

INTRODUCTION

The grand subject of the Holy Scriptures is the Kingdom of God. The great hope of the Scriptures is the dream of Paradise restored. Ever mindful of the promise of the initial creation, as the long tragedy of the fall plays out in history, man longs to be delivered from the curse and reestablished in the favor of God in a new world of perfection and peace, of harmony and happiness. This is the goal of all religions, whether true or false. And this is the goal that has been achieved through the finished work of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah.

As men groan under the curse and deal day by day with the misery and the reality of sin in this world, they look forward to the future. They long for better times. The Scriptural study of future things is called eschatology from *eschatos*, the Greek word for future. For Christians, pilgrims and strangers on this earth, this hope is tied up with the hope of the realization of the future, glorious Kingdom of God. It is based on the promises and prophecies of the Old Testament, of a golden age when Messiah will rule, the curse will be lifted, and peace, prosperity, and righteousness will flourish. This Messianic Age has also been called the Millennium. So the Christian's hope, eschatology the study of future things, the doctrine of the Kingdom of God, have all been wrapped up in the issue of the millennium.

It is for this reason that the main schools of thought in eschatological matters, the main bodies of belief with respect to the Kingdom of God, are all named according to their view of the millennium. And the differences between them are focused on their different interpretations of the millennium. And for that reason this book, a Scriptural defense of historic premillennialism, will also extensively deal with that very issue. To understand the millennium we need to start in Genesis. Nothing could be further from the truth than that the whole question of the millennium is an issue based on a passage in the twentieth chapter of the most figurative book of the Bible, the Revelation. Rather, it is only as we study the Old Testament covenants, promises and prophecies, and see what they say about the Kingdom of God and Messiah's reign, and only as we see how these truths were taught and upheld by Christ and the Apostles, can we begin to understand the glorious truths of the world to come. Let us joyfully, prayerfully, and expectantly study these blessed matters as we await the Blessed Hope, the coming and kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 1

The MILLENNIUM

What is the Millennium? To understand this we have to go back to the very beginning of the creation. In six days God created all things *ex nihilo* and pronounced it all very good. This creation had as its chief purpose to display the glory of God and be a testimony to his glorious attributes. Therefore Paul tells us that even the cursed remnants of that original creation still testify to that divine glory.

*For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: **Romans 1:20***

Even as Psalmist echoes this in his praises...

*The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handywork. **Psalm 19:1***

Not just man, created in the very image of God, to reflect and display his attributes, but the very inanimate things of the creation were all designed to show forth the glory of God. This is brought out in Christ's response to the Pharisees attempting to squelch the praising of the Messiah during the triumphal entry.

*And they brought him to Jesus: and they cast their garments upon the colt, and they set Jesus thereon. And as he went, they spread their clothes in the way. And when he was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen; Saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest. And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto him, Master, rebuke thy disciples. And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out. **Luke 19:35-40***

Now with the whole creation designed and tuned to glorify God what happened? What happened to turn it into a cursed wreck of its former self, filled with hatred of God, blasphemy against God, and rejection of God, where those created in his image reflect the image of their father the Devil? The Scriptures tell us...

*How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. **Isaiah 14:12-14***

Satan, the most illustrious and glorious of all the created beings aspired to be more. In his heart he was lifted up with pride and desired to be as exalted as God himself. He aspired to have the entire creation glorify him and to reflect his image rather than God's. And God confronts him for his part in engineering the fall into the sin and the corruption of the entire creation to take part in the Satanic rebellion against the Creator.

*Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering...Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee. **Ezekiel 28:13-15***

Yet, in spite of all this immediately after the fall God reacts not only in judgment, but also in mercy.

*And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat? And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat. And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. **Genesis 3:11-15***

There is here not only judgment on Adam, Eve, and the Serpent, but also a promise of a future deliverance through the “*seed of the woman*”. The promise is that some day, born of the seed of the woman, God will send a Savior, a Redeemer, a Messiah, who will deliver the creation from the consequences of the fall. God is promising that Satan will not triumph. His purposes will not stand, his conspiracy against God will fail. The implication clearly is that the creation will not forever be subverted to serve Satan and glorify him. Rather one day it will be restored to what it was through the promised seed of the woman, whom we now know to be Jesus Christ. This implies Paradise restored. This implies a future glorious Messianic age. This implies a future state of affairs that corresponds to what is generally called the millennium!

And this is exactly what we see as we see God’s promises and prophecies unfold in the inspired words of his prophets, in the sacred text of the Old Testament Scriptures. Isaiah is most bountiful in his descriptions of this future glorious age.

*And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD’S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. 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: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and 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. **Isaiah 2:2-4***

And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice’ den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.

*And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious. And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. **Isaiah 11:1-11***

For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed. And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the LORD, and their offspring with them. And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and d

*ust shall be the serpent’s meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD. **Isaiah 65:17-25***

And the prophet Daniel echoes the hopeful words of Isaiah of the lifting of the curse and the bringing in of everlasting righteousness in an eternal kingdom in a new earth, as does Micah.

And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Daniel 2:44

But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it. For all people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever. In that day, saith the LORD, will I assemble her that halteth, and I will gather her that is driven out, and her that I have afflicted; And I will make her that halted a remnant, and her that was cast far off a strong nation: and the LORD shall reign over them in mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever. And thou, O tower of the flock, the strong hold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion; the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem. Micah 4:1-8

The Psalmist also sings of these glorious days as he praises God in his song.

Give the king thy judgments, O God, and thy righteousness unto the king's son. He shall judge thy people with righteousness, and thy poor with judgment. The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness. He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor. They shall fear thee as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations. He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth. In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him; and his enemies shall lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him. For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper. He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy. He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence: and precious shall their blood be in his sight. And he shall live, and to him shall be given of the gold of Sheba: prayer also shall be made for him continually; and daily shall he be praised. There shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon: and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth. His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed. Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen, and Amen. The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.

Psalm 72

And the prophet Zechariah, at the end of the Old Testament prophetic period, when the nation has suffered much, has been in exile, and is only partially restored, with the Davidic dynasty still in ruin, looked forward to a better day, when a Greater Son of David will sit on David's throne and bring the messianic blessings to God's people.

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass. And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off: and he shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth.

Zechariah 9:9-10

¹⁶And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. ¹⁷And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of

hosts, even upon them shall be no rain. ¹⁸And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, that have no rain; there shall be the plague, wherewith the LORD will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles. ¹⁹This shall be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all nations that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles.

²⁰In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD; and the pots in the LORD'S house shall be like the bowls before the altar. ²¹Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the LORD of hosts: and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them, and seethe therein: and in that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the LORD of hosts. **Zechariah 14:16-21**

That there will be a millennium, a glorious Messianic Age, is the indisputable subject of prophecy in both the Old Testament and the New. The only question is will be a real millennium? Will it literally fulfil these promises here on earth, where Messiah will reign with his saints? Or can it be spiritualized away as merely God's rule in our hearts or can it be fulfilled in the blissful state of the departed saints in heaven awaiting the resurrection as amillennialists teach. Can it be reduced to merely the church successfully evangelizing the world? Can it really be fulfilled in a Messianic Kingdom without the Messiah present as Postmillennialists teach? It is with these issues that we will deal in the chapters to follow.

The Eternal State

It is at this time probably appropriate to make the distinction between the millennium and the eternal state. This distinction is clearly laid out in the book of Revelation, where we read...

¹And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. ²And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, ³And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season. ⁴And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. ⁵But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. ⁶Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years. ⁷And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, ⁸And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. ⁹And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. ¹⁰And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever. **Revelation 20:1-10**

This passage clearly speaks of a thousand year reign of Christ on earth. During this time, Christ and his saints are ruling on an earth where there is still a population that includes unbelievers, unregenerate, and wicked men. These are eventually led by Satan in a final rebellion against God and His Messiah at the end of the millennium. This brings about the final overthrow of Satan, the final destruction of the wicked, and their eternal judgment in the Lake of Fire. This is followed in Revelation 21 with the creation of the new heavens and the new earth and the eternal state.

The question before us is, can this passage, which many opponents of premillennialism take in an allegorical sense or spiritualize in a way to avoid its direct implications, be taken literally? Although the book of Revelation is specifically dedicated to the revelation of future things, that is to eschatology, and its testimony on this issue is rather explicit and clear, it may not be accepted that way by those who are otherwise minded. So, the question is does the rest of Scripture support this view? We think decidedly so. First of all we have the testimony of the Old Testament millennial prophecies as quoted above. These clearly indicate a Messianic age and a Messianic rule that includes the presence of the wicked over whom Christ will rule. As all eschatological positions agree that there are only the redeemed in the

Kingdom of God during the eternal state, these passages must refer to a different period. They must refer to the millennium.

When Isaiah says, *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*, in a millennial passage he is indicating that during this time people will be being converted and coming to the knowledge of and faith in the true God. This cannot be the eternal state. When he goes on in the same passage to state, *And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people*, he indicates that Christ in his Messianic rule will be judging and rebuking the wicked. Again this cannot be the eternal state. And when Micah, again in the middle of millennial passage similarly says, *And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off*, the point is driven home even more emphatically that this cannot be referring to the eternal state. And again, paralleling the testimony of Isaiah, Micah goes on to say, *For all people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever. In that day, saith the LORD, will I assemble her that halteth, and I will gather her that is driven out, and her that I have afflicted; And I will make her that halted a remnant, and her that was cast far off a strong nation*, he indicates that not all the people will be worshipping the true God and that there will be some people who will still be dealing with the afflictions of this present age. Again, this cannot be the eternal state.

Second, let us consider the testimony of the second psalm...

Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? ²The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, ³Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. ⁴He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. ⁵Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. ⁶Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. ⁷I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. ⁸Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. ⁹Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. ¹⁰Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. ¹¹Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. ¹²Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him. **Psalm 2**

Now, it is clear that this psalm was not fulfilled, at least not in its entirety, during the first advent. At the first advent of Christ he came as the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world. At no time did he reign over the earth and rule over the wicked with a rod of iron. As he himself put it, he could have called for legions of angels and imposed his will on the earth, but he had a different mission to fulfill and came to do the will of the Father and to drink the cup that was appointed for him. It is true that Peter quotes this psalm in Acts 2 as an example of the *kings of the earth set(ting) themselves, and the rulers tak(ing) counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed*, in their opposition to and their crucifixion of Christ. However, it is not uncommon to have partial fulfillments and applications of prophecy without exhausting the passage or voiding its complete and eschatological fulfillment. In that same passage Peter also quotes Joel's prophecy, which includes a prophecy that the sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come. This latter part of the prophecy remains to be fulfilled as we continue to await the coming of the day of the Lord. Psalm 2, therefore, speaks of a day when Christ will sit on his throne and rule over the earth and subdue the wicked with a rod of iron. Again this has not occurred as yet, this cannot be fulfilled in the eternal state, and again indicates the necessity of a millennial rule of Christ on this earth before the eternal state to exhaustively fulfill this prophecy. And again, ruling over the wicked with a rod of iron cannot be fulfilled by God's reign in the heart of his people, or the reign of the departed saints in heaven, etc., as amillennialists believe.

Another passage indicating the necessity of millennial rule of Christ for its fulfillment is I Corinthians 6:3 which says *Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?* Paul is instructing the Corinthians that they must learn to judge their own matters in this life rather than going to law before unbelievers. He tells them at some time they will have to judge angels. When would such an event occur? Certainly not in this life. And certainly not in the eternal state because then all the fallen

angels will have been consigned to the Lake of Fire. Again, this is only likely to be possible during the millennial reign of Christ.

So, we see that it is not only in Revelation 20, with its specific and detailed references to a millennial reign of Christ on this earth before the eternal state, but that this is the testimony of all Scripture.

CHAPTER 2

THE RESURRECTION

The resurrection is one of the cardinal doctrines of Christianity. It is a foundational doctrine. To deny the resurrection is to embrace heresy. It is outside the pale.¹ As Paul stated it, *“And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.”* (2 Timothy 2:17-18)

Paul makes the resurrection a central, an essential, and a cardinal doctrine of the Christian faith. He states,

“¹²Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: ¹⁴And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. ¹⁵Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. ¹⁶For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: ¹⁷And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. ¹⁸Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. ¹⁹If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. I Corinthians 15:12-18

As we shall see, it is historic premillennialism that is the most faithful to Paul’s position. It is postmillennialism and especially amillennialism that have a tendency to undermine the centrality of the resurrection. For the historic premillennialist it is the glorious premillennial return of Christ and the concurrent resurrection of the just, that is the *“blessed hope.”* By contrast, the emphasis of the postmillennialist is on the world getting better and on a millennial period of great blessing before the return of Christ. For many amillennialists their hope is in heaven. Many of them seemingly fail to realize that heaven is the intermediate state where the disembodied spirits of the just await the resurrection. They are looking forward to spending eternity in heaven and the resurrection they profess seems a useless adjunct to their eschatology.

However, the point we want to make about the resurrection is more directly to the issue at hand. Historic premillennialists believe in a literal earthly millennium as promised by the covenants, prophesied by the prophets, and as set forth in Revelation 20. The latter indicates a millennium bracketed by two resurrections, the first resurrection, the resurrection of the just, at the return of Christ at the beginning of the millennium and the second resurrection, the resurrection of the wicked, at the end of the millennium. The testimony of book of the Revelation is clear and explicit on that point. And as before we will examine the rest of Scripture to see whether it supports the view of two separate resurrections, of the just and of the unjust. And as before we will note that there is ample testimony in all of Scripture to sustain the teaching of the book of the Revelation. And if that be so it sustains the view that Revelation 20, as literally understood, is a reliable and faithful account of the eschatological future.

Now all Christians believe in the resurrection of the dead. To not so believe is a heresy condemned by the Apostle Paul. However, not all Christians believe that there will be two separate resurrections of the dead, one of the just and one of the unjust. Many simply believe in one general resurrection of the dead. Additionally, all Christians are generally agreed that all men, both the righteous and the wicked, will be resurrected, that is that there are, at least in that sense, two resurrections, the resurrection of the just and the resurrection of the unjust. Let us examine the texts that deal with this issue and determine what the Scriptures teach.

And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. Acts 24:15

Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live...Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves

¹ Extreme preterists, who believe that that all prophecy has been fulfilled and that the resurrection is past would fall into this category.

shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation. **John 5:25, 28-29**

The question that divides Christians is are these two resurrections parts of a general resurrection of the dead that takes place at one point in time, or there actually two separate events, two separate resurrections of the dead? Amillennialists and postmillennialists believe the former, and premillennialists believe the latter. The answer to this question is therefore crucial to one's eschatology.

There is a definitive answer to this question given in the Scriptures. It states that there will be two resurrections of two classes of men separated by a specific interval of time. That passage is Revelation 20. However that passage and the entire Apocalypse have been prone to allegorical and spiritualizing interpretations. The understanding of this book in general and this passage in particular has therefore been quite varied. We will examine this passage in the light of other Scriptures and by the analogy of Scripture determine if anything less than a literal understanding of this explicit passage is really justified.

This chapter will seek to establish, by a careful examination of the Scriptures, which position with respect to the resurrection of the dead is the one taught by Christ and the Apostles. We will start by turning to a key text written by the Apostle Paul.

If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. **Philippians 3:11**

ei; pwj katanth,sw eivj th.n evxana,stasin tw/n nekrw/nÅ (Textus Receptus)²

ei; pwj katanth,sw eivj th.n evxana,stasin th.n evk nekrw/nÅ (Critical Text)

evk Preposition with genitive. from, out from, away from; by, by means of, by reason of, because; for; on, at; of

Hendriksen, an amillennialist, and no friend of the view of separate resurrections says this of this verse...

What is meant by this *out-resurrection out of the dead* (thus literally)?

He spiritualizes this resurrection, but that is an untenable position. The same language is used in multiple texts many of which clearly refer to a physical resurrection (i.e. **1 Cor 6:14, Mark 9:10**, etc.)

What is Paul really saying here? What is he hoping for? If there is a general resurrection of all the dead, then why is he seeking, striving, and hoping to attain unto it? Why is he "suffering the loss of all things" (verse 8) and striving "by any means" to attain unto something that will be common to all men? The answer of course is that Paul is seeking to attain unto the first resurrection, the resurrection of the just, the resurrection out from among the dead at the coming and kingdom of Jesus Christ. This language is corroborated by being incorporated into several similar texts.

1 Corinthians 6:14 And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power.

o` de. Qeo.j kai. to.n Ku,rion h;geire kai. h`ma/j evxegerei/ dia. th/j duna,mewj auytu/Å

evxegerei the preposition ek (evx before a vowel) is prefixed to the verb to raise. This confirms the idea that there is not just simply a raising of the dead, but a raising out from among the dead. If there is a general resurrection of all men then Paul could simply have said that we will be raised up. However, if there is a separate resurrection of the just from among the dead then the reason for Paul's specific language becomes apparent. This is confirmed by the words of Christ himself.

Mark 9:9-10 And as they came down from the mountain, he charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead. And they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean.

² The author holds to the Received Text as the reliable and faithful text of the Greek New Testament. Both the Received Text and the Critical Text are noted here so that adherents of either text can see what their text says and to note, that although different, they both support the grammatical rendering of a resurrection out from among the dead.

Katabaino,ntwn de. aurtw/n avpo. tou/ o;rouj(diestei,lato aurtoi/j i[na mhdeni. dihg,swntai a] ei=don(eiv mh. o[tan o` ui`o.j tou/ avnqrw,pou **evk nekrw/n** avnasth/ | Å kai. to.n lo,gon evkra,thsan pro.j e`autou,j(suzhtou/ntej ti, evsti to. **evk nekrw/n** avnasth/naiÅ

evk nekrw/n from out of the dead or from among the dead

This is not a general resurrection of all men at the same time. First, the resurrection of Christ was not part of a resurrection of all men, but Christ alone was resurrected from among the dead. Secondly, the disciples, who were not Sadducees, and who believed in the resurrection, were not wondering what a resurrection from the dead meant. That they already knew. They were wondering what a resurrection out from among the dead might mean.

Luke 20:34-36 And Jesus answering said unto them, The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.

kai. avpokriqei.j ei=pen aurtoi/j o` VIhsou/j(Oi` ui`oi. tou/ aivw/noj tou,tou gamou/si kai. evkgami,skontai\ oi` de. kataxiwqe,ntej tou/ aivw/noj evkei,nou tucei/n kai. th/j avnasta,sewj th/j **evk nekrw/n** ou;te gamou/sin ou;te evkgami,skontai\ ou;te ga.r avpoqanei/n e;ti du,nantai\ ivsa,ggeloi ga,r eivsi(kai. ui`oi, eivsi tou/ qeou/(th/j avnasta,sewj ui`oi. o;ntejÅ

evk nekrw/n from out of the dead or from among the dead

This text again confirms the same point. If all men are to be resurrected then what does it mean to “*be accounted worthy to obtain...the resurrection of the dead.*” After all even the most unworthy, even the most depraved and wicked men, will all be resurrected. But if there are separate, distinct resurrections for the just unto eternal life and for the unjust unto eternal condemnation, then Jesus’ statement makes perfect sense. Then what Christ is saying that those who are worthy will be resurrected separately out from among the great mass of the dead. This is confirmed by such texts as...

But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just. And when one of them that sat at meat with him heard these things, he said unto him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.

Luke 14:13-15

If there is to a general resurrection of all men to their just deserts at the end of the age why does Christ specify that the righteous shall receive their reward at the resurrection of the just. And why is the response connected to eating bread in the kingdom of God? The only logical conclusion we can come to is that there is a separate resurrection of the just and that it precedes their entering into the kingdom of God.

And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day. **John 6:39-40**

No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. **John 6:44**

Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. **John 6:54**

If there is to be a general resurrection of all the dead at the last day, at the end of this age, at the return of Christ, why does Christ make this privilege exclusive to the elect in all these verses? In verse 39 being elected of the Father is connected with being raised up at the last day. In verse 40 believing in Christ and having eternal life is connected with being raised up at the last day. In verse 44 coming to Christ by being effectually called by the Father is connected with being raised up at the last day. And in verse 54 communing in the blood and body of Jesus Christ is connected with being raised up at the last day. If this is so, and if the Scriptures emphatically and repeatedly, make such prerequisites for being raised up

at the last day, how can we hold to a general resurrection of the dead that includes the wicked at that time?

Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection. Hebrews 11:35

Here also Paul infers that there is more than one resurrection. And he states that to attain unto a particular resurrection, the resurrection obviously elsewhere referred to as the resurrection of the just, is to obtain a better resurrection. The text does not imply a common resurrection for all men with different results. It implies a different resurrection.

And all this is confirmed by **1 Corinthians 15**, the great Pauline passage on the resurrection. First of all Paul says...

If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die. 1 Corinthians 15:32

Paul seems here to be speaking of resurrection in general. If there is no resurrection of the dead, why suffer all things in this life. Let us eat and drink and be merry for this life is all that there is. However as he proceeds to discuss the resurrection of the dead he is clearly alluding something far different than a general resurrection common to all men. He is speaking of a resurrection of the just. The following verses clearly imply that the resurrection under discussion is limited to those who are the just, those who are justified by the blood of Christ. Paul says of this resurrection...

So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body...And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly...For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. 1 Corinthians 15:42-44, 49, 53

This is clearly speaking of a resurrection unto life and eternal glory. This resurrection is not inclusive of the resurrection of the wicked. They are nowhere mentioned. In fact that there are a series of separate resurrections is clearly stated by Paul in this passage.

But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. 1 Corinthians 15:20-26

In verse 22 Paul says that "all" shall "be made alive" or resurrected. But in the very next verse he states that this will not all happen simultaneously. Rather he says that this will happen in a certain order. That order is first the resurrection of Christ, the first-fruits. Secondly those that are Christ's at his coming. And by inference thirdly or finally those that are not Christ's.

As Reese puts it...

