theophanic Glory of God revealed in the Old Testament... [T]he cosmos-shaking voice of the LORD as he speaks from heaven at the eschatological judgment will answer to the terrifying, earth-shaking voice of God in his ancient descent in the theophanic cloud with sound of trumpet and voice of words on Sinai...⁵⁰ {248}

Kline was one of the first to draw attention to the relationship between the glory cloud and the incarnation, but he did not see Christ's "embodiment" as a *veiling* but rather as a *manifestation* of the divine glory.

St. Peter says, "For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our LORD Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty."⁵¹ Characteristically, Otto says the disciples viewed Christ's majesty, "with the eyes of faith," and that they were in a "dreamy trance," a "sleepy stupor," and *heard* rather than *saw* the transfiguration and that⁵² "[W]e may assert that their seeing of the Divine Glory was indeed impossible." Peter apparently had it all wrong; they were not *eyewitnesses* of his majesty, but only *hearers* of it, and that only in a dreamy trance or sleepy stupor. Charity forbids our bringing up the matter of just who is in a "sleepy stupor" here; accuracy, however, requires us to say that Otto is wrong and Peter is right. The disciples were *eyewitnesses* of the divine glory.

Otto cannot even leave poor Lazarus alone, but denies that the dead man was actually dead and therefore actually resurrected. Instead, Otto drags in the colorless term "resuscitation." "While

50. *Images of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), 121–22.

51. 2 *Pet* 1:16.

52. *Coming in the Clouds*, 208.

the case of Lazarus entails, strictly speaking, a resuscitation (with physical death and resurrection still to come) as opposed to actual resurrection (with physical death passed and no longer in view), this raising anticipates ... that which follows upon the coming again [of Christ].”⁵³ So Lazarus apparently didn’t die (“physical death ... still to come”) and wasn’t actually resurrected, either. Though Jesus said, “Lazarus is dead,” he should have said, strictly speaking, that “Lazarus is hibernating.” What bothers Otto about Lazarus is not so much that Lazarus was dead and then resurrected, but that Jesus said his raising would be a manifestation of *divine glory*. “Jesus said to [Martha], ‘Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?’” To escape the force of this, Otto again has recourse to Barth-speak in order to deny the visibility of God’s glory in Jesus Christ: “[J]esus’ reference to ‘seeing’ God’s glory does not entail a visual manifestation of the naked glory of God ... Rather, the ‘seeing’ of God’s glory is based on faith and not perspicuous visibility to the common eye. ...”⁵⁴ We once thought Otto was a heretic; now it has slowly crept into {249} our minds, though we hesitate to say it, that Otto may simply be an idiot.

Is there no truth at all in the notion that the divine glory is veiled by the flesh? That without the barrier of flesh men would die, that physicality is only an instrument for concealing the divine glory, and that when this glory is once again manifested, physicality must be given up? Isn’t this the teaching of Paul when he says, “[T]he blessed and only Potentate, the King of Kings and LORD of LORDS, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen.”⁵⁵ Doesn’t this manifestation of unapproachable light require a divestiture of the physical body? Is Otto correct after all when he says that God’s glory can only be seen by the eyes of faith, rather than by sight? Doesn’t Jesus confirm this view: ‘And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.’ Shouldn’t we then agree with Raymond E. Brown, whom

53. *Ibid.*, 213.

54. *Ibid.*, 212.

55. *I Tim* 6:15–16.

Otto cites favorably on this verse: “Does this imply that the glory he had before the incarnation in the flesh will be the same as the glory he had before the incarnation? If so, the ‘flesh’ of Jesus does not seem to play a profound role in John’s view of his exaltation.”⁵⁶

It seems to us that there is an obstinacy in such men that bespeaks the implacable hatred of heretics for the truth of our Savior’s full humanity. In fact, the truth is that Christ’s divestiture of his divine honors and glory was not something he did out of an ontological necessity, as if he had no choice in the matter. Setting aside his glory was not a necessary condition or requirement for the possibility of his incarnation as a *physical* being. Surely the transfiguration of the pre-resurrection Jesus should have kept Otto from making this deduction. Moreover, there are other incidents in which the incarnate Christ expressed his glory in physical form. For instance, we see it in his first public and visible miracle, turning water to wine.” This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and *manifested His glory*; and His disciples believed in Him.”⁵⁷ We also see it when Jesus walks on water:

Then He saw them straining at rowing, for the wind was against them. Now about the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea, and would have passed them by. And {250} when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed it was a ghost, and cried out; for they all saw Him and were troubled. But immediately He talked with them and said to them, “Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.” Then He went up into the boat to them, and the wind ceased. And they were greatly amazed in themselves beyond measure, and marveled.⁵⁸

This was the same reaction they had when Jesus appeared to them *after* his resurrection: “Now as they said these things, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, ‘Peace to you.’ But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit.”⁵⁹ Otto says that when the disciples saw Jesus walking by their boat, they saw him as a “misty and numinous

56. *Coming in the Clouds*, 218; citing Brown’s, *The Gospel According to John, The Anchor Bible*, at 17:5.