Through Adam death passed upon all men; and through Christ the whole human race shall be raised. And the Apostle even gives us the programme of the resurrection:

1. Christ the first-fruits
2. The redeemed, at Christ's coming...
3. The End, when the rest of the dead are raised...

Now it should be clear to all that the first phase, the resurrection of Christ, and the second phase in this resurrection order, the resurrection of those that are Christ's at his coming, will be separated by at least 2000 years. So this certainly demolishes the idea that is not possible for there to be an interval of 1000 years between the second and the third phase of this resurrection order as premillennialists believe.

In fact Paul clearly references this resurrection of the just exactly at the time of Christ's return at the end of age as premillennialists teach. Paul says...

In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. **1 Corinthians 15:52**

Again Paul is explicit in the timing of this resurrection and is clearly restricting his remarks to a resurrection of the just. Nowhere is there even a hint of any general resurrection that would include the resurrection of the unjust. They are not in view anywhere in this classic passage of the resurrection. From this passage it would difficult, if not impossible, to prove a general resurrection of the dead, of both the just and unjust, at the coming of Jesus Christ. Let us now examine a couple of passages that have been pressed into service to argue for just such a general resurrection of the dead. The first one is a verse in Daniel.

And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. **Daniel 12:2**

Wcyqiy" rp['-tm;d>a; ynEveY>mi ~yBir;w> WTT Daniel 12:2
s ~!A[!Aar>dIl. tApr'x]; > ~!A[yYEx;l.

hL,ae = these

hL,aew = and these

In the KJV translation this is a problem text...for both views. For the proponents of a general resurrection this is problematical because the text does not say "all" but "many." To those who say that "all" of something can be "many" it is still a problem because it doesn't just say that "many" are resurrected, but that "many of" of a certain class of people, of those that sleep in the dust of the earth, will be resurrected. Now many of something is not all of that something. This text in that sense cannot teach a general resurrection of all men at this point in time.

For the proponents of separate resurrections of the just and the unjust this text has also been problematical. That is because it speaks of persons being resurrected to both everlasting life and to everlasting shame and contempt. Attempts to solve this dilemma by postulating a general resurrection of all professing believers, both good and bad are extremely unsatisfying. One is either a Christian or one is not. One is either one of the just, justified by the finished work of Christ, or one is not, regardless of one's personal sins. To be part of the resurrection of the just, but be condemned to everlasting shame and contempt is contradictory. The resolution to this text has to be found elsewhere.

The resolution is I believe to be found in Prof. Bush's translation which is consistent with the exegesis of the text expressed above. He translates...

And many of the sleepers of the dust of the ground shall awake – these to everlasting life and those to shame and everlasting contempt.

This gives two classes of resurrected persons. First of all "these" the persons being referred to as being resurrected at the point of time the text is discussing. These, as participating in the resurrection of the just, are raised to eternal life. Those, another class of persons, who will be raised separately at another point in time, not in view in this text, will be raised to everlasting shame and contempt. Understood this way the text is made to speak consistently and supports the doctrine of separate resurrections of the just and unjust. This text does not therefore constitute an effective proof text for a general resurrection of the dead as is often presumed.

In support of this Alexander Reese states...

...it remains to deal with a difficulty that exists in connection with the current versions. These seem to teach that the resurrection is not limited to the just, but that certain of the wicked dead are raised at the same time "to suffer shame and everlasting contempt." This is a genuine difficulty to many in accepting the literal interpretation of the passage, for in all other Scriptures the first resurrection is limited to the righteous...According to competent Hebraists the second verse of Daniel 12 is not happily translated in the English versions.

Reese goes on to quote the following authorities for the proper grammatical rendering of this text.

I do not doubt that the right translation of this verse is what has been given above : "And many from among the sleepers of the dust of the earth shall awake ; these shall be unto everlasting life ; but those (the rest of the sleepers, those who do not awake at this time) shall be unto shame and everlasting contempt." The word which in our Authorized Version is twice rendered "some" is never repeated in any other passage in the Hebrew Bible, in the sense of taking up distributively any general class which had been previously mentioned; this is enough, I believe, to warrant our applying its first occurrence here to the whole of the many who awake, and the second to the mass of the sleepers, those who do not awake at this time. It is clearly not a general resurrection ; it is "many from among," and it is only by taking the words in this sense that we can gain any information as to what becomes of those who continue to sleep in the dust of the earth.

This passage has been understood by the Jewish commentators in the sense that I have stated. Of course these men with the veil on their hearts are no guides as to the use of the Old Testament; but they are helps as to the grammatical and lexicographical value of sentences and words. Two of the Rabbis who commented on this prophet were Saadiah Haggan (in the tenth century of our era) and Aben Ezra (in the twelfth) ; the latter of these was a writer of peculiar abilities and accuracy of mind. He explains the verse in the following manner

And many : The Gaon (i.e., R. Saadiah, whom he often quotes) says that its interpretation is, those who shall be unto everlasting life, and those who shall not awake shall be unto shame and everlasting contempt " (Tregelles, in his Daniel, pp. 165-6) .

The true rendering of Dan. 12:2-3, in connection with the context, is "And (at that time) *Many* (of thy people) shall awake (or be separated) *out from among* the sleepers in the earth dust. *These* (who awake) shall be unto life everlasting, but *those* (who do not awake at that time) shall be unto shame and contempt everlasting." So the most renowned Hebrew Doctors render it, and the best Christian exegetes ; and it is one of the defects of the *Revised Version* that—for reasons deemed prudent, doubtless, by the Old Testament Company—it has allowed the wrong impression King James' Version gives to remain. A false doctrine is thereby, through defective rendering, given color from the Word of God, which repudiates it at every step (Nathaniel West, in his *Thousand Years*: pp. 266-269)

And in a note West adds:

So Cocceius, the best Hebraist of his day : "No universal resurrection is taught here. These who *are* unto eternal life are distinguished from those who *are* unto eternal shame and contempt. The *former* awake at the time specified, 11:45, 12:1. To carry the verb 'awake' into the second member of the verse is to add to Scripture, which I dare not do." So Saadiah, the prince of Hebrew scholars, the two Kimchis, Abarbanel, Bechai and Maimonides.

The next text to examine is the well known resurrection passage in the Gospel of John.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. John 5:25

avmh.n avmh.n le,gw u`mi/n o[ti e;rcetai w[ra kai. nu/n evstin o[te oi` nekroi. avkou,sousin th/j fwnh/j tou/ ui`ou/ tou/ qeou/ kai. oi` avkou,santej zh,sousin

John 5:28 Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice,

mh. qauma,zete tou/to(o[ti e;rcetai w[ra evn h- | pa,ntej oi` evn toi/j mnhmei,oij avkou,sousin th/j fwnh/j aurtou

w[ra moment, instant, occasion; time, short indefinite period of time; hour of the day (i.e. a twelfth part of the period between sunrise and sunset, sometimes longer and sometimes shorter than sixty minutes).

John 5:29 And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

kai. evkporeu, sontai oi` ta. avgaqa. poih, santej eivj avna, stasin zwh/j(oi` de. ta. fau/la pra, xantej eivj avna, stasin kri, sewj

This passage clearly speaks of the resurrection and clearly comprehends a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. The passage intimates two separate resurrections. One a resurrection of life, the other a resurrection of damnation. The issue again is the timing and the simultaneous nature of these resurrections. The crux of this text hinges on the meaning of the word hour. If this is taken as an hour, as a single short period of time at some time in human history, then this text can be, and has been, used to argue for a general resurrection of the dead. The Greek word in question *ora* (wra) can also carry the meaning of time. It is so used by Ambrose and even by Augustine, who is claimed by both amillennialists and postmillennialists as the father of their eschatological system. If that interpretation of *ora* is accepted then the text merely teaches that a time is coming when these resurrections will take place. However, it would no longer imply that these resurrections will take place in a single short period of time, such as an hour.

In conclusion, we have no texts that mandate an interpretation of one general resurrection of the dead at a single point in time, and we have an explicit passage in the Apocalypse, the book that is dedicated to expounding eschatology, that clearly teaches two distinct resurrections separated by a 1000 year period.

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. 5 But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

Revelation 20:4

This passage, immediately succeeding the account of the return of Christ at the end of the age, clearly teaches two separate resurrections; one of the just, and one a thousand years later of the unjust. To allegorize, or spiritualize, or argue this explicit passage away would be difficult under any circumstances. However, when it clearly and emphatically confirms what can already be deduced from all the other resurrection passages, then this passage should become conclusive.

This debate will undoubtedly continue, perhaps until the Lord returns. However, the above stated arguments should give food for thought to those who have always assumed, based on tradition and a superficial reading of the text, that there is but one general resurrection of the dead. Let us look forward to the resurrection of the just and seek by God's grace to attain to a better resurrection.

CHAPTER 3 THE FOUR SYSTEMS

HISTORIC PREMILLENNIALISM

In the following four chapters we will set forth the basic tenants of the eschatological systems of the four major schools of thought on the subject. It is important to recognize that some of these systems, particularly the dispensational premillennialist position, are extremely complex. It is also needful to keep in mind that within the four schools there is considerable variation between advocates of the same system. What is being set forth here are the only the basic tenants of each system, those things that define it as a system, and set it apart from competing schools of eschatological thought.

Historic Premillennialism is just that. Is the in fact the historic eschatology of both the Jewish Church and the early New Testament Church. The name premillennialism comes from the fact that they believe that there will be an earthly millennium and it will take place after the glorious visible return of Jesus Christ. It therefore believes in a premillennial return of Jesus Christ, hence its name. Its basic beliefs are as follows...

1. The Kingdom of God is still future and the church is merely the present aspect of a promised future glorious kingdom where Christ will rule with his saints. (Daniel 7:13-14; Mark 9:47; Luke 22:16-18; Luke 13:28-29; Luke 21:31; Acts 14:22; 1 Corinthians 15:50-54; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10)

2. The purpose of the present age is to call out the elect who will form the citizenry of this future kingdom. (Matthew 13:24-30, 37-43)

3. The wheat and the tares will ripen together. The world will wax worse and worse towards the end of the age which will be as the days of Noah. This will culminate in the personal rule of a false messiah, the Anti-Christ, whose reign will be characterized by severe persecutions of the Lord's people. (Matthew 13:24-30; Matthew 24:36-39 ; John 5:43; 2 Thessalonians 2:2-4; Revelation 13:1-8)

4. Even as in the days of Noah, when the last generation before the flood was characterized by extreme wickedness and ungodliness and came under severe divine judgments, so the last generation before the return of Christ will be characterized by great wickedness and will fall under a progression of severe judgments from God. This period of God's wrath on the inhabitants of the earth is known as the Great Tribulation. (Genesis 6:5-7; 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 3:13; Matthew 24:3-8, 21-22; Luke 21:22; Revelation 16 etc.)

5. At the end of the tribulation period there will be a visible, glorious return of Jesus Christ.

6. This return of Jesus Christ will be accompanied by a number of concurrent events. They are as follows...

- The dead in Christ will be raised from the grave in their glorified bodies. This is the first resurrection. (Daniel 12:2; John 5:28-29; 1 Corinthians 15:51-54; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; Revelation 20:4-6)

- The living saints will be translated into their glorified state without seeing death. (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17)

- The remnant of unbelieving Jews who survive the Great Tribulation will "*look on him who they have pierced*" and finally as a nation accept their Messiah, Jesus Christ. (Zechariah 12:9-11; 13:1; Romans 11:11-15, 23-27)

- The Anti-Christ and his allies and armies will be destroyed. (Daniel 7:11-14; Revelation 19:19-21)

- Satan will be bound. (Revelation 20:1-3)

7. Christ will then establish his Messianic Kingdom, his millennial reign which will last for a period of 1000 years. During this time the saints will rule with him and the ungodly who survive the last days will be ruled by a rod of iron. (Revelation 20, Psalm 2)

8. At the end of the millennium Satan will be loosed briefly and stir up the unconverted to rebel against the rule of Christ. They will all be destroyed in a final battle and Satan will be bound and cast into the Lake of Fire for all eternity. (Revelation 20:7-10)

9. The wicked dead of all ages will be resurrected to face their final judgment and their lot in the Lake of Fire. This is the Second Resurrection. (Revelation 20:5,11-15)

10. The eternal state is established in the new heavens and the new earth. In a "*new earth in which dwells righteousness*" the saints will live and reign with Christ for all eternity. (Isaiah 65:17; Isaiah 66:22; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1; see also all of Revelation 21-22)

These are the basic beliefs of historic premillennialists with respect to the events that will take place at the end of the age. The fairness and accuracy of the above synopsis of the basic beliefs of Historic Premillennialism can be seen by comparing it with the following statement by one of the school's leading spokesmen.

"UNTIL the second quarter of the nineteenth century general agreement existed among pre-millennial advocates of our Lord's Coming concerning the main outlines of the prophetic future: amidst differences of opinion on the interpretation of the Apocalypse and other portions of Scripture, the following scheme stood out as fairly representative of the school:

(1) The approaching Advent of Christ to this world will be visible, personal, and glorious.

(2) This Advent, though in itself a single crisis, will be accompanied and followed by a variety of phenomena bearing upon the history of the Church, of Israel, and the world. Believers who survive till the Advent will be transfigured and translated to meet the approaching Lord, together with the saints raised and changed at the first resurrection. Immediately following this Antichrist and his allies will be slain, and Israel, the covenant people, will repent and be saved, by looking upon Him whom they pierced.

(3) Thereupon the Messianic Kingdom of prophecy, which, as the Apocalypse informs us, will last for a thousand years, will be established in power and great glory in a transfigured world. The nations will turn to God, war and oppression cease, and righteousness and peace cover the earth.

(4) At the conclusion of the kingly rule of Christ and His saints, the rest of the dead will be raised, the Last Judgment ensue, and a new and eternal world be created.

(5) No distinction was made between the *Coming* of our Lord and His *Appearing*, *Revelation*, and *Day*, because these were all held to be synonymous, or at least related, terms, signifying always the one Advent in glory at the beginning of the Messianic Kingdom.

(6) Whilst the Coming of Christ, no matter how long the present dispensation may last, is the true and proper hope of the Church in every generation, it is nevertheless conditioned by the prior fulfillment of certain signs or events in the history of the Kingdom of God: the Gospel has first to be preached to all nations; the Apostasy and the Man of Sin be revealed, and the Great Tribulation come to pass. Then shall the Lord come.

(7) The Church of Christ will not be removed from the earth until the Advent of Christ at the very end of the present Age: the Rapture and the Appearing take place at the same crisis; hence Christians of that generation will be exposed to the final affliction under Antichrist.

Such is a fair statement of the fundamentals of Historic Premillennialism as it has obtained since the close of the Apostolic Age. There have been differences of opinion on details and subsidiary points, but the main outline is as I have given it.”³

POSTMILLENNIALISM

Postmillennialism also believes in an earthly millennium at the end of the age. However they have a different view of what will constitute that millennium and when it will take place. Essentially they believe that the world will get better and better. They believe that progressively the nations will become Christianized and that before the end of the age the nations will all be ruled by Christian governments ruling over predominantly Christian populations. This will bring about an era of peace, prosperity, justice, and righteousness that will fulfil all the predictions of a Messianic age, of an earthly millennium. They believe, however, that this will occur before the return of Jesus Christ. Hence their name as they believe in a postmillennial return of Christ at the end of the age, after the millennium. They thus have a millennium without the visible presence of the Messiah. They have a Messianic age without the Messiah being literally present. Their millennium is what we have now, developed to its fullest potential by the preaching of the gospel and the submission of the nations to Christian governments and Biblical law.

The essential beliefs of this system are as follows...

1. The Church is the Kingdom of God and as the Church grows it will develop into the full-fledged Messianic Kingdom of the Old Testament millennial prophecies.

2. It is a very optimistic eschatology that affirms that Christ's victory will be also a numerical one. Therefore they believe that a large portion of men have historically been saved and in the future the vast majority of men will be saved so that at then end of the age only a remnant of the race will have been lost and Christ will have a resounding numerical victory over Satan.

3. The Great Tribulation and indeed the events described in Matthew 24 and Luke 21 and the judgments on the earth described in the Book of Revelation have been historically fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem and the suffering of the Jews under the Romans that occurred in A.D. 70.

4. Postmillennialists believe that the world will get better and better and that as the peoples and the nations progressively come under the influence of the gospel and are Christianized the world will slowly evolve into a state of peace and righteousness.

5. As the Church grows and as the gospel conquers the nations it will usher in a period of peace, righteousness, and prosperity that will constitute the millennium. This millennium is of indefinite duration and is only symbolically represented by one thousand years, and may in fact last much longer.

6. There is no personal Anti-Christ at the end of the age and the Anti-Christ is probably the papacy and will be overcome long before the millennium takes place.

7. At the end of the millennium there may be a brief and limited revolt led by Satan stirring up the unbelieving remnant of the world's population. This is a strictly viewed as a spiritual struggle with people revolting against Christian truth and practice and not a military revolt threatening the Christian order.

8. At the end of the millennium Christ will return in power and glory.

9. This return of Jesus Christ will be accompanied by a number of concurrent events. They are as follows...

- All the dead, both the righteous and the wicked, will be raised from the grave in a general resurrection. The righteous to eternal life in a glorified state and the wicked to shame and everlasting contempt in the lake of fire.

3. Alexander Reese, *The Approaching advent of Christ*, Grand Rapids International Publications, Grand Rapids, MI 49501, 1975, pp. 17-18. Reese was a leading and authoritative spokesman for Historic Premillennialism in his day.

- The living saints will be translated into their glorified state without seeing death.
- The remnant of unbelieving Jews who survive the Great Tribulation will “*look on him who they have pierced*” and finally as a nation accept their Messiah, Jesus Christ.

10. The eternal state is established in a new heaven and a new earth. This is frequently called the Kingdom of Glory.

These are the essential features of the Postmillennial system. Again we note that advocates of Postmillennialism will differ widely in the details and will interpret specific eschatological texts in different ways. For our purposes we will take the above noted points as constituting the essential beliefs that define the system and will form the basis of our review and critique.

Postmillennialists view Israel as a type of the Kingdom and want to perpetuate the type. Especially postmillennial theonomists clinging closely to the Sinaitic Covenant and its civil laws, want to reestablish that type of kingdom of earth, versus waiting for Christ to return and fulfill the type of Messiah as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah at the second advent, as he fulfilled the type of Messiah as the Passover lamb at the first advent.

AMILLENNIALISM

Amillennialism literally means “*no millennium.*” This is disputed by some amillennialists. What it actually infers is that amillennialists do not believe in a millennium at the end of the age. They do not believe that there will be a future Messianic age of peace and prosperity on this earth. They reject both the historic premillennial and the postmillennial versions of such a millennial age. They believe that whatever millennium there is, we are in it now. For them, the gospel age is the millennium. They are split as to what constitutes this present millennium. Some maintain that it is Christ’s reign in the hearts of believers here on earth, while others maintain that the departed saints are experiencing the millennium in heaven where they live in a state of great bliss in the presence of Christ as they await the end of the age.

The amillennialists view of eschatological matters roughly follows historic premillennialism except for two things. They reject an earthly millennium at the end of the age and they have a different interpretation of the kingdom of God. Their basic beliefs are as follows...

1. The Kingdom of God is already established now, but will enter a fuller, more complete, and more glorious phase at the return of Christ. This current kingdom is defined as either the reign of Christ in the hearts of believers or as the visible church.

2. Satan was bound at the cross and remains bound during the Gospel Age.

3. The purpose of this present age is to build up this kingdom by the calling out of God’s elect.

4. The wheat and the tares will ripen together. The world will wax worse and worse towards the end of the age which will be as the days of Noah. Amillennialists are divided on whether there will be a personal future world ruler known as the Anti-Christ. Some see the Pope or the papacy as being the Anti-Christ while others allow for a future personal Anti-Christ as believed in by historic premillennialists.

5. Like the historic premillennialists, the amillennialists believes in a time of great persecution for believers and great outpourings of divine judgments on the earth at the end of the age.

6. At the end of the tribulation period there will be a visible, glorious return of Jesus Christ.

7. This return of Jesus Christ will be accompanied by a number of concurrent events. They are as follows...

- All the dead, both the righteous and the wicked, will be raised from the grave in a general resurrection. The righteous to eternal life in a glorified state and the wicked to shame and everlasting contempt in the lake of fire.

- The living saints will be translated into their glorified state without seeing death.
- The remnant of unbelieving Jews who survive the Great Tribulation will “*look on him who they have pierced*” and finally as a nation accept their Messiah, Jesus Christ.
- The Anti-Christ and his allies and armies will be destroyed.

8. There will be a general judgment of all men at the end of the age.

9. The eternal state will be established in the new heavens and the new earth where the saints will live and reign with Christ for all eternity.

This is essentially the basic amillennialist scheme of future events. As one can see this basically approximates historic premillennialism without a millennium. Hence the name amillennialism is rather quite fitting. The following quote from an amillennialist writer confirms the above analysis of their position.

"The name itself is unfortunate in that it would seem to indicate that its advocates do not believe in the thousand year period of Revelation 20. The name literally means ‘no millennium,’ while as a matter of fact its advocates believe that the millennium is a spiritual or heavenly millennium, rather than an earthly one of a literal reign of Christ on earth before the final judgment. From one point of view it might be called a variety of postmillennialism, since it believes that the spiritual or heavenly millennium precedes the Second Coming of Christ. The only mention in the Bible of a kingdom of Christ limited to a 1000 years is in the 20th chapter of the Revelation where it is said that the ‘souls’ are seen reigning with Christ during the 1000 years. The amillennialist interprets this as indicating *the spiritual reign with Christ of the disembodied spirits in heaven*, during the 1000 years. A thousand, the number of perfection or completion, is held to be the symbolic reference to the perfect period, or *the complete period between the two comings of Christ* (italics ours).