57. *Ibid.*, 168; emphasis added. Otto says Jesus’ miracle of turning water into wine was seen only by the eyes of faith, and that it was a “hidden glory.”

58. Mark 6:48–51.

59. Luke 24:36–39.

form,” having “the characteristics of human shape” and also that “[w]hat the disciples actually saw in this miraculous occurrence is thus extremely enigmatic.”⁶⁰ He further states that what they saw was probably a “brightness amidst the night that was beclouded by mist and fog” (178). Nevertheless, the only one here who is beclouded is Otto. The verse twice mentions that the disciples saw *Jesus*, not a brightness or a misty fog: Jesus did not actually take on the form of a ghost either when he walked on the water or when he appeared to the disciples after the resurrection. In fact, he clearly denied he was a ghost in the latter instance, so there is no reason to think he took on the form of a ghost in the earlier instance. Therefore, the expression of the divine glory is in no way limited by physicality or materiality, either before or after the resurrection.

The real reason that Jesus divested his divine honors and glory can be found in Philippians 2:4–11:

Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, {251} and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

It is clear from Paul’s words that it was in some sense *necessary* for the divine glory to be set aside so that Jesus could take on the form of a servant in order that he might die on the cross for our salvation. However, this necessity of divine divestiture was not an ontological necessity, but an *ethical* necessity. Since Otto fails to see this, he reduces the necessity of the *kenosis* of the Son of God to a static ontological requirement, robbing it of its dynamic, voluntary character, making it less an act of obedience and more an act of patronizing condescension. This is hardly the thought that Paul was attempting to convey in this verse.

60. *Coming in the Clouds*, 177.

Conclusion

Summing up his book, Otto says, “It is hoped that, as a result of this biblical theological elucidation of the concept of the coming of God in the cloud(s) through the course of redemptive history, Christendom may dispense with its facile literalism regarding the visibility of the glorified Christ. . . .”⁶¹

My own hope is that readers will see Otto’s facile spiritualism for what it is, a studied attempt to reintroduce quasi-gnostic categories into the Christian church’s understanding of the humanity of Jesus. While it may be premature to describe Otto as a heretic who denies the incarnation, it cannot be denied that his view of the incarnation robs it of one of its key “metaphysical” purposes: to reveal God to man. OTTO’S VIEW DOES NOT ARISE from primary exegesis of biblical textual material, but instead arises from his pre-conceived dogmatic position—that the parousia of Jesus has already taken place and that there is no more promise of his coming again, no more encouragement for us to behave with “holy conduct and godliness,” no more “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...” Moreover, Otto is a heretic if he denies the visibility of Jesus’ second coming, or if he denies the materiality of Jesus’ resurrection. For those Christians who think there is something to

MATT: The footnote reference for #62 is missing. I’m putting the text here.⁶² {252} learn from Otto and the hyper-preterists, I hope they will take St. Paul’s counsel seriously, “And from such people turn away!”

Addendum

The Spiritual Council of Sacramento Covenant Reformed Church prepared an overture to the Western Classis, asking it to adopt and forward to the Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States, the following:

Whereas,

61. *Ibid.*, xiii.

62. 2 Pet. 3:11–12.

The Hymenaeans called “hyperpreterists” allege, against the clear teaching of God’s Inspired and Infallible Word, that there is no physical Resurrection of the body, and whereas

The Hymenaeans called “hyperpreterists” allege, against the clear teaching of God’s Inspired and Infallible Word, that the Second Coming of our Lord is already past, and whereas

The Hymenaeans called “hyperpreterists” allege, against the clear teaching of God’s Inspired and Infallible Word, that there is no future Great White Throne Judgment, and

Whereas, these views represent a satanic attack upon the holy catholic faith once delivered unto the saints,

Therefore, in the certain Hope of the Resurrection, the Reformed Church in the United States does hereby find the Hymenaeian heresy to be contrary to orthodoxy, and its adherents to be preachers of a false gospel. Let these enemies of Christ and His Kingdom be anathema maranatha.

We further urge the Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States to broadly communicate the action taken this day to those of like precious faith, that the people of God may be warned against this false gospel, and encouraged to pray for the repentance of those lost souls who have been enslaved by it.

ADOPTED BY WESTERN CLASSIS MARCH 13, 1997 AND FORWARDED TO SYNOD.

To this we say, Amen, and Amen!

THE ESCHATOLOGY OF MATERIALISTIC DARWINISM

Mark Ludwig

Our understanding of the “end times” (eschatology) has a practical bearing on how we live our day-to-day lives. That applies not only to the Christian but to everyone, no matter what they believe about God, the supernatural, life, or death. In fact, to a very large extent, our society has become a picture of our eschatology.

For most people, that eschatology is materialistic and evolutionary (e.g., Darwinian). For the average person, believer or not, God plays no practical role in shaping history. He may bless them emotionally during the day, or save them from some near-calamity, but he is not really the King of Kings anymore. Thus, the modern popular eschatology is materialistic. Secondly, the modern popular eschatology is evolutionary. Competition and the survival of the fittest are capable of producing endless improvement. That is the essence of the principles of any democratic nation.