"The picture of eschatological events, without any discussion at present of supporting Scripture passages, is as follows. Like the premillennialist we view the world as a mixture of good and evil up to the time of the Rapture. We have no hope or expectation that the whole world will grow better until it is all converted to Christianity. We expect that wars will continue right up to the time of the end when Christ comes to set things right. We expect the elect to be gathered out of an evil world, though we believe that the command of Christ to preach the gospel to the whole world must be obeyed, and that it is our duty to endeavor to establish a Christian society so far as it is in our power to do so, but while we have the obligation to do this, we by no means expect that the whole of society will be Christianized. In fact, we expect the forces of evil to grow more and more violent in their opposition to Christianity and Christians. This in no way excuses us from the attempt to propagate the Christian principles as well as the gospel in the world.

"At the close of the present age we expect the forces of evil to head up in a powerful combination of political, economic and religious power led by the Antichrist. At the close of the reign of the Antichrist or Man of Sin, he institutes a terrible persecution against the Christian Church (not against the Jews as some premillennialists assert). In this terrible tribulation vast numbers of Christians are killed, but at the climax, when the hosts of Satan seem to be on the point of complete victory, during the battle of Armageddon, Christ appears in the Shekinah glory, the resurrection of all men takes place, and the transfigured bodies of the dead and living saints are caught up to welcome their Saviour. Then, as a terrible out-pouring of the wrath of God occurs, smiting the unbelieving nations of the world into destruction, the Jewish people look ‘on Him whom they pierced,’ repent and believe instantly in their Messiah . . . They too are transfigured with the living Church of Christ, and join in the rapture of the united body of the elect church of Christ of all ages. This completes the number of the elect, and from that point onward there is no more salvation for men...After the judgment, the eternal kingdom of God is established in the new heavens and on the new earth...It will continue through all eternity".⁴

4. Floyd E. Hamilton, *The Basis of Millennial Faith*, 1942, pp. 35-37, quoted from Loraine Boettner, *The Millennium*, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., Philadelphia, PA, 1972, pp 114-115.

As noted before Amillennialists come in many shades and the details of their system will vary from author to author. However, the above is representative of the essentials of their system and will form the basis of our review and critique of their position.

DISPENSATIONAL PREMILLENNIALISM

Historic premillennialism as we have noted was the historic faith of both the Jewish Church and the early Christian Church. It therefore has been around a long time. By contrast dispensational premillennialism is of fairly recent vintage. It developed as a distinctive view in the first half of the nineteenth century. It is so distinctive that it really needs to be treated as a separate eschatological system and not just a variety of historic premillennialism. It developed out of dispensational views with respect to the history of redemption. As a system it is extremely complex as "*good and necessary inference*" is pushed to its logical limits.

The following is, as best as I am able to present it, a representation of the basic beliefs and essential doctrines of Dispensational Premillennialism. Since the system is exceedingly complex with countless variations held by its adherents this can only be an approximation of what most Dispensational Premillennialists hold in common.

1. They believe that the history of the world, both past and future, consists of a series of dispensations. These dispensations are discrete intervals of time with each dispensation replacing the one before as an independent entity. The Scofield Reference Bible, a fundamental part of the creed of all dispensationalists, defines a dispensation as, "*...a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God.*" There are postulated to be seven such dispensations with the final one being the "kingdom" dispensation.

2. They believe that the kingdom age was to commence with the coming of Christ to Israel to establish the kingdom.

3. They believe that the rejection of Christ by the nation led to God changing his plans at that time. The kingdom age was postponed and the church age instituted as a substitute. They believe that the church is a temporary expedient and will be removed from the scene in the future so God can again commence his interrupted dealings with Israel.

4. They believe that at the end of the church age Christ will appear to rapture his church and take it to heaven. At the same time all the dead in Christ of the previous ages will be resurrected and given their glorified bodies. This appearance of Christ is distinguished from his second coming, and is a secret invisible return that the world will not perceive, with the believers just mysteriously vanishing from the planet. God will then pick up the thread of his purposes with Israel. The rapture of the Church will mark the beginning of Daniel's seventieth week, the final seven years of this age.

5. Israel, still in unbelief, and with no hope of salvation because the Holy Spirit has been removed from the earth when the Church was raptured, will continue to reject God and his Messiah, Jesus Christ. Rather they will accept a false messiah, the Anti-Christ and make a covenant with him. This Anti-Christ will be a world ruler, ruling over a revived Roman Empire.

6. In the middle of the week, after three and one half years the Anti-Christ will turn on Israel and severely persecute the Jews. This will commence the period of the Great Tribulation. The Church is safely in heaven and will be spared the Great Tribulation and the terrible divine judgments that will be falling on the earth.

7. At the end of the week there will be visible, glorious return of Jesus Christ in power. At this time the following concurrent events will take place. They are as follows...

- The dead in Christ who died during the Tribulation period will be raised from the grave in their glorified bodies.
-

- The living saints converted during the Tribulation period will be translated into their glorified state without seeing death.
- The remnant of unbelieving Jews who survive the Great Tribulation will “*look on him who they have pierced*” and finally as a nation accept their Messiah, Jesus Christ.
- The Anti-Christ and his allies and armies will be destroyed.
- Satan will be bound.

8. The Millennium will now commence as Christ establishes his Kingdom. This will be essentially a Jewish kingdom with the Temple being rebuilt and the sacrificial system of the Sinaitic covenant being reinstated.

9. At the end of the millennium Satan will be loosed briefly and stir up the unconverted to rebel against the rule of Christ. They will all be destroyed in a final battle and Satan will be bound and cast into the lake of fire for all eternity.

10. There will be a resurrection of the righteous dead who were converted and died during the millennium and a rapture of those still living.

11. The wicked dead of all ages will be resurrected to face their final judgment and their lot in the lake of fire. this is the second resurrection.

12. The eternal state is established in a new heaven and a new earth. In a “*new earth in which dwells righteousness*” the saints will live and reign with Christ for all eternity.

Such are the basics of an eschatological system that for most Dispensational Premillennialists is even far more complex than that which is outlined above. Again, it is the system as defined in the aforesaid points that we will use as our reference as we evaluate and critique this system.

CHAPTER 4 The COVENANTS

THE TRINITARIAN COVENANT⁵

The kingdom of God, the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, was not an afterthought in the divine mind. It was not a response to the fall, a reaction to the plight of mankind after the sin of our first parents. Rather, it was from the beginning the purpose of God to establish for his own glory the eternal glorious theocratic kingdom of his Son, Jesus Christ. This was first purposed in a covenant made between the members of the Trinity before the world began. This covenant is known as the Trinitarian Covenant.

The Apostle James stated at the council of Jerusalem, the first synod of the early church, "*Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world*" (**Acts 15:18**). To God nothing is contingent; there are no ifs. The very hairs of our head are all numbered, the sparrow cannot fall except it be by his will, and the very heart of the king is in his hands. Everything in history is working out towards the fulfillment of his eternal plan. And it is with the formulation of this plan that we are now concerned. That there is such a plan is constantly set before us in the scriptures.

Christ referred to this plan when he declared, "*Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*" (**Matthew 25:34**). The Apostle Paul referred to this plan when he declared, "*According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love*" (**Ephesians 1:4**). The Apostle Peter referred to this plan when he taught the saints, "*Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you*" (**1 Peter 1:18-20**). And so did the Apostle John, stating, "*And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*" (**Revelation 13:8**), and "*The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world*" (**Revelation 17:8**).

It is plain from all these scriptures that the atoning death of Jesus Christ, the salvation of God's elect, the eternal kingdom of God, are all matters that were settled long before the foundations of the earth were laid. These were matters that were settled in the divine councils of eternity past. And these are matters that involve all three members of the Triune God. All three members of the trinity were involved in the work of creation. The scriptures tell us, "*And God said, Let there be light: and there was light*" (**Genesis 1:3**), "*And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters*" (**Genesis 1:2**), and, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made*" (**John 1:1-3**). Similarly the work of recreation or salvation is the work of the Triune God. A work that was planned in the councils of eternity before the world began. As Jesus himself said when he was preaching the gospel and revealing the mysteries of salvation, "*All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world*" (**Matthew 13:34-35**).

Now this plan of God, worked out in the councils of eternity past, to bring to pass the Kingdom of God is what we call the Trinitarian Covenant. It encompasses all the divine decrees to bring this to pass. It includes every detail of human history required to make this kingdom a reality. In this covenant all

5. For a full exposition of all the divine covenants see the author's book, *The Divine Covenants*, American Presbyterian Press, Saunterstown, RI, 2000.

three members agreed to labor together throughout time and history to bring this kingdom to pass. And all three covenanted to fulfil their respective tasks towards the institution of this glorious kingdom.

The purpose of this covenant is to establish the eternal, theocratic kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. Everything in history is working towards that great and glorious end. God created with a purpose. God allowed Satan to tempt and deceive our first parents and permitted their fall into sin as part of his purpose. God implemented the great plan of salvation as another part of his purpose. And the culmination of it all will be the establishment of that great and glorious kingdom that will be ruled forevermore by the Lord Jesus Christ. It is wrong to think of God having created the world and ever since he has been implementing a contingency plan to counteract the consequences of the fall. One of the glories of this future glorious kingdom is that the redeemed saints will be forever praising him who has conquered sin and death and hell on their behalf. And it would be wrong to think of this covenant as merely providing for the salvation of fallen man. That is only a part of his plan, only a necessary step in his plan. The redeemed will form the citizens of this future glorious kingdom and their salvation, sanctification, and glorification are necessary to that end. But it is the kingdom that is the eternal purpose of God as formulated in this covenant. To think that the salvation of man and the meeting of his spiritual and eternal needs is the nexus of the covenant is to think in humanist terms. It is to put man at the center and think in terms of him. Rather we are to think theocentrically and put God first. It is God's honor, God's glory, and God's kingdom that are to be put first. As the scriptures say, "*But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you*" (**Matthew 6:33**).

There are three parties to this covenant, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Together they have covenanted to bring to pass the eternal, theocratic kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. Together they have covenanted to create the world and together they have covenanted to redeem it from sin. The Father has covenanted to call out a people that will inhabit the kingdom for all eternity. He has covenanted to justify them at the bar of his justice based on the atonement and intercession of his Son and to adopt them as his children. The Son has covenanted to die for them and to be their Savior, their Mediator, their High Priest, and their Advocate, and to redeem them from sin and death and hell. The Holy Spirit has covenanted to regenerate them, to work faith and repentance in their hearts, to sanctify them and one day to resurrect them and to glorify them.

It is this covenant, made between the members of the Trinity in councils of eternity past, that is the sure foundation for the future glorious kingdom of God. Well could Christ say in the gospel, *Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom*, (**Luke 12:32**). It was so ordained from before the foundations of the earth.

THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

All of God's covenants in time are steps towards the realization of the purposes of the Trinitarian Covenant. This is true from the promises of the Edenic Covenant where God promised that someday the "*seed of the woman*" would crush Satan and undo his work, to the promises of the Noahic Covenant that promised restraint on God's judgments on sin that the human race might not perish under God's wrath before the gracious purposes of the Trinitarian Covenant could be fulfilled. However, the first major step towards the fulfillment of the Trinitarian Covenant was in the Abrahamic Covenant. There are three things that are needful for a kingdom; a land, a people, and a king. The Abrahamic Covenant provided for all three.

The Abrahamic Covenant is rich in promises. The basic promise is that for Abraham and for his seed, God would be their God, and they would be his people. The seed of Abraham will be the people of God. For God promised Abraham,

"And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee" (**Genesis 17:7**).

But how can this be? God is a holy God and we are sinners. There is of course a sense in which God is the God of all men. God is over all men as their Creator and since the fall into sin as their Judge. But to

have God be our God in the sense of the covenant, in the sense of being a Father to us and we his children seems impossible. But that is made possible by a second promise of the covenant. God promises that he will justify us in his sight and declare us righteous before the bar of his justice if we have faith in him, in his promises, and especially in his coming Messiah.

These two promises are the essence of the whole covenant. They promise that God will be our God and will fellowship with us, as he once did with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden before the fall. They promise that God will give us a righteousness not our own, so that we will be fit to fellowship with him and be the children of a thrice holy God. This is itself is a promise of a return to the blessings of Eden, the essence of the kingdom of God.

As noted above this covenant is rich in promises and we will note at least three more here that form another part of this covenant. The first is the promise that his seed would be as numerous as the sand on the seashore or the stars in the heavens. God repeatedly renewed this covenant promise to Abraham.

“And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered” (Genesis 13:16).

“And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be” (Genesis 15:5).

“As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee” (Genesis 17:4-6).

“That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies” (Genesis 22:17).

The next promise is the promise of possession of the land of Canaan by Abraham and his seed in perpetuity. This promise is also frequently repeated and renewed throughout scripture.

“And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever...Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee” (Genesis 13:14-15,17).

“In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates” (Genesis 15:18).

“And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God” (Genesis 17:8).

And the third promise in this trilogy of promises is the promise that some day out of Abraham's seed will come the Messianic King. This is the promise that one of his descendants will be the promised Messiah. The definition of the promised seed keeps narrowing through the history of redemption. First we have the promise of the Edenic Covenant concerning the seed of the woman that will crush the serpent's head. Then Abraham is told that the genealogy of this promised Messiah will run through him, the Messiah will be of the seed of Abraham. And the line keeps narrowing. Abraham is told that it will run through Isaac and not through Ishmael. In the next generation again Isaac and Rebecca are told that it will run through the younger (Jacob-Israel) and not through the elder (Esau). Jacob at the end of his life prophesies that it will run through Judah and finally God promises David that it will run through his line. A greater son of David will be the Messianic King that will sit on David's throne forevermore.

“And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee” (Genesis 17:6).

“And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice” (Genesis 22:18).

These Old Testament promises may not seem as clear to us as those concerning the land etc. but they were abundantly clear in the minds of many inspired writers. The fulfillment of this promise is noted by several New Testament authors. Matthew noted it and started his gospel by stating,

“The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matthew 1:1).

Matthew starts his gospel by identifying Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ, that is the Anointed One, the Messiah. He then immediately identifies him as the promised seed of Abraham and the promised seed of David. Any believing Old Testament Jew would have immediately understood what Matthew was saying. He would have understood that Jesus was being set forth as the fulfillment of these promises of the Abrahamic and the Davidic covenants. In the Magnificat, as Mary rejoices over the impending birth of Jesus the Messiah, she relates it to the Abrahamic Covenant saying,

“He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever” (Luke 1:54-55).

Similarly, it was so connected by Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist.

“And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; The oath which he swore to our father Abraham” (Luke 1:67-73)

Peter, preaching in the temple after the healing of the lame man, also connects the coming of Christ with the fulfillment of this promise in the Abrahamic Covenant.

“Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days. Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities” (Acts 3:24-26).

And finally the Apostle Paul mentions this in the book of Hebrews saying of Christ, *“For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham” (Hebrews 2:16).*

To all these inspired men it was clear that the coming of Christ was the fulfillment of God's covenant promise to Abraham, that out of his seed would come the Messiah. And as will be noted subsequently in the section on the purposes of the covenant this trilogy of promises is one related whole. Together they provide the land, the people, and the king for the promised kingdom.

THE SINAITIC COVENANT

The next major step in time as God providentially worked towards the fulfilling of the purposes of the Trinitarian Covenant was in the covenant that God made with Israel at Mount Sinai. Here we see the beginning of the realization in time of the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant.

The blessings of the Sinaitic Covenant were a prototype of the blessings of the kingdom of God. The great blessing of the covenant was that God would be their God and they would be his people. This was the promise of the Abrahamic Covenant that said, *“And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God” (Genesis 17:7-8).*

Moses records the fulfillment of this promise for the Children of Israel under this covenant.

“And I will set my tabernacle among you: and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people” (Leviticus 26:11-12).

“For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor

choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations" (Deuteronomy 7:6-9).

All the other blessings of the covenant were also reminiscent of the expected and hoped for blessings of the messianic kingdom foretold by the prophets. If they were all fulfilled it would have virtually made Israel the kingdom of God. After the fall God had told Adam,

"...Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Genesis 3:17-19).

By contrast to all this, God gave Israel an incredibly fertile land, a land flowing with milk and honey. It was a land so fertile that it took two men to carry a bunch of grapes (**Numbers 13:23**). It was as if God would lift the curse of sin, reverse the consequences of the fall, and establish Israel in a kind of paradise. They were promised deliverance from their enemies. They were promised deliverance from disease. They were promised deliverance from drought, and famine, and locusts and all manner of natural disasters. They were promised exceptional fertility among their flocks. They were promised fruitful wives and abundant children. The cornucopia of blessings seems almost too endless to list.

Not only were the blessings of this covenant reminiscent of the blessings of the kingdom of God but the nation itself, under this covenant, was in a sense the kingdom of God, because God himself was their king. Israel was a theocracy. Israel was ruled directly by God. All nations are under God's rule. All nations are governed by God as the Ruler of the Universe and the Judge of all the earth. All nations are ruled by God through his gracious providence and just judgments. But Israel was different. God was their king. He directly ruled over them. He personally gave them all his laws. He ruled them from the mercy seat above the ark of the covenant in the holy of holies, his throne room. Through his prophets and through the High Priests by the urim and thummin he gave them his decrees and decisions. No other nation has ever been so ruled. No other nation has ever been so blessed.

The fact that Israel did not obtain these blessings does not mean that the covenant did not offer them. If Israel did not become the kind of earthly paradise that the covenant promised it was because of her sin. Time and time again instead of being a blessed nation abounding in God's goodness she was wracked by divine judgments on her idolatry and apostasy. The covenant promised much but as Paul said, *"it was weak through the flesh"* and the results were a continuing chronicle of woe and disaster due to sin. These covenant blessings still await their fulfillment, their fulfillment through another covenant, the New Covenant. They await a still future fulfillment at the coming and kingdom of Jesus Christ, the *"blessed hope"* of the church. They await a future fulfillment with the true seed of Abraham who have the faith of Abraham, the elect of God in Jesus Christ, both Jew and Gentile, the true Israel of God, in a new world wherein dwells righteousness, where God will be their God and they his people forevermore.

THE DAVIDIC COVENANT

A kingdom needs a king and one who is worthy to rule? That is the lament even in heaven as the Apostle John records his heavenly vision.

And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon. And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon. Revelation 5:1-4

The possession of this book is obviously related to the right to rule and thus some commentators have described the book as the title deeds of the universe. This is evident from the fact of the following declaration concerning he that is worthy to open the book.

*And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. **Revelation 5:11-13***

And who is it that is found worthy to rule? It is none other than Jesus Christ, the promised seed of the woman, the promised seed of Abraham, the messianic king.

*And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof. **Revelation 5:5***

The rightful ruler, the worthy candidate to rule the messianic kingdom, is Jesus Christ, who is particularly identified as the "Root of David." This is a reference to the Davidic covenant and to Christ as the promised Son of David who would sit on the throne of his father David forever.

As previously noted the Trinitarian Covenant provided for the future establishment of an eternal kingdom. Such a kingdom has requirements that include a land, a people, and a king. We have seen that the Abrahamic Covenant contained promises with respect to all three and that the Sinaitic Covenant involved a temporary, conditional, partial fulfillment of all three. In the Davidic Covenant we see a further development of God's eternal purpose in providing an eternal king to rule forever over the people of God in a future glorious kingdom. The terms of this covenant are quoted below.

"And as since the time that I commanded judges to be over my people Israel, and have caused thee to rest from all thine enemies. Also the LORD telleth thee that he will make thee an house. And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever" (2 Samuel 7:11-16).

The promises of the Davidic Covenant were very plain and simple. God promised that David's posterity would sit on his throne in perpetuity. God covenanted that the reign of the seed of David would be established in his kingdom forever. This was not just for the duration of the kingdom or for the duration of some present age. The promise was that his seed would rule on his throne forever, for all eternity. The incredible extent of this promise, the scope of this covenant, is expressly set forth in scripture.

"I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations. Selah...His seed also will I make to endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven...My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me. It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven. Selah" (Psalm 89:3-4, 29, 34-37).

As if the term "to all generations" were not sufficient the psalmist adds that the throne of David, occupied by his seed, will endure as long as the sun and the moon, and as long as the "days of heaven". This comprehends a royal dynasty that will span a future eternity. Two things are actually covenanted here. First of all a throne, and a kingdom, that will last for all eternity. And secondly a royal dynasty that will occupy that throne for all generations without end.

The purpose of this covenant is simple. Like all the previous covenants God made with man this covenant is a step toward the fulfillment of the purposes of the Trinitarian Covenant. That covenant had

purposed an eternal kingdom. That purpose requires an eternal king or at the very least an eternal dynasty. The Abrahamic Covenant had promised to provide kings out of Abraham's seed. The Sinaitic Covenant had provided for the institution of kingship in God's prototype kingdom. Now this covenant will provide the dynasty that will rule God's true kingdom forever in a future glorious eternity. This covenant will provide the eternal king, whose reign will never end, and who will rule in righteousness forever over the people of God. This covenant in short will provide for the eternal theocratic reign of Jesus of Nazareth, the Lord's Christ, the promised Son of David. Hallelujah!

THE NEW COVENANT

The Abrahamic Covenant was established to take definite steps towards the fulfilling of the Trinitarian Covenant to provide a people, a land, and a king. This was partially, typically, and temporarily fulfilled in the Sinaitic Covenant. However the people apostatized, the land was forfeited, and the dynasty collapsed under the weight of its sin. It is through the New Covenant that all these are raised up again and will one day see a glorious fulfillment of all the covenant promises. The prophecy of the coming of this covenant and the fullest description of its terms are found in the writings of Jeremiah.

*"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: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. **Jeremiah 31:31-33***

The purpose of every covenant is to further the purposes of all the covenants that have gone before and contribute towards the fulfillment of these prior covenants. Particularly each covenant is designed to take additional steps in the accomplishment of the goals of the original covenant, the Trinitarian Covenant. However it is through this covenant that all shall be fulfilled. It is through the New Covenant, the final covenant, that all God's purposes in his creation and in the human race will be fulfilled and brought to fruition.