If we look at the United States—or any democratic nation—today, we see this faith written large in the hearts and minds of its people. The idea that a nation will be improved by various political factions jockeying for votes is, in essence, evolutionary. After all, counting votes is little more than a survival of the fittest process. As the ultimate arbiter of right and wrong, the vote is also morally blind in any ordinary sense of the word. It doesn't really matter whether the Christian Right gains the upper hand in the political process, or whether the homosexuals or pedophiles do.

Given such eschatology, man's physical survival depends on man's own actions. Thus we must defend ourselves from nuclear attack as well as work to get rid of the nukes altogether. We must protect the environment, etc. Yet man's survival goes beyond merely his body. The evolutionary eschatology applies to man's ideas as well. Thus, we must “make the world safe for democracy”

and other such inane ideas. What our former presidents meant when they said that was that we must keep these ideas which we cherish alive, whether those ideas be democracy as opposed to tyranny, or {258} international socialism as opposed to national socialism, or fascism (state controlled capitalism) versus true free enterprise. Any way you cut it, man is master of his own destiny.

To a large extent, the modern church has cut a deal with this evolutionary, popular eschatology. Once we confine ourselves to the church, and we confine ourselves to the spoken eschatological beliefs in the church (as opposed to what is practiced, which is evolutionary), we have to recognize that the most popular eschatology is one of defeat. In other words, the world will become a worse and worse place until Jesus comes to rescue us. Until the second advent, all we have to look forward to is growing state control, the triumph of evil men, and eventually the antichrist, the mark of the beast, and the great tribulation. The only hope the church has is either the rapture or the second coming.

How is this a compromise with evolutionary eschatology? First, by adhering to such beliefs, the church has voluntarily committed itself to irrelevancy in the here-and-now. Rather than being a world-changing force, the people of God are at best spectators. At worst, they are spectators forced to flee from the grandstands because the lions have turned on the audience. The people who will shape history are thought to be (a) the mightiest princes of this world and (b) a small socialist democracy in the Middle East. In essence, this idea of how the world is to work is a surrender to the evolutionary eschatology.

Maintaining that the world will be ruled by evil up to the point of a historically unique supernatural intervention is a surrender to materialism. It is to make an unnatural split in history, effectively denying the working of God in the here-and-now. The god of such a perspective is not the Christian God, but a deist's god—a god outside of the machine, waiting for it to crash and burn so he can pick up the pieces. Yet if God does not work in the here-and-now, then the world is left to survival of the fittest. Good guys really do finish last, so you'd better live your life like a materialist.

It is little wonder that the Christian who believes such an eschatology must become either schizophrenic or manic-depressive. He says he believes in God and trusts God, yet in the

practical day-to-day world, he acknowledges that his faith is an impediment {259} to his own survival. Thus, he wants to live as a Christian, but he believes he must live as a materialist or concede defeat. Such schizophrenia produces a nation that says it believes in God, but lives like hell. Sound familiar?

A similar schizophrenia occurred centuries ago, and the results were disastrous. Christians understood that God created the universe, but they built their understanding of the universe not around the Scripture, but around Greek philosophy. Aristotelian geocentricity became a test of the Faith. The universe was held to be static and Euclidean, essentially unchanging and infinite in extent. To fit this universe into the Faith, it was supposed that God either popped it—or the matter in it—into existence at some point in the past.

In the 16th century, when Newtonian mechanics was formulated and put to work, science began to succeed at describing phenomena in our world so well that the idea of a God working personally and miraculously in the world began to give way to a God who worked primarily through natural law. By and by, the miraculous was edged out further and further from real day-to-day experience. Newton invoked God to explain planetary orbits that varied from his expectations, and he had no qualms about suggesting that living organisms may not fall under his laws of mechanics. Yet by the 19th century, Laplace could claim that he had “no need of that hypothesis” (e.g., God), and biology had become a thriving science that was integrated with other scientific disciplines.

The present world was understood in terms of natural law, and not the direct action of God. The past was understood in terms of an eternal, static universe, except for a blinding miracle that cut straight across all thinking in terms of natural law. In retrospect, the miracle seemed curiously out of place set against the general understanding of the very nature of the universe itself. The whole idea of creation had been put into a very small box, just about the right size for an intelligent man to step on. Creation involved the supernatural, but the creation which Christians believed in was not really even philosophically consistent with a supernaturalist worldview because the miracle was seen as a unique exception in a world of law. {260}

Only later, after creation had become an arcane curiosity among intellectuals, did Einstein come along and question the very thing that began leading Christians down the wrong road from the beginning, the Euclidean universe.

Rather than beating Einstein to the punch, though, the church was content to be infiltrated with secular philosophy, which had the effect of removing God from the world and the church, leaving the church powerless to combat materialistic ideas.

Just so, the modern church's spoken eschatology has put God in a box, and rendered God's people powerless. Many Christians are convinced that the righteous must inevitably—by the will of God—fail, suffering ever-increasing irrelevance, frustration and defeat. So they are rendered powerless to do any good work—disheartened before they even begin.