First, we have in this covenant the fulfillment of all the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant. Christ is the promised seed in whom all the families of the earth will be blessed. Through Christ all the seed of Abraham will be redeemed and inherit all the covenant promises. And justification by faith, which is the very foundation of God's covenant with Abraham, is based on faith in Christ and in his atonement, the once and for all sacrifice of the New Covenant. The promise of a seed as numerous as the stars of the heavens and the sand of the seashore is fulfilled through Christ, for all who are united to him by faith are counted as the seed of Abraham (see **Galatians 3**), and will compose that great multitude described in the Book of the Revelation.

*"After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands" (**Revelation 7:9**).*

And the promise of kings coming out of Abraham has its ultimate fulfillment in the eternal kingship of Jesus Christ. And the promise of the land given to Abraham, that has never been fulfilled in this world, will be fulfilled at the return of Christ. Then Abraham will see its fulfillment in a future eternity in the kingdom of God and in that new earth wherein dwells righteousness. It will see its fulfillment in that glorious day in history when as Christ taught, *"the meek shall inherit the earth."* Yes, truly, all the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant are yea and amen in Jesus Christ!

Secondly, we see in the New Covenant the fulfillment of the hopes of the Sinaitic Covenant which it replaced. The Sinaitic Covenant could not save those under it. As Paul stated it,

“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” (Galatians 2:16).

“For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not, but a body hast thou prepared me: In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God. Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldst not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law; Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Hebrews 10:4-10).

Paul, the likely author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, takes a great deal of time in that letter to expound on the deficiencies of the Sinaitic Covenant and the superiority of the New Covenant. A better mediator, a better priesthood, a better sacrifice, and the list goes on. All that the Sinaitic Covenant offered, but failed to accomplish was fulfilled in the New Covenant. All of Israel’s hopes in the Sinaitic Covenant, that were frustrated by their sin, are fulfilled in the New Covenant of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Thirdly, we see in the New Covenant the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant. We have already seen how David’s descendants forfeited their right to rule by their sins. It is only through Jesus Christ, that the Davidic Covenant has been fulfilled and there will be a Son of David who will rule on his throne over the people of God for all eternity. And finally we have in the New Covenant the fulfillment of the Trinitarian Covenant. All of God’s redemptive purposes are fulfilled and brought to complete fruition through the New Covenant. An everlasting kingdom, an eternal king, a redeemed people, and a new earth, all these are the fruits of the New Covenant. It is through Jesus Christ and the New Covenant that all of God’s covenant purposes are fulfilled. Hallelujah!

The basic promise of the New Covenant is the same as that of the Abrahamic and of the Sinaitic Covenants. The Abrahamic Covenant had promised,

“And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee” (Genesis 17:7).

The Sinaitic Covenant had promised,

“And I will set my tabernacle among you: and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people” (Leviticus 26:11-12).

And so does the New Covenant promise,

“But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jeremiah 31:33).

After the fall and the expulsion from the presence of God in the Garden of Eden men were no longer children of God in the full sense of that term. God was still their Creator and still sovereign over them as God but no longer their God, no longer their Father in heaven. The great promise of these covenants is that God will reverse the sentence on our first parents. He will again be our Father. He will receive us as his sons, he will adopt us as his children in Jesus Christ.

“He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name” (John 1:11-12).

“But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Galatians 4:4-6).
“According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will” (Ephesians 1:4-5).

Progressively this promise has come to greater fulfillment under each successive covenant. God walked with Abraham, visited him, and spoke with him personally even as God had walked with Adam and Eve in the garden. Under the Sinaitic Covenant God dwelled with Israel. The Shekinah glory was the visible sign of his presence. He personally ruled them from his throne room in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle. And under the New Covenant God dwells within us and we are temples of the living God.

“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are” (1 Corinthians 3:16-17).

The ultimate fulfillment of this covenant promise will be in the eternal state when the kingdom of God is established in all its fulness.

“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God” (Revelation 21:1-3).

An additional promise of the New Covenant as recorded by Jeremiah was, *“I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts”*. This promise and its meaning were elaborated on by the Apostle Paul.

“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people” (Hebrews 8:10).

Paul defines what *“inward parts”* means and relates it to the heart and to the mind. He relates it to the unfulfilled promise of the Sinaitic Covenant,

“And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live” (Deuteronomy 30:6).

He relates it to the realities of the New Covenant.

“Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart” (2 Corinthians 3:3).

“And be renewed in the spirit of your mind” (Ephesians 4:23).

For what is really being promised here is a new heart and a new mind, in short the new birth, regeneration. This is one of the great promises and blessings of the New Covenant. At Sinai Israel was given the law written with the very finger of God in tables of stone. Under the New Covenant we are made new creatures in Christ with renewed hearts, which delight in the law of God. It is not of course being implied that Old Testament saints were not regenerated. What is being implied is that this is a blessing of the New Covenant, and the fruit of the atonement offered by Jesus Christ. Because Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God *“slain from the foundations of the world”* the benefits of his sacrifice were already administered under previous covenant administrations. Adam and Eve were warned that in the day they ate of the forbidden fruit they would surely die. They didn't die because God prepared them coats of skins from animal sacrifices typical of the true sacrifice of Jesus Christ under the New Covenant. But the same Bible that teaches the necessity of regeneration saying, *“Ye must be born again”*, also teaches that the new birth is a blessing of the New Covenant.

The New Covenant fulfils everything. It provides for a holy people, regenerated and sanctified by The Spirit of God, and cleansed and justified by the blood atonement of Jesus Christ. It provides for a new heaven and a new earth in which dwells righteousness. And it provides for a Glorious, Eternal, Messianic King. Hallelujah!

CHAPTER 5

THE ORIGINAL KINGDOM - PARADISE.

Paradise, the Garden of Eden, was a prototype of the Kingdom of God. It had all three elements of the Kingdom. It had a land that was perfect. There was no curse, no death, no pestilence. Everything was as perfect as an omniscient and almighty God could make it. For six days God labored to produce this creation. And when he was done he said of it.

*And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day. **Genesis 1:31***

There was peace, prosperity, and an abundance of every good thing. The land lacked nothing. There was perfect harmony between all the creatures of God, and they were all subject to man, made in the image of God. It was the most delightful land imaginable. It was paradise, the garden of God. Forever after it was the standard of perfection to which all other lands were compared.

*For the LORD shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody. **Isaiah 51:3***

*And they shall say, This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden; and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are become fenced, and are inhabited. **Ezekiel 36:35***

And there was a perfect race of people to inhabit this land. Adam and Eve were created perfect. They were created in the image of God. They were physically perfect, not subject to death or disease and not afflicted with any of the consequences of God's righteous curse on sin. They were morally, ethically, and spiritually perfect. They were created in the image of God. They possessed true holiness and righteousness. They had all the communicable attributes of God to perfection; not just holiness and righteousness, but also mercy, justice, love, truth, etc. They reflected the glory and the perfections of the God who created them. One could not imagine a more exalted and upright people to populate a kingdom.

And finally, there was a perfect king over this kingdom, Jesus Christ. We are told that God dwelled in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. God walked with them and fellowshiped with them in Eden.

*And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden. **Genesis 3:8***

God was with them, spoke with them, guided them and commanded them.

*And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so. **Genesis 1:29-30***

*And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. **Genesis 2:15-17***

And who was this God that walked and talked with them in the Garden? It was none other than Jesus Christ. It was none other than the Theocratic, Messianic King himself. For the Scriptures elsewhere teach us that no man has ever seen the Father.

*Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God, he hath seen the Father. **John 6:46***

*Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father? **John 14:9***

It is fitting that the one who created this ideal kingdom was also the one to rule over it for the Scriptures repeatedly emphasize that it was Christ who brought this whole creation into existence.

*All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made...He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. **John 1:3,10***

*And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ. **Ephesians 3:9***

*For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him. **Colossians 1:16***

So what we find here are all the elements of the Kingdom. We have a perfect land, an upright people fit to fellowship with a thrice Holy God of "*purser eyes than to behold evil,*" and we have the presence of the Messianic King himself. Our first parents had everything, they had it all. They had the land, the perfect land, the very Garden of God. They had complete personal perfection and blessedness. And they had the presence of the King, of Christ the pre-incarnate second person of the Trinity. They had access to the tree of life. They had the prospect of everlasting life. The one and only thing lacking was that there was no guarantee of permanence. They only had probationary status in this embryonic kingdom of God.

Unfortunately, because of man's sin this ideal condition did not last very long. First of all the land was lost. They were expelled from the Garden of Eden which was eventually permanently destroyed, perhaps in Noah's flood. They were thrust out into a new world that was under God's curse and life would be hard and fraught with toil and misery.

*And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return. Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life. **Genesis 3:17-19,23-24***

Secondly, the righteous people that were to inhabit the kingdom were lost. The whole race, both Adam and Eve and all their future progeny, were now under a sentence of death, and alive only by the grace of God. They were no longer fit to fellowship with God and dwell in his kingdom. They had become unworthy of his kingdom. They had corrupted the image of God in which they were created and were now unacceptable to a Holy God "*who cannot fellowship with iniquity.*" And all who were born to them would be born in sin and conceived in iniquity and under the same sentence of death and expulsion from the presence of a Holy God as their first parents. As the scriptures declared, a sinful and fallen Adam sired children in his own image and likeness.

*And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image; and called his name Seth. **Genesis 5:3***

There was no longer a holy and godly race to be the people of the kingdom.

And finally, they lost the presence and the fellowship of the King, Jesus Christ. They were now barred from his presence and from the place he had honored with his presence. And that expulsion from his holy sight was enforced by the supernatural power of the Cherubims with their flaming swords. They had lost everything. The original kingdom was no more. The original kingdom was lost. And it is only by the grace of God that we have a hope, yea a certainty, that it will be recovered.

CHAPTER 6

THE TYPICAL KINGDOM

In our previous treatment of the Sinaitic Covenant we demonstrated that the Old Testament Hebrew Commonwealth was a prototype of the Kingdom of God. It had the three basic elements of that kingdom. And it partially fulfilled many of the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant. It had a special people, the elect nation, the seed of Abraham. It had a special land, the land of promise, that had been promised to Abraham and his seed as an everlasting possession. And it had a special king. God was its king. Jahweh directly ruled over them himself. God dwelled with them and called them his people. And God gave them many precious promises that if they had been fulfilled would have given them many of the messianic blessings.

However, it was a prototype kingdom and the promises were conditional. Unlike the New Covenant, where all the promises are yea and amen in Jesus Christ, this covenant depended on Israel's covenant faithfulness. That was a broken reed that continually caused God's covenant sanctions, his holy judgments, to fall on the people and caused the promised blessings to be withheld. As Paul said, "*It was weak through the flesh...*"

However it was a marvelous demonstration of the nature of God's kingdom, and the nature of God's covenant promises. For almost all of its distinctive features were typical of the true Kingdom of God. Let us examine the many ways this kingdom was typical and foreshadowed the true kingdom of God. Not only did the Old Testament types foreshadow the greater future fulfillment of the kingdom through the New Covenant, but even its failures pointed out the superiority of the ante-type that would not fail, but bring to a glorious realization all the promises of the Old.

First of all we have Moses, the mediator of the Old Covenant, that is the Sinaitic Covenant. Moses could not lead the children of Israel into the land of promise. A whole generation died in the wilderness, because of their unbelief. He could not even enter in himself. He was excluded by his own sin when, in his rashness and impatience with the murmuring of the people, he struck the rock. But Jesus, the Mediator of a better covenant, will bring all of God's elect into the kingdom. He is the Good Shepherd and not one of his Father's sheep will be lost. He is the ante-type through whom all the promises will be fulfilled and through whom the covenanted kingdom will be established. He is the True Mediator who will reconcile us to God by his own blood, so we are adopted as children of the Most High and "*accepted in the Beloved.*" He will bring us all into the heavenly⁶ Canaan, into that eternal kingdom that is reserved for God's people.

And even Moses' successor, Joshua, who conquered all the enemies of God's people, did not succeed. The author of the Hebrews states, "*For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.*" (**Hebrews 4:8-9**) As a type of Christ he brought the Children of Israel into the earthly Canaan and conquered all their enemies. In this passage it is said of Joshua, Jesus being the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew name Joshua, that he was not able to give rest to the people. The word for rest is sabbatismos (sabbatismo,sj), which literally means a Sabbath keeping. It is Christ who has conquered all our enemies, sin, and death, and hell, especially the "*last enemy*", death. And it is Christ who will bring all his sheep, the Father's elect, into their eternal rest, the eternal sabbath of the kingdom of God.

The work of the Old Testament Levitical priests was never finished. This is because it was never really efficacious. As commentators have remarked the furniture of the tabernacle/temple did not include any chairs. This was because their work was unending, for as Paul stated it, the blood of bulls and goats could not really take away sin. For since the typical blood sacrifices of the Old Testament were not efficacious even such Old Testament saints as David could say,

⁶ Heavenly, here, refers not to its location, which will be in *the new earth wherein dwells righteousness*, but to its nature which will be heavenly.

For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. (Psalm 51:16-17)

And Paul⁷ could add in his review of the economy of the old covenant,

And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Hebrews 10:11-14

What the sacrifices of the typical kingdom could not accomplish has been accomplished by the one sacrifice of the New Covenant, the sacrifice by Jesus Christ of himself on the cross.

Paul continues with his covenant comparison detailing the differences of the promises of the two covenants. He proclaims the superiority of the promises of the New covenant.

But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. Hebrews 8:6

The promises of the Sinaitic covenant, as God gave Israel his law, were essentially this, "This do and thou shalt live." As Moses declared it to the children of Israel,

"And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God Deuteronomy 28:1-2

There follows from verse three through verse 13 an enumeration of the promised blessings. Glorious as these promises were, and rich as these covenanted blessings were, there was one blessing, one promise, conspicuous by its absence. And that was a promise of the requisite grace to enable Israel to keep the commandments of God and ensure the reception of the blessings. This was a promise that lay at the very heart of the new covenant that replaced the failed Sinaitic covenant. As Jeremiah prophesied,

But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. Jeremiah 31:33

Peter reiterates this in the New Testament as he states of the promises of that covenant,

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. 2 Peter 1:4

This covenant promised the grace required for those in the covenant to keep its terms. It promised regeneration. It promised to give us new hearts, to give us new natures, to make us new creatures in Christ that we might love God and walk in his ways. As David put it long ago as he surveyed the deficiencies of the Old Covenant, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." (Psalm 110:3)

We could go on and on in this vein. However, this is not meant to be a study in covenant theology nor an exposition of Paul's covenant comparisons. The point in all this is not so much the superiorities of the New Covenant as the similarities between these two covenants. Both had a mediator. Both had a conqueror of the enemies of God's people. Both had a priesthood. Both had a High priest. Both had a sacrifice for sin. Both had many precious promised and proffered blessings. And both offered a kingdom. It is in these similarities, in this parallel pattern, that we see the true evidence that the kingdom offered in the Sinaitic Covenant was a prototype of the true Kingdom of God that will be realized under the New Covenant. It was a typical kingdom to foreshadow the one that would be the blood bought purchase of the true sacrifice, of the true High priest, of the true Mediator, Jesus Christ.

And the superiority of that kingdom is beyond what we can imagine or appreciate. The blessings of the prototype as described in Deuteronomy 28 we can readily picture. It was the epitome of earthly bliss. Its promises we can relate to, and we can long for such blessings in our own earthly sojourn as we

⁷ Although, we can not be certain, I consider Paul the likely author of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

struggle under the consequences of the curse. But of the blessings of the New Covenant, of that eternal kingdom Paul says, *“But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.”* (**1 Corinthians 2:9**) It will be earthly, but only in the sense that it will be on that new earth “in which dwells righteousness.” In its nature it will be heavenly. It will be far above and beyond anything we can think or ask. Hallelujah!

CHAPTER 7

THE KINGDOM OFFERED

The issue dealt with in this section has frequently been called the “postponed kingdom” theory. This is an unfortunate choice of words. This conjures up an image of God being foiled in his plans, of God having to regroup and resort to plan B, because of the rejection of his Son, Jesus Christ, by the nation of Israel. It would be far better to simply term this the kingdom offered theory as I have elected to do. Many still have a problem even with this. Could a sincere offer have actually been made? How could this be? Can there be a kingdom with out it being purchased by the blood and sacrifice of Jesus Christ? To consider that we need to consider the parallel case of the free offer of the gospel. We are commanded to preach the gospel to every creature. All are invited. To all the Scriptures call and say “*Whosoever will...*” Yet Christ only died for the elect. Only the elect will be saved. Nonetheless it is true that “*Whosoever will...*” It is also true that only the elect will be made willing in the day of his power. Therefore the offer of the gospel is real. There is no duplicity in it. Whosoever comes sincerely to Christ in faith will in no wise be cast out. The kingdom parables spoken against the Pharisees make this offer of the kingdom clear. They clearly delineate an invitation. They clearly condemn for refusing to heed the invitation. They clearly state that others will be invited who will come. Those who rejected the offer will lose the kingdom.

The problem that many have is how can there be a kingdom unless it is purchased by the blood sacrifice of Christ? How can God in good conscience offer an eternal messianic kingdom to sinful men unless the issue of their sin and guilt has been dealt with through the atonement Christ made on the cross? They rightly ask, “How can there be any kingdom unless Christ was rejected and crucified? How can there have been a granting of the kingdom if Christ had been immediately accepted by the nation as their Messiah?” And the answer of course is there clearly cannot be. Then the issue remains how can there be a genuine offer of the kingdom to Israel at that time? That is not for us to explain. The Scriptures simply and unambiguously state that the offer was repeatedly made, but was met with scorn and rejected by the nation through its leaders. That rejection too was part of God’ plan.

It is simply not correct to try to second guess God’s perfect plan and devise contingency back up plans for various eventualities. God does not work that way. In our finite minds we can conceive of alternate scenarios. We can imagine, for instance, the nation’s joyful acceptance of their Messiah, their coming in faith to receive this marvelous Messiah and all his great and miraculous works. We can imagine that the nation having received him as their king, the Romans would have arrested Christ and crucified him as “*the King of the Jews*”, exactly as they did, but without political pressure from the Jewish authorities, or the Jewish mob crying out “*Crucify him, crucify him. Away with him. We have no king but Caesar.*” Then Christ’s post resurrection appearance could have been like the second coming, with the destruction of the wicked, the resurrection of the dead saints, the translation of the living saints, and the establishment of the kingdom in accordance with all the Old Testament prophecies. We can imagine all this and use it as a possible scenario to try to justify God making the offer of the Kingdom to the nation of Israel. But it is not legitimate to think that way. God has no contingency plans. His holy will is never foiled and his purposes never fail. God’s plan is perfect and it is comprehensive, encompassing all that has ever and ever will come to pass. God’s plan needs no justification from his sinful creatures and no human reasonings as to how he could have sincerely or genuinely done something that he has done. He is sovereign. He makes the plans. He determines what is right and wrong. It not for us to judge but only to admire and to praise and glorify now and for all eternity for all his marvelous works.

The Scriptural evidence for the sincere offer of the kingdom to the nation of Israel at the time of Christ is overwhelming. That the kingdom as promised, prophesied, and covenanted, did not appear at that time is also obvious. The Roman Empire continued for century after century to dominate the known world, and was as corrupt, wicked, and pagan as ever, increasingly so. Out of the ashes of the Roman Empire rose the Papacy, an institution that dominated the known world for the next millennia, until the

Reformation, and that was so corrupt and so opposed to true Christianity that the Reformers considered the Pope to be the Man of Sin and the institution of the Papacy to be the very Anti-Christ. So, ultimately, we have only two choices before us. Either we accept the understanding that although the kingdom was sincerely offered to the nation of Israel and that they rejected it in rejecting their Messiah and shouting "*Away with him, away with him, crucify him...We have no king but Caesar.*" (**John 19:15**) Or we have to redefine the kingdom in some way so that we can maintain the position that it was actually established at this time. This is what the amillennialists have done in postulating a spiritualized kingdom that is constituted by either God's reign in the heart or the reign of the departed saints in heaven. However, this is inconsistent with the clearest statements of prophecy and the explicit promises of the covenants, and grossly different from the way they were understood by the people at the time of their giving. It would make both prophecy and covenant an exercise in deception unworthy of the true God and his servants and reminiscent of the worst of paganism in the duplicitous pronouncements of the oracle at Delphi.

Let us examine first of all the Scriptural testimony concerning the offer of the kingdom to Israel at the time of Christ's first advent. The plain and direct pronouncements of John Baptist were that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. John, the forerunner of the Messiah, proclaimed to Israel...

...saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. **Matthew 3:2-3**

Christ himself taught the same doctrine, as Scripture records, "*From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" (**Matthew 4:17**) And so he instructed his disciples to preach commanding them, "*And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" (**Matthew 10:7**) and saying, "*And heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you. But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say, Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you: notwithstanding be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.*" (**Luke 10:9-11**)

What do these statements mean, "*The kingdom of heaven is at hand*" and "*The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you*."? The first statement can only mean that the kingdom is imminent, that its establishment is at hand. And what kingdom is this that is at hand? Can it be the kingdom as visualized by amillennialists? Can it really be that God's reign in the heart of his people is finally at hand? Can it really mean that God's reign over the departed saints in heaven is finally at hand. Such thoughts demonstrate the absurdity of those definitions of the kingdom. Or can it be the church kingdom of the postmillennialists that is at hand. But the church has been established since the days of Abraham. Could it perhaps mean that the church kingdom of the postmillennialists will now flourish and become a great world wide kingdom? But that is what began to happen as the gospel went out to all the world after Christ's resurrection. That is what began to happen when the kingdom that was at hand was rejected, its offer rescinded, and its establishment deferred. Therefore the kingdom that was at hand had to be another kingdom. It was the kingdom of Old Testament prophecy that the Jews were expecting and should have been prepared for. It was that messianic kingdom that would fulfill all the millennial promises. It was that kingdom that modern commentators, who oppose premillennialism, love to scorn as being "Jewish" and earthly and carnal, etc.