But is the present social and political condition of the world the inevitable fulfillment of the word of God, or is it a self-fulfilling prophecy, the result of a Christian community that doesn't really believe in God, and that twists Scripture to accommodate materialism? I don't know the answer to that question. I do know that, looking at cause and effect, it would appear that the evil times we live in are largely the result of the retreat of those who claim to believe the Scripture, but who don't really believe. When challenged, be it by scientists or perverts, they back off. They surrender a little here, a little there to the devil, until we're in a real mess. {261}

Book Reviews

HOW THE CHURCH UNDERMINED THE FAITH

Rev. Andrew Sandlin

A Review Article

Frederick Beiser, *The Sovereignty of Reason*

Princeton University Press, 1996. 332 pp., including index.
ISBN 0-691-03395-1

During the summer of 1997, Rushdoony was raving to me about the thesis of Beiser's work. He bought me a copy and I read it for myself. Now I know what all the fuss was about. This book is perhaps the most telling revelation ever written from a non-Christian perspective about the church's role in subverting the Faith; but it is also the most patent confirmation of Cornelius Van Til's and Rushdoony's well-honed explanation of the utter destructiveness of the notion and practice of human autonomy. Beiser's work, subtitled *The Defense of Rationality in the Early English Enlightenment*, limits its treatment to the Anglican church and to England as a nation. However, its thesis is so cogently argued and painstakingly documented that those alert to the trends of rationalism in both continental and American churches cannot but conclude that rationalism's subversion of the Church of England and English society is just a single illustration of the pattern of religious destruction of post-Reformation times almost everywhere.

Far from accepting the prevailing wisdom that the new natural philosophy of the English Enlightenment made inroads into the church and thereby neutralized her virile Christian message, Beiser shows that it was precisely *within* the bosom of the Church

of England where the pernicious rationalism which utterly eviscerated the Faith originally emerged. Two factors contributed to this emergence. First, there was the ecclesiastically and politically motivated attempt by Richard Hooker, the Great Tew Circle, and Cambridge Platonism to justify and defend the established Church of England against the zealous Calvinistic Puritans on one hand, and the traditionary Roman Catholics on the other. The second factor in the genesis of rationalism within the church was the increasing discomfort with the old Reformational, and specifically Puritan, conception of the sovereignly predestinating God. These factors deserve explanation.

Anglicans and Puritans

The Church of England in the late sixteenth century included two principal parties: the High Churchmen who wished to maintain and secure, by Erastian monarchy, the *via media* between the rigorous Calvinism on the one hand and Roman Catholicism on the other (chapter 2).. {262} The Puritans were zealous to purify the church along explicitly biblical lines. Beiser notes that the Puritans, by and large, were theonomic (he uses the term *theocratic*). Beiser's account of Hooker's dispute with the Puritan Thomas Cartwright, in fact, includes documentation of the latter's strictly theonomic views that "the Gospel did not abrogate the moral or civil but only the ceremonial law of Moses; it then gave us in addition further moral and ecclesiastical laws" (54). Although the majority of the Puritans were not as *strictly* theonomic as Cartwright, the conclusion of their approach to the character of Scripture led to much the same thing: that both civil and ecclesiastical law must be governed by Holy Scripture. This notion, of course, would never do for the *via media* High Churchmen who wished to locate the authority for regulating both church and state in the hands of the monarchy, with the subordinate assistance of the Church of England. Thomas Hooker, in his memorable and misguided *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, was obliged to defend the High Church view by asserting that not only Scripture, but reason and tradition as well must function as authorities in the church and Faith: "The aim of this theory is to establish reason as an equal and independent source of

intellectual authority alongside Scripture, and thus to undermine the Puritans' narrow and exclusive reliance upon Holy Writ" (62). Hooker offered an ingenious defense of such a superexalted view of reason: he reintroduced a version of the ancient Greek notion of the eternality of the law of the universe, an idea known as "natural law." This is the view that the universe is structured according to a benevolent law to which both God and man are subject, and which permeates the mind of both God and man. Therefore, since "reason knows these eternal laws, it will be in possession of certain universal and necessary criteria to judge human action and belief. Moreover, its edicts and verdicts will have divine authority, since they will give voice to nothing less than the divine nature itself. Thus reason by itself will be able to know the nature of God apart from Scripture" (Ibid.). This view expressly denied both the predestinarian sovereignty taught by Luther and Calvin, and the nominalism taught by Ockham. Both assert (though in different ways and for radically different reasons) that law and morality are what they are because God has determined that it be so. Hooker, and the later natural law tradition, held that God acts lawfully and morally precisely because law and morality could not be otherwise: they are part of the structure of the universe.

Understandably, this view of natural law undermines the sovereignty of God as expressed in the Augustinian and Reformational view of Scripture, which refer to God as the source, not the servant, of law and morality. Had the High Churchmen assented to the radically biblical role of Scripture in reforming the church and the state that the Puritans {263} demanded, they would have been forced to abandon the *via media* arrangement of the Anglican church as well as the monarchy. This, of course, they were not prepared to do. Hooker's insistence on an authoritative role for reason was therefore necessary to justify the Anglican *status quo*.