And this is evidenced by the fact that this kingdom was simply preached as "*the kingdom*" without being accompanied by great explanations. If Jewish notions of the kingdom were actually too earthly and carnal, then why are they not corrected? Why are their views not rebuked, as modern commentators love to do, and the true nature of the kingdom expounded? If the Apostles views of the kingdom were too carnal, as commentators love to infer from Acts 1:6, why were they not corrected? If the Pharisees views of the kingdom were defective why are such views not corrected in the kingdom parables that Christ spoke against them? The fact is that this kingdom was consistently preached, proclaimed as imminent, and offered to the Jews based on their understanding of the kingdom. It was not their basic understanding of the kingdom that was defective.

What was defective was their understanding of the spiritual requirements for entering into it. Nicodemus had to be reminded that to see the kingdom one had to be born again. John the Baptist had to warn them that to prepare for the kingdom that was at hand they had to repent. It was not the nature of the kingdom, but the nature of those that would inherit it that the Jews totally misunderstood. And this is exactly what we see in the preaching of Christ and the Apostles to their Jewish hearers. There is totally absent any effort to reeducate them with respect to the nature of the kingdom. By contrast, there is a constant emphasis on the spiritual requirements that are needed to enter into it. Constantly the Jews are warned to repent, to turn from their wicked ways and embrace their Messiah in faith and repentance.

And what does the second statement, *"The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you,"* mean? Consistent with the first statement examined above, this statement infers that the kingdom is close, its establishment imminent, but it has not as yet come. To understand the import of this phrase it is helpful to go back to the parallel situation when the establishment on the prototype kingdom was imminent. The generation of the exodus had left Egypt, received God's law at Sinai, had there entered into covenant with him, and had marched to Kadesh-Barnea on their way to enter the land of promise. At that point the kingdom was at hand. At that point the prototype kingdom of the Sinaitic Covenant was nigh, nigh at hand. However, although it was nigh, and geographically they were the closest to the land of promise of anytime in their wilderness wanderings, they did not enter in.

Paul says they did not enter in because of unbelief. They apostatized and lacking the faith to trust God's promises and intimidated by the inhabitants of the land they shrunk back from entering the land. Instead of inheriting the promises they were condemned to forty years of wandering in the wilderness until they all died, and a new generation, exercising faith and renewing the covenant on the plains of Moab was enabled to enter in. Now the Jews of Christ's generation were in a similar situation as those of Moses' generation. They too were offered a kingdom. They too had a kingdom that was at hand, that was nigh unto them. They too were called to exercise faith and repentance and submit to God's law. And they too could not enter in because of unbelief. And they too came to a similar condemnation. For they and their descendants have been wandering in a spiritual wilderness for not forty, but for almost two thousand years.

In conclusion we can say that the Jews of Christ's generation were offered a kingdom. They were offered the kingdom that the Jews were awaiting. They were offered the kingdom of prophecy, the expected messianic, millennial kingdom. And they rejected it. They, like the generation of the wilderness, were unworthy to enter in. And we, if we desire to be the seed of Abraham, then we must have the faith of Abraham. If we desire to inherit the kingdom, then we must exercise the faith and repentance that they did not. If we would enter in, then we must have that holiness without which no man shall see the Lord.

CHAPTER 8

THE KINGDOM POSTPONED?

The Apostles asked the question. *“Lord, will thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”* Commentators like to pontificate in their self-righteousness and marvel at the ignorance of the Apostles...at the *“Jewish”* notions of the kingdom that they still held. But these Apostles are the inspired founders of Christianity. For three years they have been in the actual school of Christ versus John Knox’s experience in Geneva.⁸ They have been instructed by the Lord himself and sent to preach the gospel of the kingdom. And now we are told that they didn’t even know what the kingdom was all about. This is casting aspersions on our Lord himself who taught them, prepared them, and sent them forth! It is true that they didn’t at first understand the need for the crucifixion, but now they do, and they ask the question. And Christ does not rebuke their ignorance or correct them. He does not abuse them, as modern commentators frequently do, for not understanding the nature of the kingdom. Rather he answers their question. And the answer is that the timing of the kingdom, of that kingdom about which they are inquiring, is to be left to the sovereign purposes of the Father and it is not to concern the Apostles at this time.

The language of a “postponed kingdom” is unfortunate. It has connotations that God has had to retrench and modify his plans. This is of course absurd. *Known to God are all his works from the beginning of the world.* He does *according to his will in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth.* *The king’s heart is in the Lord’s hand and he turns it wheresoever he wills.* Rather the offer of the kingdom has to be seen as conditional and as having failed. But this was all part of God’s plan. Even as the Sinaitic Covenant failed, and even as the Davidic Covenant has for many centuries appeared to have failed, so has this conditional offer failed. But God’s purposes stand certain. The tabernacle of David had fallen down for centuries (see **Psalm 89**) but God has raised it up again through the miracle of the virgin birth and God will in his own time establish the kingdom. The Apostles were not wrong. They are not being rebuked or corrected. They are merely told that the kingdom that they were expecting, the restoration of the kingdom to Israel, to the true Israel of God, will happen in God’s own good time.

There is a parallel here with the typical kingdom of Palestine and with the nation of Israel as it left Egypt. They were offered Palestine, the type of the kingdom, in fulfillment of the promises in the Abrahamic Covenant. At Kadesh-Barnea they rejected the opportunity to take this kingdom. Paul says that they could not enter in because of unbelief. That generation was condemned to die in the wilderness. The possession of that typical kingdom was postponed one generation. The next generation renewed the covenant on the plains of Moab and entered the land in faith under the leadership of Joshua. A millennium and a half later their descendants were offered the real kingdom. They too rejected it in unbelief. They too could not enter in because of their unbelief, their lack of faith in God’s promises and in God’s Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. God again raises up another people, another generation of the seed of Abraham (See Galatians 3), who will enter in and inherit the kingdom. That people, now constituting the Church of Jesus Christ, are being called out now and will one day see the fulfillment of all of God’s covenant promises in that kingdom that shall have no end.

The offer, rejection, and postponement of the kingdom as it is offered to others is set forth in some of Christ’s kingdom parables. We will deal with these parables more exhaustively in a another chapter. For our present purposes there are only three parables that we need to study.

The first one is the parable of the wheat and the tares. (**Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43**) That the thrust of this parable has to do with the kingdom is evidenced by the opening statement, *“The kingdom of heaven is likened unto...”* In this parable is it clear that Christ is no longer declaring that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. The kingdom, rather than being imminent, is now postponed until the end of the world. At that time, Christ declares, *“...the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”* One must be

⁸ Knox declared Calvin’s Geneva to be the most perfect school of Christ since the Apostles.

careful not to extrapolate parables beyond the obvious parallels that occasioned them. Nonetheless, it is hard to escape the implication that the abundance of tares has occasioned this delay of the kingdom. And that certainly fits with the facts, for the majority of the Jews proved to be tares, as they rejected the Messiah and demonstrated that they were indeed tares, children of their father the devil.

The second parable instructive of our point is the parable of the vineyard. It is found in **Matthew 21:33-46**. This is even more enlightening with respect to the point we are establishing. In this parable it is clear that the vineyard is Israel. The following passage makes that clear...

Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: ²And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. ³And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. ⁴What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes? ⁵And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; *and* break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down: ⁶And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briers and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. ⁷For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts *is* the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry. **Isaiah 5:1-7**

Christ obviously has this passage of Scripture on his mind as he confronts the religious leaders of the nation. They also must have had this passage in mind because the Scriptures record, "...when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceive that he spake of them." They were the husbandmen, the undershepherds, who in the owner's name, in Jahweh's name, were to care for his vineyard. However, instead of producing the fruit of obedience and righteousness, these husbandmen rebelled. They slew the emissaries of the owner, the faithful prophets of Jahweh, and finally they slew his son. Christ is being prophetic here, but the chief priests and Pharisees know what they are planning and plotting to do. They already have murder in their hearts against the Lord's Christ. They understand that he is again speaking of them.

And what is the result of all this? Like David in response to Nathan's parable, they proclaim their own wickedness and the judgment upon it. In response to the Lord's inquiry, "*When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?*" they replied, "*He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.*" To which Christ replied, "*The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.*"

Again it is clear from this parable that the kingdom is no longer at hand. It is not nigh to those of his audience. Rather, instead of still being offered, the kingdom is being taken away from them. That is the offer of the kingdom is being withdrawn from them. It will be offered to others. The gospel will go out to the Gentiles. The kingdom will be given to a nation that will "*bring forth the fruits thereof.*" And what nation is that? Peter identifies that nation for us, when he states, "*But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.*" (**1 Peter 2:9-10**) The elect of God, gathered into the Church of Jesus Christ, to whom Peter is writing, is that holy nation, that Israel was called to be. The elect, those with true faith in Christ, those with the faith of their father Abraham, are the true seed of Abraham, the true Israel of God, as Paul argues in Galatians 3. But this raising up of a new holy nation will take time. Therefore the kingdom is postponed until the end of the age as the gospel goes out to the Gentiles and they are grafted into the olive tree, with the believing Jews of all ages, to become part of the true Israel of God.

And finally, we have the third parable that makes our point, and it is the clearest of them all. The third parable is the parable of the marriage of the king's son. It is found in **Matthew 22:1-14**. In this parable the kingdom of God is compared to the wedding of a king's son. The analogy is clear. The King is Jahweh, the Lord God of Israel. His son is Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah. And the wedding feast is the kingdom. This parallels the parable of the ten virgins, as well as the marriage supper of the Lamb at the end of age spoken of by the Apostle John in the book of the Revelation. However, in this parable, there is problem with the wedding feast. There is a problem with the establishment of the kingdom. Those who were invited have refused to come. Their refusal ranges from contempt for the king and his son's wedding, to total indifference, to active hostility culminating in the murder of the king's emissaries.

It is clear from all this that those who were invited were the Jews, the children of Israel, the people of the elect nation. And as he is still speaking to the same audience as the second parable, they perceive this as well. For as soon as he is finished speaking this parable against them the Scripture records, "*Then went the Pharisees and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk.*" They were again bent on murder. They were, in their hatred and malevolent opposition, fulfilling the very parables that offended them so. That God was prepared to give them the kingdom that he was offering them, had they responded in faith and repentance, is evident from the king's statement to his servants, "*The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy.*" The result of all this is that the king "*...was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city,*" referencing the coming destruction of the Jewish nation and of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The wedding feast, that is the kingdom is postponed, so the king's servants can go out into the highways and byways inviting other men to the feast so that the wedding might be furnished with guests. This is clear reference to this present age where the gospel is going out to all the Gentile nations and God is calling himself out a people to inherit the kingdom that was rejected by the Jews.

In these parables we clearly see the following points. First, that a kingdom was offered to the Jews, secondly, that they rejected it, and thirdly, that it is being given to others. And we see that this process of calling out another people has occasioned the kingdom, that was nigh at hand for the Jews to accept, is no longer at hand, but will now be established at the end of the age when the calling out of the Gentile believers has been completed.. When the last of this engrafted people have been grafted into the olive tree, the true Israel of God, when the last of the of the true seed of Abraham has been called to faith in Jesus Christ, then the kingdom will be established and the wedding feast furnished with guests as numerous as the sand of the seashore and the stars of the heavens. Hallelujah!

CHAPTER 9

THE KINGDOM PROPHESED

We have already dealt with some of the Old Testament Scriptures that dealt with the coming messianic, millennial kingdom. One thing that has to be noted is that the Old Testament authors, the ancient Hebrew prophets, did not distinguish between the two advents of Christ. Indeed, how could they? They were calling the nation to prepare to receive their messiah. They were preparing the nation to long for Messiah's day when the promised covenantal blessings would be realized. To have explicitly prophesied that the Messiah would come and be rejected, that the nation would be dispersed and the Gentiles called in their place, would have prejudiced the offer of the kingdom at the time of Christ's first advent.⁹

Nonetheless, there were many clues. Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would be "*...despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief*" Zechariah prophesied that the Shepherd of Israel would be sold for thirty pieces of silver. It had been foretold that the chief cornerstone would be the stone that the builders had rejected. However, in general the Jews believed that at the advent, the next advent, the coming expected advent, of Messiah, that the kingdom would be established. They did not seem to attempt to resolve the apparent conflict between the many prophecies of the glories of Messiah's day and those few prophecies that spoke of Messiah as the suffering, despised, and rejected Servant of Jahweh. In retrospect it is easy for us to see that the prophecies of the glorious reign and millennial kingdom of the Messiah were to be realized at the second advent, even as the prophecies of his suffering were to be fulfilled at the first advent. We can see that at the first advent Jesus Christ came as the Lamb slain from the foundation from the world, to die for his people, to purchase their redemption, and to make possible that glorious kingdom of prophecy. We can see that at the second advent he will return as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, taking vengeance on his enemies, delivering his saints, and establishing that glorious kingdom that they will inherit for all eternity.

The rejection of the Messiah and the apostasy of Israel, culminating in the call of the Gentiles was another thing that Jews scarcely conceived of. Again there were clues and hints in the writings of the Old Testament prophets. From the beginning God made it clear that the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant were to be for all peoples, telling Abraham, "*And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.*" (**Genesis 12:3**) and "*And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.*" (**Genesis 22:18**) The psalmists spoke of this truth declaring, "*All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name.*" (**Psalms 86:9**) and "*So the heathen shall fear the name of the LORD, and all the kings of the earth thy glory.*" (**Psalms 102:15**) And so declared the prophets, such as Isaiah, saying, "*And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious.*" (**Isaiah 11:10**) and "*And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.*" (**Isaiah 49:6**) However, for the most part these truths remained hidden. Paul speaks of the call of the Gentiles as a great mystery that was kept hidden from the foundation of the earth. He tells the Ephesian Christians, "*Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) 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 by the gospel.*" (**Ephesians 3:4-6**) So that, without having the knowledge that there would be two advents and without being able to distinguish between them, the Old Testament believer was entirely inclined to expect the promised and covenanted kingdom at the first advent of Messiah.

⁹ If this seems preposterous to some consider the effect of witnessing to a person and exhorting them to repent of their sins and their worldly ways and to put their hope and their trust in Jesus Christ, and then simultaneously telling them that it has been revealed to you that they are not one of God's elect.

However, there is no such issue with the kingdom prophecies of the New Testament. The first advent has passed. Christ has died and purchased the redemption not only of his people, but of the entire creation, making possible the long expected kingdom of prophecy. The New Testament writers all look forward to the second advent as they continue to prophesy concerning the long expected kingdom of God. It is particularly in their prophecies that we see that the kingdom was not established at the first advent, but rather will be established at the second advent, at the return of Jesus Christ.

As one studies the New Testament passages dealing with the kingdom of God, one is struck by the paucity of material. There aren't very many. Once one gets past the offer of the kingdom to the Jewish nation and its rejection, the amount of material is rather slender. This, although an argument from silence, is a powerful argument for the historic premillennial position. After all, a literal reading of the Old Testament kingdom prophecies clearly would mandate that view. And it is clear that is how the Jews of that time received these prophecies and they continued to hold those kingdom prophecies in that literal premillennial sense right up until Christ's time. If this was wrong we would expect a major correction of these views in the New Testament. Instead, not only do we find a lack of material regarding the kingdom, we find absolutely no correction of the historic views of the Jews regarding it. The kingdom was preached to the Jews by John the Baptist, by Christ himself, and by the Apostles, without any correction and as something that the people already understood. The kingdom, as preached by the Apostles after the resurrection is again without corrections or explanations, and as something that was well understood.

The main feature of their preaching with respect to the kingdom is that it was no longer at hand, but rather would be established at the end of the age, at the second coming of Jesus Christ. The Jews had for centuries been expecting the kingdom at the time of the appearing of the Messiah. It would be established in Messiah's time, in Messiah's day. The notion of a kingdom without the king, of a messianic kingdom without the Messiah present to rule over it was entirely foreign to them. And these views were left intact. The only difference being that all this would take place when the Messiah returned, at the coming advent of Jesus Christ at the end of the age. Peter's sermon after Pentecost is a good example. He has just healed a lame man at the temple and is preaching to the amazed crowd that gathered.

Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began. Acts 3:19-21

Again we have the call to repent. The conditions for entering the kingdom have not changed. Their sins need to be dealt with, to be blotted out, before they will be fit for the kingdom. Secondly, Peter tells them they need to repent to prepare for the "*the times of refreshing.*" What are these *times of refreshing*? They are a reference to the Messiah's time, when the curse will be lifted and the millennial blessings will be poured out. Thirdly, Peter says that this time will come when God again sends Jesus Christ. The kingdom will come when the King comes. And when will this be? Peter says that it will not be now. Rather Christ must remain in heaven for a period of time. As the Psalmist puts it, "*The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.*"¹⁰ Christ must remain in heaven until "*the times of restitution of all things*" another reference to Messiah's time, to the time of Messiah's reign. Peter is clearly teaching that when Christ returns, then, and then only, will the kingdom be established. And finally, Peter is teaching that the kingdom he is speaking of, the Messianic kingdom, is the one that was spoken of by all the Old Testament prophets. It is a kingdom that his hearers are very familiar with. And Peter is preaching to them that that they need to repent. Particularly they need to repent of having rejected their Messiah, Jesus the Christ, and of having participated in his crucifixion.

¹⁰ It is interesting to note that this passage in the Psalms is referenced no less than six times by the New Testament writers and is quoted by Peter in his sermon on Pentecost. The emphasis of all these New Testament writers is clearly that Christ must remain in heaven until the time of the kingdom.

They need to repent and put their faith in Jesus of Nazareth as their Messiah if they are to participate in that blessed, messianic, millennial kingdom.

The Apostle Paul teaches the same doctrine as he instructs his son in the faith, Timothy. He says, "*I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom.*" (2 Timothy 4:1) In harmony with Peter, Paul places the establishment of the kingdom at the return, at the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ. At that time Paul states that Christ will judge the living and the dead. It is at that time that Paul himself expects to be judged and to receive his reward. For later in this passage he goes on to say, "*For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.*" (2 Timothy 4:6-8) Paul looks forward to the establishing of the kingdom when he will receive his reward and enter into the joy of his Lord. As Christ himself put it, "*For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.*" (Matthew 16:27) This coming in glory is an obvious reference to the second coming when, unlike this humiliation at his first coming, he will come in glory with his saints and legions of angels, as the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. As Paul told Timothy, "*And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*" (2 Timothy 4:18) he trusted that God would preserve him until that great day of the Lord when he would share in the first resurrection, the resurrection of the just, and he would inherit the kingdom. Paul does not agree with those commentators who believe that the kingdom is already here, or will be here shortly. He is preparing to die and anticipates that day at the end of the age when he will enter into the joy of his Lord.

Christ himself taught this doctrine at the Last Supper. There he told his disciples, "*But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.*" Matthew 26:29 Notice that Christ is physically present with his disciples, and he is physically drinking with them of the fruit of the vine. In those circumstances he states that he will not do this again until he does it again with them in the kingdom. We can draw several inferences from this statement of our Lord. First of all, the kingdom was at that point not as yet established. Christ defers the kingdom to some time in the future, and as we know from other texts, to his second coming. Secondly, in this future kingdom, Christ will be physically present. Thirdly, this is a physical kingdom where he will physically drink with them of the fruit of the vine. All of this supports the premillennial understanding of the kingdom and is inconsistent with any notions of the kingdom that are completely spiritualized or that do not have Christ physically present.

And finally, we have the following statement of the Apostle Paul, "*Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.*" (Titus 2:13)

What is the *blessed hope*? It is the second coming, the glorious appearance of Jesus Christ with great power to destroy the wicked, to deliver his saints, and to establish his kingdom. As noted above, that was Paul's hope, the coming and kingdom of Jesus Christ. That was also the hope of all the Old Testament saints. Through all Israel's sin, apostasy, and idolatry, through all the trials and tribulations of God's judgments on her, a faithful remnant always looked ahead to the coming of Messiah. Their hope was in Messiah's day, in Messiah's reign, in Messiah's kingdom. Such also were Simeon and Anna, who waited for the Lord's Messiah, the Christ, to come. As Luke records it...

And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. ²⁶And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. ²⁷And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, ²⁸Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, ²⁹Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: ³⁰For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, ³¹Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; ³²A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel...And there was one Anna, a prophetess...which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. ³⁸And she coming in that instant

gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem. Luke 2:25-32, 36-38

The Old Testament saints, the saints of Christ's time, including "*all them that looked for redemption,*" and the Apostle Paul all looked forward to the appearance of Jesus Christ. That was their blessed hope. The Apostle John echoes that with his prayer, "*Even so, come quickly Lord Jesus.*" We have to ask the question, Why is this not the hope of the modern church? Why is it only the hope of historic premillennialists? Why is it only the hope of a small minority in the professing church of Jesus Christ? For amillennialists the millennium has been already realized. It is not part of any blessed hope they are looking forward to. For many of their adherents the only hope they profess is to go to heaven. They believe they will spend eternity in heaven with the Lord. They do not anxiously await the coming and kingdom of Jesus Christ. They do see in that their deliverance. They do not longingly anticipate his kingdom. The resurrection and the kingdom, and even the return of Jesus Christ seem almost meaningless adjuncts for many of them. For Postmillennialists it is similar. They are looking forward to a kingdom before the return of the King. Their blessed hope is the flourishing of the kingdom in the church age. Their millennium has nothing to do with the glorious appearance of Jesus Christ. His appearance will mark no radical improvement in their situation. They will have been doing quite well without him present. And for dispensationalists, their hope is in a pre-tribulationist rapture. It is not in the glorious appearance of Jesus Christ nor is it in the establishment of his kingdom at that time. It is in being raptured into haven and there to await those events. Their deliverance will already have been accomplished. By contrast, the saints of sacred history as recorded in the Scriptures had different blessed hope. They had the blessed hope of which Paul spoke. Their hope was the glorious appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ and that should be our hope. As Luke stated it... "*And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.*" (Luke 21:27-28)

And finally, the blessed hope is also the hope of the souls that have preceded us and have gone to heaven. As the Apostle John records it in the Apocalypse,

And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled. Revelation 6:9-11

Heaven is not the final state, the consummation of all things. Heaven represents neither the *times of refreshing* nor the *times of the restitution of all things*. Heaven is merely the intermediate state. Heaven is where the disembodied souls of the righteous await the resurrection and the consummation of the kingdom. And that is the testimony of John. That is the cry of the martyred souls in heaven. They cry out, *How long, O Lord* as they await the kingdom. As they await when God will vindicate them, destroy their enemies, avenge them of their persecutors. They await that moment at the end of the age when the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of Jesus Christ and they will enter into their eternal inheritance. And they are told to wait. They are to wait until history has run its course to the end of the age, until all of God's elect have been called out, and until the full sum of the martyrs will have paid the ultimate price for their allegiance to Jesus Christ, for their faithfulness to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.