This superexalted place for reason must have appeared stunning to those still strongly within the Reformational fold: "Reason has such great authority for Hooker chiefly because it is a manifestation of the divine law. Since reason knows the law of nature and since the law of nature is a manifestation of the eternal law, reason knows the divine nature itself. The voice of reason is therefore divine" (65). Though the Puritans argued vigorously against this

thesis, it did not meet with the astonishment we might expect because Luther and Calvin, despite their dim view of natural law, still furnished a small room for it in their theological house (25–30).¹ Still operating somewhat within the medieval notion of the nature-grace distinction, both Reformers retained elements of the medieval scholasticism which allows “the laws of nature” to suitably supplement the infallible revelation of God in the Bible. Neither Calvin nor Luther was consistent in this affirmation, however, and sometimes when one reads Calvin (as in the early chapters of the *Institutes*) he seems to be saying quite plainly that man after the Fall can know nothing truly unless he knows it on the basis of Scripture. While in other places (notably in the final chapter of the *Institutes*) he claims it is mistaken to form a state on the laws of Moses and instead recommends to magistrates the so-called “laws of nations.”

The Puritans were much closer to the biblical view and to Van Til and especially Rushdoony’s: man can know nothing truly apart from the revelation of God in Holy Scripture. It is true that, as Van Til says, “all men unavoidably know God.” However, since they suppress the revelation of God within them and the revelation of God in nature, they must consistently and unwaveringly look to Holy Scripture as the source of truth by which all of life must be lived. While Hooker seemed to be claiming that Scripture, reason, and tradition were coordinate authorities, in effect reason won out: “[R]eason is not only an equal but a higher source of authority than Scripture itself, for it is through reason alone that we can be assured of a legitimacy of Scripture” (75). This is as much as to say that *whatever enjoys the role of epistemological validation necessarily enjoys the role of ultimate authority.*

Beiser correctly observes that in this point Hooker deviates radically from the Protestant view of the self-attestation of the Bible. Eerily portending the debates of the twentieth century, Hooker and Cartwright argued over the *jurisdiction* of the Bible’s authority. While Hooker held {264} that it was the rule of faith, Cartwright held that it was the rule of faith and life. Hooker submitted that there were simply many things in life which the

1. August Lang, “The Reformation and Natural Law,” in ed., William Park Armstrong, *Calvin and the Reformation* (Grand Rapids [1909], 1980), 56–98.

Bible was never intended to govern, and that in these matters, one must appeal to reason and tradition. Cartwright, on the other hand, noted that while the Bible does not speak explicitly and specifically about all things, it speaks explicitly and specifically about many things, and generally and implicitly about *all* other things. Notably, this is just the position Van Til articulated.²

Hooker's superexaltation of reason was the only crack in the door that was necessary to assure the expansion of the role of reason and consequently the contraction of the role of Holy Scripture (chapters 3 and 4). The group of seventeenth century luminaries known as the Great Tew Circle, as well as the Cambridge Platonists who were all ostensibly committed to the Church of England and, like Hooker, to defending it against both Puritanism and Romanism, took Hooker's cue and expanded the claims for the power of reason: "Contrary to intention, these writers undermined the sovereignty of the Bible and Protestantism. Although they defended the orthodox Protestant view that Scripture was the rule of faith, they implicitly gave reason an even higher authority than Scripture by insisting that Scripture too must conform to the norms of historical evidence" (86). In this regard they resembled Hooker, but their rationalism was much more explicit, emphatic, and general than his: "[t]hey made the principle that we should examine all beliefs according to reason into a religious duty, indeed into the characteristic obligation of the Protestant" (Ibid.).

The Great Tew Circle was greatly indebted to two principal intellectual schools in the period: Socinianism and Arminianism. "We find in the Socinian and Arminian traditions the same devotion to reason, toleration, ecumenism, and irenicism. We also see the same in theology of universal grace, free will, and good works" (89). Four main presuppositions mark the Great Tew men: the view that one can maintain faith by natural reason apart from supernatural grace; hostility toward the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination; distaste for the adamant zeal of the dogmatism of orthodox Protestantism and orthodox Romanism; and, most significantly, the aversion to theological dogma. They were essentially moralists—what is important is the moral rectitude of

2. Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Phillipsburg, NJ, 1967 edition), 8.

the individual, not his or the church's theological orthodoxy. This notion, of course, has been a major tenet of Protestant liberalism for over 150 years now. It originated among ostensibly faithful members of the Church of England early in the seventeenth century.