All the New Testament prophecies of the kingdom look forward to its coming at the glorious appearance of Jesus Christ. All the New Testament saints looked forward to that blessed hope, the fulfillment of all the prophecies, promises and covenants, at the coming and kingdom of Jesus Christ. And that is still the hope of, and the hope set forth by, those who hold to historic premillennialism.

CHAPTER 10

THE KINGDOM REALIZED

The kingdom, of course, at least as I understand it, and as we have noted, has not as yet been realized. In this chapter therefore we will not be dealing with its realization as much as with what we understand from the Scriptures about its future realization. We will deal not only with the how and the when of its realization, but especially with the nature of the kingdom that is to be realized.

The first thing we note is the incredible lack of material, especially in the New Testament about the nature of the coming kingdom of God. This is of course, again, an argument for the historic premillennial position, as it places great reliance on the Old Testament prophecies of the kingdom and of its nature. It places greater stress on how these kingdom prophecies were pronounced, received and understood in their day. And that they were received and understood in the sense in which historic premillennialists hold them today is beyond controversy. And this again underscores the point that the kingdom was well understood by the Jews at the time and that the literal understanding of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the kingdom required little correction.

This may be one of the reasons that the Apostle Paul, speaking of the covenanted kingdom that we are to inherit can say, *“But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.”* (1 Corinthians 2:9) This is corroborated by his statement *“For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.”* (1 Corinthians 13:9-12) In both these statements the Apostle is teaching that the glorious nature of this future kingdom is such that we will need to experience it to begin to understand just how wonderful it will be. What we already understand, especially from the Old Testament prophecies, is already so glorious that it is probably all we can conceive of for the present.

Thus, the New Testament gives us surprisingly little detail of what it will be like in the kingdom. The most extensive and most detailed eschatological passages in the New Testament are Matthew 24 and the parallel passage in Luke 21, and the book of the Revelation, particularly the last four chapters. These passages deal mainly with the events leading up to, and the actual establishment of the kingdom. They give us scant detail however, on the what it will be like. Again, we are thrust back on the Old Testament prophets, particularly Isaiah and his descriptions of Messiah's reign. We will examine some of these passages and review what they teach us about the coming realization of the kingdom of God.

We also need to note that not only is there a dearth of factual information in the New Testament giving specific details about the kingdom, but there are indications that what can be known will not be properly understood. In fact there are specific warnings that people in general and even the Lord's people will face great deceptions in these matters. This was already the case in Paul's day. He noted that some were already corrupting his eschatological message saying that the resurrection was already past, stating of them, *“Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.”* (2 Timothy 2:18) Similarly he warned the Thessalonian believers, stating,

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5

Paul is in this passage correcting his readers who have been the victims of deception in eschatological matters. They have been taught that the return of Christ is imminent. This error has been transmitted to them by various forms of deception. One was by spirit, probably false charismatic utterances pretending

to be new revelations of the Spirit. Another was by word, that is by the teaching and preaching of false prophets. And finally by counterfeit letters purporting to come from the Apostle Paul himself. Paul instructs them that specific events have to be fulfilled before Christ can return and reminds them that he had previously taught them these things. This shows the importance that both the Apostle Paul placed on eschatology, in his detailed instruction of believers concerning the coming of the kingdom, and of Satan, who is employing every means to confuse the churches in these matters.

Christ also warned his apostles that such a campaign of deception in eschatological matters would be waged against the church. When the disciples question him about the coming of the kingdom asking, *"Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?"* (**Matthew 24:3**), he responds with, *"Take heed that no man deceive you. ⁵For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many."* (**Matthew 24:4-5**) Further on in his discourse Christ repeats these warnings stating, *"And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many."* (**Matthew 24:11**) and *"For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before."* (**Matthew 24:24-25**) Christ not only repeats these warnings throughout his discourse, but he reminds them that he has previously given them these warnings.

From all this it does not appear that the church at the end times will be particularly well informed about the kingdom and the events leading up to its establishment. It appears that there will be a sustained campaign of disinformation to deceive the believers and that this campaign will be so crafty, deceitful, and effective, that as much as is possible it will deceive even the very elect. This should provide encouragement for historic premillennialists, who are distinctly in the minority in their eschatology, but hold to the faith of the Jewish church and the early church. It should also provide some basis for serious reflection for dispensational premillennialists, who are in the vast majority with their eschatological views, views that are fairly recent as church history goes and are vastly different from what the church has historically ever believed. And all this is reminiscent of the Jewish Church at the time of the first advent. For in spite of all the promises and prophecies, in spite of all the signs that the Lord gave, except for a few souls such as Simeon and Anna, very few persons were prepared for the coming of the Messiah. A forerunner was needed to prepare them, John the Baptist, and he was rejected by the religious leaders of the nation and executed by Herod. The nation was not prepared for the coming of the Messiah, they misunderstood Christ, and eventually rejected him. It appears that things will not be much different in the times leading up to the second advent. Small wonder that Christ can say it will be as in the days of Noah, who lived among one of the most wicked and apostate generations in human history.

Now let us proceed to examine some of the New Testament Scriptures that deal with the kingdom and the events leading up to its establishment.

MATTHEW 24

As we shall see this is a problematic passage for various positions. While most any position can find some support in this passage, none can do so without some difficulties. To begin with we have the introduction to this passage. The discourse is occasioned by Christ, speaking of the temple, saying, *"See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down."* and the disciples response, *"Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?"* They are asking Christ about two separate issues. One is the destruction of the temple so that not one stone is left upon another. The other is Christ's return at the end of the age. Taking the former to have been accomplished in A.D. 70 when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the temple was totally annihilated,¹¹ we have a time period of at least two thousand years and counting between those events and the end of the world.

¹¹ The only remains of the Temple, the wailing wall, was not part of the Temple proper, but part of a retaining wall on Mount Moriah that supported the foundation of the Temple.

So as we study each event described by Christ in this discourse we immediately have an issue. Is what is being foretold a response to the first question about the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70 or is it related to the second question, Christ's return at the end of the world. And this is complicated by the very nature of the prophetic utterances in the Bible. It is not unusual to have the same prophecy in the Old Testament look forward to and describe events at both the first and the second advents of our Lord, without ever indicating that there are two advents being described. So in this passage is Christ speaking of one, or the other, or of both of these events? And if the latter where is the transition from the events of A.D. 70 to those portending the end of the world and the return of Jesus Christ? And additionally in the Greek the word for *world in the end of the world* is *aion* (ἄκρῆ) which means age. So while most take this naturally as referring to the end of the age at the second coming of Jesus Christ some take this as referring to the end of the Jewish age at the destruction of the Temple and the dispersion of the nation. And finally, it is not unusual in a prophecy to have a partial fulfillment in time and the ultimate fulfillment at the end of the age.

Now this is not meant to be a general work on eschatology, for our scope is limited to a study of the what the Scriptures teach about the millennium and about the kingdom of God, particularly its nature and the timing of and events surrounding its establishment. A complete exposition of this key eschatological passage is therefore beyond the scope of this work. We will merely examine what it teaches about the events leading up to the kingdom and how this impacts the various views of the millennium. And first of all we will examine which question of the Apostles, which era of time, Christ is addressing as he describes events that are to come to pass at some future time.

It seems that Christ is mainly addressing the second question of the Apostles. He is addressing the events at the end of the age. This is evident from his statements in verses 6, 13, and 14 where each time he refers to the end, the end of the age. Now what we have to determine is this end the end of the Jewish age as characterized by the fall of Jerusalem, the destruction of the Temple, and the dispersion of the nation? While some of these events could be fitted into the scenario of A.D. 70 it really takes a shoehorn to force them all into a fulfillment in that timeframe.

Take for example verse 14 which speaks of the gospel being "*preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations*" before the end of the age. Was this fulfilled by A.D. 70? Again, it depends in how you interpret those phrases. In Luke's account of the nativity of Jesus Christ he states that Caesar Augustus taxed *all the world*. Clearly, that had to mean the Roman world as he did not, and could not, have taxed the Chinese and South Sea Islanders, etc. Nonetheless, the repetition of *all the world* and *unto all nations* is somewhat emphatic, and drives home the point that this time these phrases should really be understood in a universal sense and not in a restricted sense. And while it is true that in the lifetime of the Apostles the gospel did go through much of the Roman world and beyond, it did not go to all nations. There is no evidence that Paul ever made it to Spain as he purposed, or even on to Britain as some have conjectured. And while it is widely believed that the Apostle Thomas made it to India and even possibly to China,¹² that still is not all nations. It is more natural to think of this requirement before the end of the age can come as being a necessary fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. There God covenanted that in Abraham's seed all the families of the earth would be blessed, and that his seed would be an innumerable multitude likened unto the sand of the seashore and the stars of the heavens for number. This would fulfill the vision of the Apostle John who saw, "*...a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.*" (**Revelation 7:9**) Jesus is teaching that the end of the age, indeed the end of the world, will not come until all of God's elect have been called out from every tongue and nation and people on the face of the earth.

Similarly, verse 27 speaks of an appearance of Jesus Christ so universally obvious that it likened to lightning which can see far to the east and to the west. Nothing like that has occurred since the ascension

¹² See J. Gordon Holdcroft, *Into All the World*. Holdcroft, a former head of the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions argues that the Apostles took the gospel into much of the known world.

of Jesus Christ and this prophecy too awaits its fulfillment at the his second coming. And all this is supported and strengthened by verses 29 and 30 which speak of the sun being darkened, the moon not giving her light and the stars falling from heaven and *"then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven"* Such a dramatic and universal appearance of a returning Christ, accompanied by such marvels in the heavens has not as yet occurred. When the text goes on to state, *"Then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn"* as they see *"the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory"* one is again compelled to relate all this to the glorious second coming of our Lord. And certainly all the tribes of the earth didn't mourn over the events of A.D. 70.

Then as Christ continues his discourse he states in verse 31 that he shall at that time he will send his angels to *"gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."* Again, this event logically fits at the end of the age, at the end of the world, at the glorious second coming of Christ, and not with the events surrounding the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. This event obviously did not happen at that time and is still awaiting its future fulfillment.

Then Christ refers to the times of these events as being as the days of Noah. In the days of Noah the world experienced a universal catastrophe that almost wiped out the human race. Then in its aftermath a kind of new world emerged out of the flood waters populated only by the righteous Noah and his family. This is far more reminiscent of the end of the age and the terrible destruction that will be visited on the wicked at that time and which will also be succeeded by a new world, than the limited and local catastrophe of the fall of Judea to the Romans. Secondly, the apathy of the human race to its spiritual condition and the consequences of that, and the resultant normalcy of life, is more reminiscent of the end of the age before the tribulation attending Christ's return than the years of restive rebelliousness and Zealot inspired revolution against Rome that preceded the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans. And thirdly, the normalcy of life, reminiscent of Noah's day before the deluge, is ended by *"the coming of the Son of man."* These events just do not fit into the A.D. 70 timeframe near as well as they logically fit into the events at the end of the world and the return of Jesus Christ.

Additionally, in verses 40 and 41, we see a reference to the rapture of the living saints at the return of Christ. This parallels the description of the rapture that is described by Paul to the Thessalonian believers where he states, *"For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."* (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17) As Paul clearly teaches the rapture of the living saints occurs contemporaneously with the resurrection of the dead saints and at the glorious return of Christ at the end of the world. It simply did not occur in A.D. 70.

The Olivet Discourse, as recorded by Matthew actually takes up two chapters, Matthew 24 and 25. The remainder of chapter 24 and the first two thirds of chapter 25 are taken up by three parables of our Lord that stress the importance of being prepared for his return. Then, in verse 31-33 the text speaks of the return of the Son of man in glory accompanied by legions of holy angels, to *"sit upon the throne of his glory"* and judge the nations as he separates the sheep from the goats. This again is obviously a final judgment of the nations at the return of Christ at the end of the age and certainly cannot be fitted into the events of A.D. 70.

For all these reasons it simply not possible to realistically attempt to fit all of these events into the time frame of the events surrounding the fall of Jerusalem. It is possible to fit some of these events into that time frame, especially verses 15-20 of chapter 24, and it is also possible to think in terms of a partial fulfillment of these events at that time, with the full eschatological fulfillment at the end of the world. However, it is extremely hard to realistically fit all these events, exhaustively, into the A.D. 70 time frame.

THIS GENERATION SHALL NOT PASS

Finally, before we leave this passage, what are to make of the statement in verse 34 that all these events will come upon that generation? Could all these events really have come to pass in the generation of Christ's first advent? The answer lies in the meaning of the Greek word *genea* (γένεα) translated as generation. It can also mean a race of men. Thayer gives a total of four different meanings for this word. The second meaning he lists states "...men of the same stock, a family...the successive members of a genealogy...a race of men very like each other in endowments, pursuits, character."¹³ Although the third meaning he gives, "the whole multitude of men living at the same time" is the predominant way the word is used in Scripture, as we shall see that meaning is a difficult fit in this case. For then we would have to exhaustively fit all the events of the Olivet Discourse into the time frame of A.D. 70, and we have already noted how nearly impossible that is. If the word can be taken as referring to the race of the Jews,¹⁴ then Christ's meaning becomes that ethnic Jewry will not pass away before all these events come to pass. This would then be a prophecy that God will preserve the Jews throughout history until the end of the age.

If so, this is a remarkable prophecy and its historical fulfillment is no less remarkable. The Northern Kingdom, Israel, disappeared from the pages of history. They assimilated with their pagan neighbors and have disappeared as an ethnic group. However, it is amazing how God has preserved the Jews. Dispersed across the known world, with no national homeland for almost 2000 years, they still maintained their ethnic identity and have been preserved as a distinct people. Through many trials, constant persecutions, driven from one land to another, harried from pillar to post, they still exist. And amazingly, they still exist as Jews, having overcome the perpetual temptations to assimilate, to become Gentiles, and thus escape their tribulations. Even Hitler, with all his malevolent hatred towards them, and dedicating the resources of a modern, powerful, totalitarian state to their destruction could not accomplish that task. Although about half of Europe's Jews were exterminated in the death camps, they continued to survive as an ethnic group and were strengthened in their commitment to live as Jews. And the result of Hitler's rage against them was that they were restored to their ancient homeland in 1948 because of the suffering that they had just endured. Their preservation as a race, and the preservation of their ethnic identity and culture, is indeed a marvel, and might well have been the thrust of Christ's prophetic utterance.

And this prophecy of the preservation of the Jewish race as a distinct ethnic group until the end of the age also relates to prophecy and the events at the end of the world. The Apostle Paul intimates in Romans 11 that God, having pruned out the branches of unbelieving Judaism from the olive tree, representing the true Israel of God, and having grafted in the Gentile believers, will at a future date graft the natural branches back in. Paul concludes that argument by stating, "For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob." (**Romans 11:25-26**) This would be the fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy that at the end of the age the Jews will accept their Messiah, stating, "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn." (**Zechariah 12:10**) And the Apostle John references the fulfillment of that prophecy when he states, "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen." (**Revelation 1:7**) So we see that a prophetic utterance of Christ's concerning the preservation of the Jews is very much in line with the general prophecies of their coming to accept their Messiah at the end of the age, which of course necessitates their preservation as a people.

¹³ Joseph Henry Thayer, D.D., Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, Evangel Publishing Co., Wheaton, Ill., 1974, p. 112.

¹⁴ This view, that Christ is referring not to the generation of Jews of his time, but to the Jewish race is also held by Hendriksen. See William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel of Matthew*, Baker Book House, Grand rapids, MI, 1975, pp. 867-869. Lenski maintains a similar position. See R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, MN, 1964, pp. 952-953.

Now, how does all this relate to our view of the millennium? First of all we can say that this understanding of the Olivet Discourse is fully in line with the views of historic premillennialism, as we defined it earlier. That is, it teaches that the end of the end of the age will be a time of great wickedness, persecution of the Lord's people, and divine judgments on the wicked reminiscent of the days of Noah. We can also say that it is compatible with amillennialism, as it also views the end of the age as a time of great wickedness and apostasy from Christianity, and of great trials, divine judgments and tribulation just prior to the glorious return of Jesus Christ. This view, however, is entirely incompatible with postmillennialism. They view the world as progressively improving as the gospel Christianizes the nations and see the world as increasingly being conformed to God's law. They view the period of time before the return of Christ as the millennium and a futuristic interpretation of Matthew 24 as applying to the end of the age is contrary to their view. They must therefore insist that it was all referring to the fall of Jerusalem and was exhaustively fulfilled in A.D. 70. As we have seen there are serious difficulties with that approach.

Finally, although there is much in our view that is acceptable to dispensational premillennialism, it also poses a problem for them. It places the rapture at the end of the age, at the time of the second coming of Jesus Christ. Since a pretribulation rapture is a keystone of dispensational premillennialism,¹⁵ this passage is problematic for them as well. They view the church as having been raptured to heaven before these events and that therefore this entire discourse as having no relevance for the church. The parables of Christ in this discourse warning believers to watch for his return has therefore no application to us. This discourse of Christ is therefore not only a problem for them, it is meaningless to them as they do not believe the church of Jesus Christ will experience these events.

REVELATION 19-22

It is important to note the place of the book of Revelation in Biblical eschatology. It is the capstone, not the foundation. We do not start our eschatological studies with it, but rather we conclude them with it. The Revelation is a book rich in symbolism and figurative language. It has to be understood and interpreted in the light of the rest of Scripture. It has to be interpreted in a way that is consistent with the expected fulfillment of all the previous covenant promises and all the Old Testament prophetic utterances. It has to be seen as the crowning revelation of all that Christ and the Apostles taught about the end of the age.

The book of Revelation has to be divided into three sections. This is based on the following passage, which states, "*Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.*" (**Revelation 1:19**) The *things which thou hast seen* are generally understood to comprise the contents of the first chapter, including his vision of the risen Christ. The *things which are* certainly include the then existing churches of Asia, whose spiritual states are related in the letters to the seven churches in chapters two and three. After that unanimity quickly disappears. We are not only dealing with four different eschatological perspectives all looking at the book of Revelation through the lenses of their particular eschatology, but we are also dealing with different views of interpreting this book. There are futurists who see most of the book, particularly starting with chapter four as still future. And we have preterists who see most of the book as having been fulfilled, at least up to chapter nineteen. Extreme preterists see the entire book as having been historically fulfilled, including the resurrection and the

¹⁵ It is important to note that not all pretribulationists are dispensationalists. However, for dispensationalists the pretribulation rapture is a necessary part of their system. They believe that seven years before the glorious second coming of Jesus Christ there is a secret coming of Christ for his church. This will end the church age, the present dispensation, and God will pick up his dealings with physical Israel where he left off when they rejected his Son as their Messiah. They maintain a sharp dichotomy between Israel and the church failing to see there is one true Israel of God, symbolized by Paul as an olive tree, with branches of unbelieving Jews being pruned out and branches of believing Gentiles being grafted in. Paul speaks of a national re-engrafting of the natural branches, the Jews, at the end of the age into the one olive tree of which Gentile believers are already a part. He does not support the idea that God deals with Israel and the church as totally distinct and separate entities that even require separate dispensations to accommodate God's dealings with them.

second coming of Christ. That view has to be considered heretical. And various eschatological positions can take either a preterist or a futurist take on the book of Revelation. In general both historic and dispensational premillennialists are futurists. Amillennialists come down on either side of the question. And postmillennialists are generally preterists. As with the awesome cataclysmic events of the Olivet Discourse, their eschatology does not fit with the seals, and trumpets, and vials of wrath, raining down divine judgments and destruction on the earth at the end of the age.

It is not the purpose of this book to seek to untangle all this eschatological confusion. And it is not necessary for our purpose which is to study what the Scriptures teach about the millennium. Our purpose is to study the last four chapters of Revelation, chapters nineteen through twenty-two. Except for extreme preterists, whose view are really heterodox and outside the pale, all positions agree that these chapters deal with future events at the end of the age and at the second coming of Jesus Christ. We will examine what these chapters teach about the return of Christ, the establishment of the kingdom, the millennium, and the eternal state. And we are aided in this study by the fact that these chapters are more straightforward and direct in their teachings and less clouded in figurative language than other parts of the Revelation.

We can start off with a brief overview of these four chapters. Chapter nineteen deals with the prelude to the millennium and covers the glorious second coming of Jesus Christ to conquer the earth, destroy the wicked, and establish his kingdom. Chapter twenty deals with the actual millennium and supports our previous study that the Scriptures teach two separate resurrections separated by a period of time. Chapter twenty-one deals with the eternal state, including the new heavens and the new earth, and chapter twenty-two gives additional descriptions of the eternal state and John's concluding remarks.

Chapter nineteen starts off with praises to God for his just and holy judgments on an apostate and rebellious creation, steeped in devilish idolatry, and ruled by anti-Christian forces that are persecuting his saints. Then follows an invitation to the marriage supper of the Lamb, when Christ shall come for his church, deliver his saints, and they will sit down and dine with him in the kingdom of God. As Christ put it, *"And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven."* (**Matthew 8:11**) And *"But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."* (**Matthew 26:29**) Then comes a dramatic description of the triumphant return of Jesus Christ in great power and glory. It describes Christ in detail as he is accompanied with the armies from heaven to come and possess the earth. It recounts the total triumph of Christ and the heavenly forces and the destruction of the anti-Christian powers and their consignment into the Lake of Fire.

Verse fifteen is especially noteworthy. It says, *"And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God."* (**Revelation 19:15**) Here again it speaks of Christ ruling the nations with a rod of iron. This is not the eternal state. This is not the final state of the redeemed in the kingdom of God. This is an earthly rule of Christ with his saints where there are still wicked men present who need to be ruled with rigor and compelled to bow the knee and acknowledge and obey Jesus the Christ, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. This is the millennium. This is the millennial kingdom.

And now we are finally at Revelation the twentieth chapter. This is the most detailed and explicit overview of the millennial state in the Scriptures. The chapter starts off with the binding of Satan. It is the visible and personal reign of a triumphant, and all powerful Jesus Christ, returning in power and great glory, coupled with the binding of Satan that sets the stage for the long anticipated millennial kingdom. All eschatological positions realize this and therefore interpret the binding of Satan in accordance with their view of the millennium.

Amillennialists spiritualize the millennium and place it during the period between the first and second advent of Jesus Christ. They therefore have to place the binding of Satan at the time of the first advent. They argue this from such texts as the following, *"But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods,*

except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house.” (Matthew 12:28-29) However, as we shall note, this position has great difficulties associated with it, not the least of which is that it is contradicted by numerous other Scriptures. Furthermore, this passage does not require us to believe that Satan was bound at that time. Rather Christ is saying that casting out devils is a sign of the kingdom of God. And Christ is saying that the spoiling of Satan’s kingdom requires that he be bound. Satan is called “*the prince of this world,” “the god of this world,” “ruler of the darkness of this world.”* As such he offered Christ the kingdoms of this world in the temptation in the wilderness if Christ would but worship and serve him. When Satan is bound then will come to pass the prophecy of John that says, “*The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.*” (**Revelation 11:15**) Casting out demons is a sign of the kingdom because for the kingdom to be established Satan has to be bound. That is what Christ was teaching.

In a similar vein, neither does Satan’s fall or expulsion from heaven indicate that he is in any way bound. Christ prophetically speaks of this when he says, *And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.” (Luke 10:18)* John speaks of this when he states,

“And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time. Revelation 12:9-12

John is warning that rather than being an exercise in binding Satan, his expulsion will make him even more dangerous. And the reason he is more dangerous than ever is because he knows that it will only be a short time until he is bound.

That Satan was not bound during Christ’s earthly ministry or after the cross is manifest from various Biblical statements. Paul tells the Roman believers, “*And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.” (Romans 16:20)* Paul places the bruising of Satan, a reference to Genesis 3:15, to some future time. Paul does not see Satan as bound declaring, “*And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.” (2 Corinthians 11:14-15)* He explains to the believers in Thessalonika, “*Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us.” (1 Thessalonians 2:18)* And Peter echoes this view of Satan as being unbound warning, “*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” (1 Peter 5:8)* All these statements clearly indicate that Satan is not bound at this time.

And finally, we have our senses and the history of the last two thousand years. We find that the world has been characterized by wickedness, war, cruelty, and oppression, and by the persecution of the saints for most of that time. We find men greedy, ungodly, and steeped in idolatry and lust. We find that men worship idols and follow Satan and reject the true and the living God. And today we see that the world is regressing from the attainments of the Great Protestant Reformation and becoming ever more apostate and corrupt. None of this gives us any confidence in a theory that states that Satan is presently bound.

Postmillennialists also believe that Satan must be bound before their millennium can occur. They place the millennium towards the end of this age and before the return of Jesus Christ, believing that the advance of the gospel and the Christianization of the nations, will bring about millennial conditions. They therefore postulate that the binding of Satan takes place during the present gospel age. They see this binding not as an advent, but as a process. They believe that as the gospel progresses to conquer the

world and as nations are converted to Christianity Satan will be progressively bound. There are several problems with this view.

First of all it is tough to transmute this act of binding into a process, a process that has now been going on for two thousand years. The language of John in Revelation 20 hardly admits of such an interpretation. John says, *"And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him."* (**Revelation 20:1-3**) John speaks of chains, he speaks of lock and key. This does not evoke images of a gradual and progressive restriction. John speaks of casting him bound into a pit and sealing up the pit. The Postmillennial view of Satan's binding simply flies in the face of the Biblical testimony about his binding.

Secondly, the Postmillennial view of Satan's binding requires that the world slowly and steadily becomes a better place. We see this neither in church history, nor in the prophetic Scriptures. The Olivet Discourse and the book of Revelation do not paint that kind of picture of the end of the age. That, of course, is why postmillennialists have to maintain that those prophecies have all been fulfilled and are behind us. The Apostle Paul prophesies that, *"Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived."* (**2 Timothy 3:12-13**) Paul does not say that persecution shall diminish over time. Rather he states that it will be the common lot of Christians, particularly for those who are faithful and seek to live godly in Jesus Christ. Secondly he states that the wicked will wax worse and worse. The tares will mature with the wheat. The world will not get better because the ungodly will increase in ungodliness. Paul goes on to say,

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. **2 Timothy 3:1-5**

This reminds us of the warning of Christ that the end of the age will be as the days of Noah. Paul's description of men at the end of the age does not fit the Postmillennial dream. Rather, it is reminiscent of Noah's generation of which Moses says, *"And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."* (**Genesis 6:5**) For all these reasons the Postmillennial view that Satan will be progressively bound throughout the present gospel age is simply untenable.

The premillennial view has none of the problems of the other views. It fits naturally with the prophecies regarding the moral state of the world at the end of the age, and has Satan bound in one decisive act that coincides with the establishment of the millennial kingdom. It is consistent with the explicit description of Satan's binding given by John and does not need to explain it away. It accepts the sad reality that Satan, in God's providence, and according to his good and holy will and his righteous judgments, is still very much the prince of this world. And it looks forward to the blessed hope, the coming and glorious appearance of our blessed Savior Jesus Christ to deliver the world and establish that kingdom that is the subject of prophecy and has been the hope of the faithful throughout history.

John goes on expounding the things that shall be saying, *"And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years."* (**Revelation 20:4**) This is not the judgment of the righteous. They are already justified. Paul says, *"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus."* (**Romans 8:1**) There will be a judgment of the righteous, for Paul also says, *"...for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ,"* (**Romans 14:10**) but it will be a judgment of their works, not of their eternal destiny. For Paul tells the Corinthians, *"Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If*

any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." (**1 Corinthians 3:13-15**)

Rather than being a judgment of the saints John is foretelling judgment by the saints. The saints will live and reign with Christ. They will sit on thrones, as Christ told his disciples¹⁶, and with Christ will judge the world in righteousness. Then will be fulfilled the following Scriptures, "*It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us*" (**2 Timothy 2:11-12**) and "*And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.*" (**Revelation 5:10**)

And then we get the heart of the issues surrounding the millennium as John states, "*...and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.*" We now get the most detailed information about the timing and the extent of the millennium. First of all John states that the saints lived. This implies a resurrection and fits in with Paul's statements to the Thessalonians concerning the resurrection of the saints at the return of Christ. They are resurrected to reign with Christ in his kingdom. And that reign will be for a thousand years. It is from that statement that the millennium gets its name as it is Latin for one thousand. This millennium kingdom, as we have already noted, is distinct from the eternal; state and will last for one thousand years. This kingdom is inaugurated by the return of Christ and the resurrection of the saints, elsewhere termed the resurrection of the just. John then introduces a parenthetical statement. He states that the rest of the dead, those who were not resurrected, will be resurrected at the end of the thousand years. This establishes several things. First of all it confirms that there will not be a general resurrection of all the dead at one time. It confirms the Biblical statements we examined earlier that stated that the saints will be resurrected out from among the dead. And it established the exact period of time that will separate the two resurrections, the resurrection of the just and the resurrection of the unjust. John then goes on to state that *this*, that is the resurrection of the saints who lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years, *is the first resurrection*, and reiterates that those who participate in that resurrection will "*...be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.*" That this is a resurrection only of the saints, of the just, is emphasized by John's statement that the second death, defined in verse fourteen as the Lake of Fire, has no power over those resurrected at that time.

John then explains how the millennial kingdom will end. It will end because one of the conditions that made it possible, the binding of Satan, comes to an end. God, according to his inscrutable will and purpose, releases Satan at the end of the thousand years. In our highly technical and scientific age we tend to underestimate the power of the devil. The New Testament Scriptures are replete with warnings about Satan, his deceptions, his wiles, his power, and the danger he represents. And here we have a demonstration of just how dangerous and powerful a foe he is. For no sooner is he released then he effectively deceives the nations and gathers them together in a great insurrection against the millennial reign of Jesus Christ. It is stunning once, Satan is released, how quickly millennial conditions dissipate and men are stirred up to rebel against the King of Kings in a futile attempt to again have their own way. And this again also demonstrates that during the millennium we will have both saints and sinners, the redeemed of the Lord and unregenerate men, living together, distinguishing it from the eternal state. The rebellion is quickly crushed by divine power and the final judgment of the wicked ensues. At this time we have the second resurrection, the resurrection of the unjust. John states this as follows, "*And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.*" The dead are resurrected to face their final judgment before the great white throne and are sentenced to be "*cast into the lake of fire.*" Thus ends the millennium. From now on there are no more wicked inhabiting the kingdom. From now on there is no more need of Christ ruling with a rod of iron. Satan is now permanently bound, an eternal prisoner in the Lake of Fire. Now we are ready for the eternal state and the final consummation of all things, the final consummation of the kingdom of God.

¹⁶ See Matthew 19:28 and Luke 22:30

John then proceeds with a glorious description of the eternal state in chapter twenty-one and the first portion of chapter twenty-two. He speaks of the new heavens and the new earth, and in great detail about the New Jerusalem. The wicked are forever destroyed and this is a kingdom for the righteous only. As John puts it, "...the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death... And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life." Although John gives us considerable amount of detail it is still hard for us to imagine this glorious kingdom. It remains as Paul stated it in his day, "...Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

Now how does all this relate to the various millennial views? The above is a brief, but straightforward, exposition of how historic premillennialists view these chapters of Revelation. Dispensational premillennialists would agree with much, but not all, of the above. The main difference is not only the pretribulational rapture, but the extreme complexity of their system causes them to have additional raptures and resurrections. For amillennialists and postmillennialists who reject the idea of a millennium after the return of Christ, a main issue is the doctrine of the resurrection. They oppose the idea of two resurrections, believing in one general resurrection of all men at the second coming of Jesus Christ. They interpret the Biblical passages that speak of two resurrections, of a first and a second resurrection in a different way, basically by spiritualizing the first resurrection as being born again. For both positions the first resurrection is spiritual, a resurrection unto new spiritual life. The second resurrection is physical, a raising up of the body from the grave. For them the second resurrection is not just a resurrection of the wicked, but a general resurrection of all men to face their final judgment.¹⁷

For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. **Matthew 22:30**

¹⁷ Hendriksen, an Amillennialist, says, "The first resurrection has nothing to do with the body; it concerns the soul. As soon as the word of Christ is accepted by faith...one 'has everlasting life...' and what is this but *the first resurrection*...?...The second resurrection is physical in character...It is universal: *all* will be raised: both believers and unbelievers." *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1975, p. 201.

CHAPTER 11

A CHURCH KINGDOM?

The theory that the church is the kingdom is one that is frequently held by both postmillennialists and amillennialists. It seems to have had its origin in the writings of Augustine late in the fourth century. Before that, as church historians generally recognize, the church held to historic premillennialism. That it took centuries after the personal teaching of Jesus Christ regarding the kingdom and after the apostolic age for this theory to emerge should raise some caution in our minds about it.

Nonetheless, this is a subject that can be difficult to deal with and hard to refute. This is because it is partially true, that is, it is true in a sense. The original version of the Westminster Confession of Faith, holding to the church kingdom theory states...

Chapter 25; Section II: The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the gospel (not confined to one nation, as before, under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, and of their children, and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.

The American Presbyterian Church, seeking to correct what it considers an overstated view of the church as the kingdom, has amended the Confession at that point to say...

Chapter 25; Section II: The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the gospel (not confined to one nation, as before, under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children, and is the present aspect of the future, glorious, visible kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.

There is huge difference between the glorious fulfillment of the real kingdom at the second coming of Jesus Christ and a shadow of a prototype, a present aspect that is merely the earnest or down payment of our inheritance as we await the consummation of all things at the end of the age. The standard church-kingdom theory does not do justice to that difference and that is why we will examine it and see what the scriptures teach concerning the church as a kingdom.

We have already noted that Old Testament Israel, the commonwealth established by Moses at Mount Sinai, was a prototype of the kingdom of God. It had all the prerequisites of such a kingdom. A covenant people especially set apart and consecrated to the service of the true God; a land that was set apart as the land of promise and consecrated as the homeland of God's people of that day; and the special presence of God who ruled over them as their God and their King from the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies in the Temple where he dwelt with his people.

In a similar sense we can see in the church of Jesus Christ all the features of a prototype of the kingdom of God. And therefore it is not surprising that there should be a widely held belief that it is the kingdom. However a prototype is just that. It is not the real thing. And that is what we want to clear up at this point. How is the church presented in Scripture as a prototype of the kingdom? For starters the Apostle Peter notes of the church that he is writing to...

But ye *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: **1 Peter 2:9**

Now a nation is a kingdom, the one word being a synonym for the other. In what sense can we describe the church of Jesus Christ as a kingdom? First of all there is the church membership. These constitute a covenanted people of God, consecrated to his service and dedicated to his public worship. This kingdom thus has a people. Secondly, it has a government. The elders of the church constitute a government, as they rule over the Lord's people as officers of Christ, ruling over his people in his name. They enforce his commandments and discipline the disobedient who will not repent and submit to the rule of Christ. And although it lacks a land it does have church buildings and properties that are set aside for the use of Christ and his people. There Christ is publicly worshipped, his ordinances and

sacraments are faithfully performed in his name, and from these sacred precincts the unrepentant are banished and excommunicated by his authority. So, as we can see, this is truly, in a real sense, a prototype of the future coming glorious kingdom of God. But it is not that kingdom and should never be confused with or presented as such.

What are the scriptures that cause men to see the church as the kingdom of God and by what arguments do they defend such a conclusion? First of all we note the language of some of the kingdom parables. In some of these parables the kingdom of heaven is likened unto various objects, such as a grain of mustard seed, leaven, and a net, etc. The common denominator in all these objects is that there is a process going on whereby something is growing, slowly but surely. The tiny mustard seed is growing into the largest of the herbs. The leaven is slowly, but systematically changing the measure of flour into a leavened lump. The net is slowly, one cast at a time, gathering in a harvest of fish. This, to many, seems like the church. It starts off small like a mustard seed but grows to be a large organization. The church through its ministry leavens the world as it preaches the gospel and converts men and women to Jesus Christ. As Christ's ministers function as fishers of men they cast out their nets slowly building the church of Jesus Christ, one living stone at a time. It thus seems that in all these parables the activity of building the church is likened to establishing the kingdom of God. This certainly gives food for thought for the proponents of the church-kingdom theory.

The key to the understanding of these parables lies in another kingdom parable. That is the parable of the marriage of the king's son found in Matthew 22:1-14. In this parable the kingdom of God is likened unto the marriage of the king's son. More specifically, we might say it is likened unto the marriage feast of the king's son. Those who were invited to the wedding feast were bidden to come. However, the appointed guests mocked the king's servants, refused to come, and even went to great extremes mistreating the king's emissaries going so far as to kill some of them. The king was furious and as we see in a parallel parable, and dealt with these rebellious subject according to his wrath and his justice. And then he ordered his servants to go out in highways and byways and invite others to the wedding feast. And forth they went to gather those that will be the king's guests at the marriage supper of his son. Now the meaning here is clear. The Jews, forming the elect nation, the chosen covenant people of God refused to come to the wedding feast. They refused to repent at the preaching of John and enter the kingdom of heaven. Instead John, as many other prophets, was martyred, and then they slew the king's son. God in his anger cast them off and sent the Romans in A.D. 70 to destroy their city and the temple and scatter them over the face of the earth. And now we see the meaning of the kingdom parables we were examining. The kingdom that was nigh at the preaching of John, and at the preaching of Christ and the apostles, was rejected by the Jews. Therefore the kingdom is no longer nigh or at hand. Instead the king's servants are going out to invite those that will be the guests at the marriage supper of his son, to call out those who will be the citizens of the kingdom of God. The meaning of the mustard seed, the leaven, and the net, is that the kingdom is delayed until the process of the furnishing the kingdom with a people has been completed. This is a slow and steady process, as the growth of a mustard seed, as the spread of leaven through a measure of meal, and as the gathering of a harvest of fish by successive casts of the net. Not until all of God's elect have been called out and the wedding feast is thoroughly furnished with guests will the wedding feast take place. Then, at the glorious second coming of Jesus Christ the kingdom will be established as the resurrected and raptured saints join their Lord in a kingdom that will never end. That is the clear meaning of these kingdom parables and supports the historic premillennial view of the end of the age and gives no support to the theory that the church at present is the kingdom of God.

Another favorite argument of the proponents of the church-kingdom theory is that the kingdom is God's reign in the heart. This is buttressed by the text where Christ states, "

And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: either shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you. (Luke 17:20-21).

The Pharisees were thinking in terms of a cataclysmic establishment of the kingdom at the appearance of the Messiah according to the Old Testament prophecies, and put the question to Christ as when this might be expected to happen. He plainly informs them that this is not going to happen, at least not now, in their generation and states that the kingdom does come by observation. Christ is teaching that the kingdom, in their day, will not be characterized by an outward establishment, by a show of force supporting an external organization. Rather, as the kingdom parables have already taught us, the kingdom in this era is characterized by the elect being called out through faith and repentance, and made fit for the kingdom one living stone at a time. Then, as the lynch-pin of the argument of the church-kingdom theorists Christ adds, "for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you." This however doesn't fit very well. Christ is addressing the Pharisees. They are wanton hypocrites. The kingdom of God certainly is not within them. Rather, as the alternate translation states, the kingdom of God is among them. They are looking for the kingdom to be established by a great outward display of force, etc. Instead Christ is telling them that all that they can experience of the kingdom now is already in their midst. There, men and women are entering the prototype of the kingdom, the church, and receiving an eternal inheritance in the ultimate glorious kingdom of Jesus Christ that will be established at his return.

To postulate that the church is the kingdom would be to contradict their own position. Presbyterian and Reformed in general including Presbyterian Postmillennialists and Presbyterian Amillennialists believe that the church started in the days of Abraham. There (Genesis 17) we first see the three marks of a true church, the proclamation of the word of God, the faithful practice of the sacraments, and the exercise of church discipline. But if the church has been around since Abraham's day that is fatal to the church-kingdom theory. Then how can Christ preach that the kingdom is at hand. Was he preaching that the church was at hand? Paul, quoting Psalm 22:22 states, "Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee." (**Hebrews 2:12**) Paul recognized that the church existed in Old Testament times. Similarly Stephen speaks of the church in the Old Testament, saying "This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and *with* our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us." (**Acts 7:38**) The church-kingdom theory requires that the church be established at the first advent of Christ. That is clearly not the case. The New Testament church was patterned after and came out of the synagogue system. This system was already fully functioning when Christ began his ministry. There the word of God was read and preached on the Sabbath, the psalms were sung, and church discipline was exercised as the unrepentant were "cast out" of the synagogue. Early Christian Churches were frequently composed of synagogues that confessed that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah. Paul always went to reach in the synagogue first to see if they would convert to Christianity, a simple process, which merely required accepting Jesus as the Messiah in addition to their current beliefs. It is the position of dispensationalists that the church was founded at Christ's first advent!

Similarly, we can argue with respect to Christ's reign in the heart. Was Christ teaching that God's reign in human hearts was at hand when he proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom? That would be absurd. God has ruled in human hearts from the beginning of time. The pre-deluvian patriarchs from Seth through Noah were godly regenerate men and God ruled in their hearts as they lived lives of faith and obedience unto God. Similarly, from Abraham through Moses the post-deluvian Old Testament patriarchs had God's reign in their hearts. The Old Testament church from Moses through Christ had God's reign in the hearts of the believers. To say all this was nigh, and at hand, at the first advent of Christ, is totally absurd. Yet, that is what a logical application of the church-kingdom theory would require. That is what one would have to believe if one held that God's reign in the heart is the kingdom that Christ established at his first advent.

Both the church and God's reign in the heart existed in Old Testament times. How can it then be said that they were at hand when Christ started his ministry? How can it be said that that was the kingdom that he was establishing? Both Ladd, a premillennialist, and amillennialists in general teach that God's reign in the heart was the kingdom that Christ established at his first advent. They thus reject any notion of the millennial kingdom being offered to the Jewish nation and of its deferment to the end of the age

because of their unbelief. This is an overreaction to the dispensational form of the postponed kingdom theory, which is rife with serious theological problems.

Ultimately, there is a host of scriptures that cannot be fitted into the church-kingdom theory. The following are just a few randomly selected.