In the 1630s, "all the rationalist tendencies inherent in the English Church . . . fully blossomed in Cambridge Platonism" (134). {265} Interestingly, the Cambridge Platonists developed their rationalism apart from any knowledge of Descartes or other philosophical rationalists. For the Cambridge Platonists, rationalism was principally a theological, not a philosophical, construct (in this, they were correct). From the natural law tradition, they developed the systematic natural theology, according to which knowledge of good and evil, of right and wrong, of justice and injustice, exist in the very structure of the universe. While they were not committed to overthrowing Scripture, their diversion to natural theology meant, in practice, that the Bible was superfluous. A significant motivation of the Cambridge Platonists was the problem of atheism, which they believed a strict Protestantism tended to generate in the minds of logical, thoughtful people. Their logic here was simple: if God is the source of all things, including morality and law, and if all depends on his infallible decree, there is no room for real human freedom. In addition, since all men are not saved, God can be charged with being a great cosmic monster. The Cambridge Platonists held that this line of reasoning easily leads men to atheism. The solution to the problem is to deny the predestinarianism of Calvin and Luther and interpose a natural theology that makes both God and man subject to the eternal law of the universe. In this way, they hoped to get God out of theological hot water and justify the ways of God to man. They made the fundamental error of assuming that atheism is an intellectual problem. However, Scripture teaches that atheism is a *moral* problem. To his credit, Beiser notes this point (142). Unfortunately, by the early seventeenth century even some of the Puritans were feeling the effect of the new rationalistic spirit and gradually compromised the message of old-line Calvinism. In an insightful paragraph, Beiser declares:

Assuming, then [as the Cambridge Platonists did], that the danger of atheism originally arose from Calvin's theology, what was the

best antidote? What, if anything, could cure the sick soul fraught with anxieties over its salvation?... The answer would have to come within the field of theology itself, and from one field of theology in particular, namely soteriology. What was required, in other words, was a new theory about the nature of God and the conditions under which he grants salvation. (148)

The underpinning of this revision is the notion that, “God acts not in an arbitrary and mysterious but in a necessary and intelligible manner according to eternal rules and laws” (148, 149). This alteration may {266} seem to the unwary as nothing more than a theological tempest in a denominational teapot. In reality, it shifts the entire foundation of the Christian religion. It is not merely the theological war between natural law and philosophical nominalism, between the view that eternal law is woven into the very structure of the universe and the view that law and morality are merely conventional or customary, shaped by merely human and temporal considerations, a simple revival of the Nominalist controversy. Rather, it is the battle between God and Satan first joined in the Garden of Eden. Satan endeavored to persuade Eve that there exists a universal standard greater than God to which *both* God *and* man should bow down. God had stated on the basis of his self-attesting authority that all standards of law and morality are what they are because he says so. Eve opted to take the “natural law” approach, thus plunging the entire race into sin. *The rationalism of the Cambridge Platonists and other deviants within the bosom of the Church of England were thus reintroducing Original Sin under the guise of the defense of the Faith.* As Van Til and Rushdoony would note four centuries later, the church’s polluted apologetic methods which refuse to surrender human autonomy relentlessly undermine the Faith.³ Beiser notes that even the otherwise stalwart Puritans began to adopt the rationalistic tack in introducing it into their soteriology. Beiser quotes William Perkins’ comment that the conscience “is (as it were) a little God sitting in the middle on men’s hearts” (156). Perkins and other Puritans argued that conscience was reason itself, which was really nothing more than God speaking within man. In other words,

3. R. J. Rushdoony, *By What Standard?* (Vallecito, CA [1958], 1995), 1-7 and *passim*.

the voice of reason was transformed into the voice of God. This is rationalism with a vengeance.

One of the leading Cambridge Platonists, Benjamin Whichcote, posited the view popular today⁴ that “reason has power to grasp the divine. Since things are good and evil, just and unjust, absolutely, both God and men think and act according to the same prototypes, laws, and standards. There is thus a homogeneity between the divine and the human mind, which differ only in degree from one another” (162). This view is preserved even in some Reformed quarters today, where it is assumed that God and man reason univocally, that logic is not a creation of God but reflects his very being and nature. Few notions could be more idolatrous and damaging: It was this very sort of reasoning that eviscerated the Christian Faith in the seventeenth century.

Beiser goes on to discuss how rationalism was employed to combat the “enthusiasts,” those who claimed they received immediate revelation from God apart from or in addition to Holy Scripture (chapter 5). Beiser notes that the enthusiasts themselves broke with the orthodox Protestant tradition in positing the Scripture as essentially a symbolic, rather than {267} historical, book. One whose main function was to inspire in men the same sort of revelation and miracle it did during biblical times. The rationalists, though, did not combat this error on the proper grounds, that is, by pointing men to the cognitive revelation of Holy Scripture. They did not argue against the enthusiasts on the grounds of *finality* of biblical revelation, but rather on the grounds of the *reasonableness* of presuming such finality: “they argued that it would not be *rational* for God to permit any new revelations” (204). Some of the rationalistic arguments against enthusiasm were more naturalistic, however, taking a cue from the new natural philosophy. The point here was that, “enthusiasm amounts to nothing more than a species of superstition” (206). Eventually this reduced to anthropological and psychological arguments—certain people have an internal *need* to presume they are the recipients of special divine revelation. No doubt, in some cases this

4. “The law of noncontradiction is more than a law of human thinking; it is a fundamental law of being as well[!]”, Ronald H. Nash, *The Word of God and the Mind of Man* (Grand Rapids, MI: 1982), 69, 101 and *passim*.

argument was valid. However, since it was not anchored to biblical revelation, but rather to reason (and in some cases, experience), it tended to reduce the claims of biblical supernaturalism. As Beiser notes, it is for this reason, “ironically, spiritualism [enthusiasm] provided a religious sanction for the rationalism that eventually replaced it” (218). If reason rather than the Bible is the ultimate standard in refuting enthusiasm, it may culminate in being the ultimate standard for religion altogether.

It is this historical theme that Beiser takes up in his chapter on the Deism controversy (chapter 6). When Hooker opened the door, albeit slightly, to rationalism by positing Scripture, reason, and tradition as coordinate authorities in the church, he could never foresee that his successors would incrementally press this anti-Christian coordination to its logical conclusion, in which reason is virtually penultimate: “Although they [the predecessors of Deism] affirmed the sovereignty of reason, they did so only to make her the handmaiden of faith. Now, though, reason had become the master. She began to flex her critical muscle and to turn against faith itself” (223). Beiser suggests that even Calvin and Luther are not exempt from criticism, inasmuch as they employed reason and the nominalist tradition as a tool by which to undermine the Roman Catholic dogma of transubstantiation, though this is probably much less true of Luther than of Calvin.⁵ The Deists had carried the superexaltation of reason to the conclusion of systematically eliminating or seriously reducing the elements of supernaturalness in Christianity, which is to say, its very heart. There can be no doubt about the truthfulness of Beiser’s assertion that their “campaign against the supernatural was their belief that it poses a grave threat to human autonomy” (228). He notes the grim irony of those naturalistic thinkers who argued on such grounds, since to deny the supernatural claims of Christianity by substituting the {268} naturalistic claims of the new natural philosophy led squarely into a naturalistic determinism whereby man can no longer be free and therefore autonomous: In other words, consistent naturalism or materialism is always deterministic. But most of the naturalistic Deists at this inchoate stage did not make this connection. Even those Deists

5. Siegbert W. Becker, *The Foolishness of God* (Milwaukee, WI: 1982).

who did not renounce miracles, though, adopted an almost hypocritically pragmatic stance: the notion of miracles is needed among the common, uneducated folk to maintain their sense of responsibility, law, and morality, but we educated elite know better. Like the liberals of the twentieth century, leading Deists John Toland pitted the Bible against Christian orthodoxy: "... the doctrines of the Trinity, transubstantiation, and the Incarnation were mysteries, Toland thought, only because the scholastic concepts of substance, essence, and unity had been imposed upon the simple and plain message of Scripture" (257). Just as Toland was convinced that scholastic formulations of biblical doctrine superimposed an alien message on the Bible, so modern liberals believe that early Christian and Reformational formulations of doctrine (like orthodox Christology and predestination) interpret the Bible through the scheme of an alien grid. These accusations are sheer hypocrisy, however, because liberals, no more than their Deistic predecessors, affirm the divine inspiration and infallibility of Holy Scripture. They simply press the Bible into service when it will suit their own theologically subversive causes.

Beiser notes that the Deists were brothers with the free thinkers, who considered themselves the true heirs of Protestantism in their notion that, "what matters to Protestantism is not *what* we believe but *how* we believe, and in particular whether our faith is arrived at by individual scrutiny or not. Protestantism is therefore consistent with *any* beliefs as long as they are the result of a free examination" (259). This, of course, is a misunderstanding and prostitution of the Protestant idea of liberty of conscience, which actually meant liberty of conscience to interpret Holy Scripture within the bounds of historic Christianity. No conscience is at liberty to deny the word of God.

Beiser's final chapter (chapter 7) deals with the ethical rationalists, those supporters of rationalism committed to creating a natural law paradigm as a means of justifying a bland Christian ethical system apart from the Bible itself

Ethical rationalism made the strongest claims in behalf of reason. It affirmed that reason by itself can determine the fundamental principles of morality, independent not only of revelation, but also of all experience, sentiment, or desire. It held that reason can motivate the will to act without the assistance of {269} supernatural

grace or sensible rewards. And it maintained that reason can provide us with the most sublime metaphysical knowledge: it can discover not only the final ends and providence, but also the eternal laws of good and evil, laws that manifest the divine will itself. Such claims show the distance that English theology had traveled since the stiff and stuffy Calvinist orthodoxy of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In all these respects ethical rationalism was the direct antithesis of the theology of Luther and Calvin. (267)

Beiser recognizes that “rationalists were opposed to all their enemies for a single reason: they undermine the possibility of their cherished, eternal, and immutable morality” (269). This led naturally to the conclusion that, “law has a *normative* force even if God does not exist” (279, emphasis in original). Here we detect the great apologetic compromise of the ethical rationalists who willingly and pointedly employed the tools of the atheist in order to combat them (283). Like Hooker and their immediate predecessors, the rationalists were convinced that human reason was a bulwark against the claims of atheism and immorality. Like Hooker, they did not understand that it is abandoning Holy Scripture to the claims of human reason which is *itself* the chief contributing factor to atheism and immorality. As Van Til and Rushdoony have ceaselessly noted, if we grant sinful man autonomy in our apologetics, we cannot be surprised when he demands it in his ethics.

Beiser concludes by recognizing the utter failure of natural law theory, inasmuch as it is little more than a culturally, politically, and historically shaped wax nose for justifying beliefs already held and, on the other hand, claiming that we cannot abandon this magisterial role of reason. He states categorically, “[h]owever much it cares to question the claims of reason, there can be little doubt that we accept reason alone as our final standard of truth in deciding intellectual questions. No one today in tune with the *Zeitgeist* would demand that we accept without question the authority of inspiration, tradition, or the Bible” (333). Beiser seems oblivious to the utterly destructive claims of Nietzsche and the darling deconstructionists of the modern age, for whom, like

Stanley Fish,⁶ reason is *itself* a faith that demands justification, simply another faith among epistemological competitors.

He also seems oblivious to the fact that from an historical prospective he has verified most dramatically the sweeping claims of Van Til and Rushdoony: human autonomy in the form of rationalism gestated and blossomed within the bosom of the church and later consumed the Faith from which it ostensibly sprung. {270}

Contrary to Beiser's assumption, orthodox Christians of all stripes—and their number is growing—do *not* accord to reason a place of supreme arbiter, but agree entirely with Van Til and Rushdoony: our final authority in *all* matters is the self-attesting Triune God speaking infallibly in Holy Scripture:

*As self-explanatory, God naturally speaks with absolute authority. It is Christ as God who speaks in the Bible. Therefore the Bible does not appeal to human reason as absolute in order to just what it says. It comes to the human being with absolute authority. Its claim is that human reason must be taken in the sense in which Scripture takes it, namely, as created by God and therefore properly subject to the authority of God.*⁷

May our number increase!

6. Stanley Fish, *There's No Such Thing as Free Speech ... And It's A Good Thing Too* (New York and Oxford, 1994), especially 134–138.

7. Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Phillipsburg, NJ, 1969), 15, emphasis in original.

THE MINISTRY OF CHALCEDON

[Proverbs 29:18]

CHALCEDON (kal-SEE-don) is a Christian educational organization devoted exclusively to research, publishing, and to cogent communication of a distinctly Christian scholarship to the world at large. It makes available a variety of services and programs, all geared to the needs of interested layman who understand the propositions that Jesus Christ speaks to the mind as well as the heart, and that His claims extend beyond the narrow confines of the various institutional churches. We exist in order to support the efforts of all orthodox denominations and Churches.

Chalcedon derives its name from the great ecclesiastical Council of Chalcedon (A D. 451), which produced the crucial Christological definition: "Therefore, following the holy Fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man..." This formula challenges directly every false claim of divinity by any human institution: state, church, cult, school, or human assembly. Christ alone is both God and man, the unique link between heaven and earth. All human power is therefore derivative; Christ alone can announced that "all power is given unto men in heaven and in earth" (Matthew 28:18). Historically, the Chalcedonian creed is therefore the foundation of Western liberty, for its sets limits on all authoritarian human institutions by acknowledging the validity of the claims of the One who is the source of true human freedom (Galatians 5:1).

Christians have generally given up two crucial features of theology that in the past led to the creation of what we know as Western civilization. They no longer have any red optimism concerning the possibility of an earthly victory of Christian principles and Christian institutions, and they have also abandoned the means of such a victory in external human affairs: a distinctly biblical concept of law. The testimony of the Bible and Western history should be clear: when God's people have been confident about the ultimate earthly success of their religion and committed socially to God's revealed system of external law, they have been victorious. When either aspect of their faith has declined, they have lost ground. Without optimism, they lose their zeal to exercise dominion over God's creation (Genesis 1:28); without revealed law, they are left without guidance and

drift along with the standards of their day.

Once Christians invented the university; now they retreat into little Bible colleges or sports factories. Once they built hospitals throughout Europe and America; now the civil governments have taken them over. Once Christians were inspired by “Onward, Christian Soldiers”; now they see themselves as “poor wayfaring strangers” with “joy, joy, joy down in their hearts” only on Sundays and perhaps Wednesday evenings. They are, in a word, pathetic. Unquestionably, they have become culturally impotent.

Chalcedon is committed to the idea of Christian reconstruction. It is premised on the belief that ideas have consequences. It takes seriously the words of Professor F. A. Hayek: “It may well be true that we as scholars tend to overestimate the influence which we can exercise on contemporary affairs. But I doubt whether it is possible to overestimate the influence which ideas have in the long run.” If Christians are to reconquer lost ground in preparation for ultimate victory (Isaiah 2, 65, 66), they must rediscover their intellectual heritage. They must come to grips with the Bible’s warning and its promise: “Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he” (Proverbs 29:18). Chalcedon’s resources are being used to remind Christians of this basic truth: what men believe makes a difference. Therefore, men should not believe lies, for it is the truth that sets them free (John 8:32).

Finis