Paul, suffering persecution and facing death states, "And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve *me* unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom *be* glory for ever and ever. Amen." (2 **Timothy 4:18**) If Paul is to be preserved unto the kingdom he cannot be in the kingdom as yet. Paul is looking to be preserved unto the kingdom that Christ will establish at his coming. That Paul believes the kingdom will be established at the second coming is evident from the following scripture, "I charge *thee* therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom. (**Timothy 4:1**) The following text demonstrates that the disciples, or followers of Christ, and therefore members of the church, are not in the kingdom, but must pass through many trials before they do so. They must suffer many things for Christ's sake in this world if they wish to enter the kingdom in the world to come. "Confirming the souls of the disciples, *and* exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. (**Acts 14:22**).

Another text that is greatly misunderstood and misinterpreted that refutes the church-kingdom theory is the petition in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as *it is* in heaven. (**Matthew 6:10**) What was Christ instructing us to pray for? What is the thrust of this petition? Are we really praying, as the church-kingdom theory would logically imply, "Thy church come?" That is of course nonsensical, especially if we believe that the church has been established since patriarchal times. So, this is frequently transmuted into a petition for the church to grow and to prosper. But that is clearly twisting the text and reading one one's desired meaning into it. The petition is clearly for something, the kingdom however one defines that, to come, and not for something to prosper and grow. The petition is a natural one for the Lord's people. It echoes the prayer of the Apostle John, "Even so, come quickly Lord Jesus." It expresses the longing of the Lord's people for the coming and kingdom of Jesus Christ. It is a prayer, a petition, for the coming of the Blessed Hope, the resurrection of the just at the coming of the Lord Jesus when our vile bodies will be transformed unto the likeness of His glorious body, when, as Paul states it, this corruption shall put on incorruption and this mortal shall put on immortality. To reduce that great hope to simply a petition that the church will prosper in this present age when we still groan under the curse and wait for the consummation of all things when we will be delivered from the body of this death and become the souls of just men made perfect is to seriously corrupt this text and make a shambles of this petition for the Christian's true hope, the Blessed Hope, the coming and kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Another text that is badly handled by the proponents of the church-kingdom theory, by those who believe that the kingdom Christ instituted at his first advent was his reign in the heart is Acts 1:6, which states, "When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" Amillennial and postmillennial commentators waste no time in condemning the apostles for their supposed ignorance and carnality. We hear that they are gross and carnal and do not understand that this is a spiritual kingdom. We hear that the apostles are still caught up in Jewish fables and hopes for a worldly kingdom, etc. But those who are quick to condemn the apostles are slow to see that Christ does not respond as they do. There is no hint of correction in his response to their question. If they really were as ignorant and had such erroneous views of the kingdom it would have been criminal for the Lord Jesus Christ to have left them, the inspired leaders of the church, in such a state. Who is willing to charge Christ with such neglectful conduct? There is no correction because their question was legitimate. All Christ did was instruct them that the timing of the kingdom was not something that they were to concern themselves with, but was in the hands of God the Father. Their question was directly in line with the expectations of the Jewish faithful in Old Testament times. They were inquiring as to when the kingdom of prophecy, promised to Israel, might be established. Christ's response is that it will be established according to the purpose of the Father in the Father's good time. They are inquiring about the kingdom that is to be established at the second coming

with the true Israel of God, that has had the unbelieving branches pruned out and has had the believing Gentiles grafted in, Gentiles who having the faith of Abraham are the seed of Abraham and heirs of the kingdom according to the promise. These commentators have forgotten that it is not their function or prerogative to criticize the disciples of Christ. As Paul states it, *"Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand."* (**Romans 14:4**) In other words if Christ has no criticism of his disciples regarding their question about the timing of the kingdom then neither should we. The Biblical testimony is that the disciples understood the nature of the kingdom. In Matthew 13, after Christ has set forth many kingdom parables he asks the disciples if they understood what he had been teaching. Their response was, *"Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea, Lord."* (**Matthew 13:51**)

Additionally, to infer that the disciples were ignorant men who misunderstood the kingdom is to cast serious aspersions on our Lord Jesus Christ. He called these men. He personally taught them and trained them. From his mouth they personally received the gospel of the kingdom. At his command they were sent forth to teach the that gospel. And now we are told that they didn't even understand the very nature of that gospel. We are informed that were ignorant, yea, clueless, about the real nature of that kingdom. We are asked to believe that Christ sent forth ignorant and ill-trained men who misunderstood the gospel and the kingdom and went forth and preached error. This we cannot, we will not believe, never! It is the height of arrogance for these presumptuous commentators to parade their alleged knowledge and understanding of the kingdom and contrast it with the supposed ignorance and error of the apostles. We will reject their folly and cling to Christ and his words and the view of the kingdom that he taught his disciples when he sent them forth to preach the gospel of the kingdom, the kingdom of prophecy that had been the hope of the Old Testament faithful for generations.

Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated *us* into the kingdom of his dear Son: **Colossians 1:13**

CHAPTER 12

A JEWISH KINGDOM?

A common objection to any kind of earthly millennium, especially as set forth by the dispensationalists who dominate premillennialism, is that the kingdom would be too Jewish. Such a reaction is wrong and represents a totally invalid approach. It is like rejecting the doctrine of the virgin birth because it is too Romish. The fact that Rome stresses the virgin birth to such a degree that they maintain the perpetual virginity of Mary and exalt her far beyond Biblical limits does not invalidate the fact of the virgin birth or the angel's pronouncement, "*Blessed art thou among women.*" The proper response to error is not a reaction to the other extreme, but a return to the Biblical testimony on that point. Because Dispensationalism has erred in the extreme on this issue, the Jewish nature of the millennium kingdom, the typical Reformed response is to reject all premillennialism as constituting the establishment of a Jewish Kingdom. This is very unfortunate as the Dispensationalists have totally misunderstood the sense in which the millennial kingdom and its successor in the eternal state will be Jewish.

Just as there was a sense in which the church is the kingdom, as discussed previously, so there is a legitimate sense in which the millennial kingdom will be Jewish. The kingdom of prophecy was promised to Israel. The prophets clearly taught that the kingdom was covenanted to Israel and that one day Messiah would come and Israel would be delivered from all her woes and inherit the kingdom. These promises and covenants will be fulfilled. The question is not if, but how. The dispensationalists in answering this question have produced gross error. Let us examine in what sense the Jewish nature of the kingdom is true. Jesus taught that salvation is of the Jews. He told the woman at the well, "*Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews.*" (**John 4:22**) This is reinforced by Christ's actions with the Canaanite woman. When she asks for deliverance for her daughter from a demon his response was "*I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*" (**Matthew 15:24**) And when she persists he adds, "*It is not meet (i.e. fit or proper) to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.*" (**Matthew 15:26**) His actions could not be clearer, or more emphatic, that salvation is of the Jews. The promises and the covenants were all made to Israel. And to Israel they shall be fulfilled. Thus far we can agree with the Dispensationalists, but no further.

The millennial kingdom and its successor in the eternal state is Jewish in the sense that one needs to become a Jew to enter it. Paul explains all this under the analogy of an olive tree. Paul does not say that there are two olive trees. He does not say that one olive tree, the Jewish one, has been cut down and another one, the Gentile one, planted. There is but one olive tree, representing the true Israel of God. It was composed in Christ's day almost exclusively of believing Jews. Paul says of this olive tree has been pruned. He states that the unbelieving branches, those Jews who refused to repent at the preaching of John the Baptist and who rejected Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah, have been pruned out. They were excommunicated from the true Israel of God because they were not true Jews. As Paul states it, "*But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.*" (**Romans 2:29**) It is those who repent of their sins and accept in faith Jesus as the Messiah; those who have been regenerated by the Spirit of God and have the true circumcision of the heart, these are the true Jews, constituting the true Israel of God. These, whether Jew or Gentile, form the olive tree. It is in this sense that one needs to become a Jew in order to enter the kingdom of God. It is in this sense, and in this sense only, that the kingdom will be a Jewish kingdom.

The promises and the covenants were made to the patriarchs and to Israel. They were especially made to Abraham and his seed. To enter into these covenants, to inherit the promises, to inherit the kingdom one needs to become a Jew, one needs to become the seed of Abraham. How then can a Gentile be saved? How can we enter into a kingdom that was covenanted to Israel; that was promised to the seed of Abraham? Paul again explains all of this and expounds it very clearly in the third chapter of Galatians.

There he states, *“Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.”* (**Galatians 3:6-9**) Here Paul argues that the true seed of Abraham, even as the true Israelite mentioned above, is characterized not as much by physical descent, as by sharing the faith of Abraham, the father of the faithful. And how can this be? Paul further explains saying, *“Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.”* (**Galatians 3:16**) Paul here is arguing that seed of Abraham is not just those physically descended from him, but is particularly Jesus Christ. The inference is then that it is those that are in Christ, those that are united to Christ by faith, that they are Abraham’s seed, and not those who reject him and have no part in him. He is the promised seed and only by being in him are we Abraham’s seed. And this lays the foundation for Paul’s grand conclusion, *“And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”* (**Galatians 3:29**) It is by faith that we become the seed of Abraham and inherit the kingdom that was covenanted to his seed. Yes, there truly is a sense in which the kingdom is Jewish. It was promised and covenanted to Israel. And we must become true Israelites, circumcised in the heart; we must have the faith of Abraham and thus become the seed of Abraham, in order to inherit that kingdom. Truly, as Christ spoke, *“salvation is of the Jews”* and only as we become part of the true Israel of God can we be saved and inherit that eternal kingdom.

Let us now, in contrast to the kingdom described above, examine the Jewish nature of the kingdom as understood by dispensationalists. First, one needs to understand the nature of the error of dispensationalism. It is not that they believe in dispensations. That there are such in the Biblical economy is undeniable. The Westminster Confession of Faith states as much when it says, *“There are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations”*. Their error is that they see all these dispensations as independent, as stand alone, and as succeeding and replacing the previous dispensation, which has passed away. Rather, Biblically, the dispensations, or covenants as the Reformed prefer to term them, flow one into the other. Each successive covenant is built on the previous one, which provides its foundation, and each successive covenant contributes to the fulfillment of those that have gone before. So instead of an atomistic scheme of independent dispensations Reformed covenant theology sees one grand unity as the covenants reveal step by step God’s great plan of redemption and progressively reveals, and takes steps towards the establishment of, that covenanted kingdom that is the hope of the Lord’s people. The Westminster Confession expresses that unity by using the term the covenant of grace, a term not found in the Bible, to comprehend this series of gracious covenants that reveal God’s plan of salvation.

It is because of this nature of dispensationalism that the pretribulation rapture is such a key, and indispensable part of their system.¹⁸ For them the present dispensation, the church age, must vanish and be replaced with the kingdom age. To accomplish this transition the pretribulation rapture is essential. The church will disappear from the scene being raptured to heaven and this will set the stage for a new dispensation that will be very Jewish. And there is more than just their view of the dispensations, their use of the pretribulation rapture to institute a new Jewish age, and their views respecting the Jewish nature of the kingdom that Christ will establish at his return. As we have previously noted their view of the “postponement” of the kingdom is also highly problematical.

Calvinist premillennialists have no problem on this latter point. They see the sovereign and unchanging plan of God unfolding as progressively in time he reveals and carries out his great plan of redemption. They acknowledge as Scripture teaches, *“Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.”* (**Acts 15:18**) The coming of Christ to Israel, the offer of the kingdom, his rejection by the elect nation, the call of the Gentiles, the calling out of God’s elect into the New Testament Church of Jesus Christ, that holy nation that will supply the righteous citizens that will form the people of the

¹⁸ In all fairness, I hasten to point out that there are premillennialists who are not dispensationalists who do hold to the pretribulation rapture. My point is, that for such, holding it is an option. For dispensationalists it is a necessity.

future glorious kingdom of God to be established at Christ's second advent are all seen as part of God's plan from the foundation of the world. They see the call of the Gentiles as clearly prophesied in the Old Testament. Paul speaks of the call of the Gentiles as a mystery revealed in these latter days, but there were many indications in the prophets that this was God's plan. God tells Abraham, "*And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.*" (**Genesis 12:3**) Paul, quoting Isaiah, says, "*But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me. But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.*" (**Romans 10:20-21**) They see that the apostasy of Israel, that the Messiah would be "*despised and rejected of men,*" that the builders would reject he who was the chief cornerstone, was all predicted and prophesied and part of God's plan.

They see two aspects of the Messiah revealed in the testimony of the prophets. One, the glorious triumphant Messiah, ruling over his enemies and establishing his kingdom in power and glory, the other the suffering servant of Jahweh revealed in Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53, "*a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief,*" who dies for his people. For Calvinist Premillennialists the coming of the Messiah, his rejection by Israel, his atoning death, his resurrection and ascension in power and glory to sit at the right hand of the father until his enemies become his footstool and he returns to reign as the Son of David, as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, are perfectly understandable and seen as part of God's great plan of redemption. For them the offer of the kingdom, its rejection on the terms offered in the preaching of John, of Christ, and the Apostles, that is faith and repentance, and its ultimate establishment at the second coming is no stumbling block, and is seen as part of God's eternal plan even as partially foreshadowed in the writings of the prophets.

Now, compare that with the "postponed kingdom" theory as postulated by dispensational premillennialists. Their views are radically different. Dispensationalists are almost uniformly Arminian in their beliefs with respect to God's way of salvation. They see the offer of the kingdom in an entirely different light. Believing in a free will of the creature that is capable of frustrating the plans and purposes of God, they believe that God had no way of previously determining what Israel's reaction would be. So, when Israel apostatized they see God as regrouping and replanning. They see the church age instituted as a stop-gap measure to deal with the reality of Israel's rejection of their Messiah. They remain convinced that God will fulfill his purposes with and promises to Israel, as they define the true Israel of God. To that end they abort the church age by means of the pretribulation rapture so God can again seek to fulfill his purposes with Israel, a second try if you will.

Such views are of course rather dishonoring to God, and fail to praise him as the great sovereign God who "*doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?*" (**Daniel 4:35**) Such views are therefore anathema to Calvinists. However, the point here is that such views need neither be accepted, nor tolerated, to accept the historic premillennialist understanding of the kingdom. The offer of the kingdom to Israel at Christ's first advent, its rejection on the terms required, that is repentance and faith in Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah, and its postponement to the end of age as God calls out the true Israel, the true seed of Abraham, to attend the wedding feast of his son, and to inherit that kingdom, presents no difficulty to a Calvinist, believing fully in the sovereignty of God and seeing all this as part of God's eternal plan already partially revealed in the writings of the prophets.

Having digressed to clear up some issues and come to a better understanding of dispensationalism and how it has been such a stumbling block for Calvinists and those who are Reformed to consider premillennialism as a viable doctrine, we can now pickup where we left off and examine the Jewish nature of the kingdom as understood by dispensationalists. In spite of fact, as we have seen, that the Old Testament prophets predicted the rejection of the Messiah, the apostasy of Israel, that they would sell the Messiah, the Shepherd of Israel for thirty pieces of silver, that the Gentiles would be called in their place to provoke them to jealousy, and in spite of the fact that Christ warned them most specifically saying, "*That many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping*

and gnashing of teeth," (**Matthew 8:12**) the dispensationalists take the rejection of the Messiah by Israel as catching God somewhat by surprise. For them, Christ's earthly kingdom, to be established with the Jewish nation, did not come to pass because of Israel's rejection of Jesus, which was beyond God's control. But, now that the church age has run its course, and has been terminated by the mechanism of the pretribulation rapture, they see God as ready to resume his dealings with Israel. Now the kingdom will be established, not as we have pointed out above, with the true Israel of God, but with physical Israel, with the unbelieving branches as it were. This will be a very Jewish kingdom, with a rebuilt temple, an Aaronic priesthood, a Levitical order, and a reconstituted sacrificial system.

Now while there are a few verses in the Old Testament Scriptures that might indicate an ongoing Levitical order, and sacrifices, such as, "*Then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant, that he should not have a son to reign upon his throne; and with the Levites the priests, my ministers. As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured: so will I multiply the seed of David my servant, and the Levites that minister unto me.*" (**Jeremiah 33:21**) etc, the overwhelming analogy of Scripture is against it. Almost the entire book of Hebrews is a polemic against such a conclusion. Paul speaking of the ceremonial law warns the Hebrew Christians not to apostatize from the faith of the New Covenant and return to the Old, the Sinaitic Covenant, saying, "*But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?*" (**Galatians 4:9**) Paul's Language could hardly be more powerful. He sees any return to the Old Covenant and the ceremonial law it contained, including the Aaronic priesthood, the Levitical order, and the sacrificial system as unthinkable. Yet, that is what dispensationalists are asking us to believe, that the glory of the Messianic Millennial Kingdom will be the dregs of the Old Covenant. We are asked to believe that when Christ returns he will resurrect "*the weak and beggarly elements*" and use them to construct his glorious and eternal kingdom. This is totally unthinkable. All this has permanently passed away and Paul teaches as much. He clearly instructs the Hebrew Christians that the Old Covenant has been replaced by the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31:31 and is to be no more. He says,

*But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:) In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to **vanish away**. (**Hebrews 8:6-10, 13**)*

Paul makes it clear that Christ is the Mediator of a new covenant, of the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31. Paul indicates the vast superiority of this covenant and the contrasting failure of the Old Covenant, the Sinaitic Covenant, to deal with problem of sin. This is clearly manifest in the following passage...

*And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin. (**Hebrews 10:11-18**)*

Paul notes that the sacrifices of the Old Covenant continued on and on because they were ineffectual. However, now they have been replaced by the once and for all sacrifice of Jesus Christ of himself and the problem of sin has been dealt with forever. And Paul's conclusion is that there is no longer any need for any more sacrifices for sin. Paul slams the door pretty hard here on the notion of any ongoing sacrificial system. He notes that Christ has accomplished it all and has sat down at the right hand of God waiting

until his enemies be made his footstool. This simply means that he will sit at the right hand of the Father in power and glory until he returns to establish his kingdom. Commentators have noted that the furniture of tabernacle/temple did not include a chair. This is because the priests work was never done. The blood of goats and bulls could not really take away sin, so the sacrifices went on and on, day after day, without really dealing with the problem of sin. In contrast, Christ having offered a single and effectual sacrifice for sin that has forever perfected those who believe, can sit down. Christ can rest from labors and sit at the right hand of the Father because there is nothing left to be done. The work of redemption is finished. And it is almost blasphemous to allege that it needs a resurrected Levitical sacrificial system to somehow complete it.

Probably, more than anything else, it is these aspects of the nature of the millennial kingdom, as taught by dispensationalists that are anathema to Reformed Christians and make premillennialism to be a stench in their nostrils. As long as Calvinists associate a future millennial kingdom with a resurrected Levitical sacrificial system, etc. there will never be any serious consideration of premillennialism as a viable Biblical eschatology. Only as they realize that this is a fairly recent development in eschatology, dispensationalism having its genesis in the nineteenth century. Once they realize that there is a historic premillennialism, a premillennialism that holds to a postponed kingdom theory consistent with the sovereignty of God, a premillennialism that rejects a pretribulationist rapture ushering a new Jewish age, and that especially and emphatically rejects the Jewish nature of any millennial kingdom that infers a restored Aaronic priesthood and the sacrifices of the Old Covenant, then premillennialism should become something they could seriously consider rather than dismissing it out of hand. Having seen that the kingdom was covenanted and promised to Israel and how this is expressed in the Jewish nature of the kingdom as expounded above, they can see that such a kingdom is worthy of their consideration as fulfilling the words of the prophets and the teaching of Christ and the Apostles.

Finally, the kingdom is Jewish in also one more sense, and that is that it was promised and covenanted to Israel. We have already noted how God has dealt with the Gentiles, bringing the descendents of Japheth into the tents of Shem and making them the seed of Abraham. There are however also clear indications that at the end of the age God will again deal in mercy with Israel according to the flesh. Paul clearly indicates (See **Romans 11:1, 18-21, 23-27**) that when the fullness of the Gentiles has come that he will again graft the natural branches back into the olive tree. Whether one takes the fullness of the Gentiles as the fullness of the Gentile elect having all been called out, or that the fullness of the Gentile apostasy has come to fruition, it is clear that at the end of the age God will pour out of his grace on Israel and grant them also the blessings of the New Covenant. Zechariah says, *"And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn."* (**Zechariah 12:10**), and *"In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness."* (**Zechariah 13:1**) God's promises and covenants with Israel shall be fulfilled in a most gracious way at that time.

However, the important thing to note is that no one will enter the kingdom because he is a Jew, and an Israelite according to the flesh. He must become a true Israelite, circumcised in the heart, he must have the faith of Abraham and truly become Abraham's seed. This is of course just as true for Gentiles. No Gentile will enter the kingdom because they were born into a Christian home or because they were baptized into membership in the visible church. The kingdom will be composed of the true Israel of God, those who are regenerated by the Spirit of God, justified, sanctified, and glorified, the true seed of Abraham walking in faith and believing in Jesus the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

Refute dichotomy of Israel & the Church held by both dispensationalists & the Reformed. Use arguments from "The Divine Covenants" that there is only one true Israel of God and the church is comprehended in that one Israel!!!

CHAPTER 13

WHAT THE KINGDOM IS

Let us recapitulate for a moment. We have been discussing so many different aspects of the kingdom and so many varying views of the kingdom. What is the kingdom? What are we really talking about?

The kingdom is the kingdom of prophecy. No one has ever seen the kingdom. Amillennialists have a spiritual kingdom that can't be seen. The kingdom of the postmillennialists and the premillennialists has not as yet been established according to their views. So all we really know of the kingdom is what has been prophesied about it.

The kingdom of prophecy

The kingdom described by the O.T. prophets

Christ, the Son of David, sitting on the throne of David forever

A new world in which dwells righteousness

A world with peace, justice, and judgment

A world where the curse has been lifted and nature has been restored

A world where the saints have been transformed into the glorious likeness of the human nature of Jesus Christ

A world where the saints rule with Christ and are delivered from all ill.

Almost all eschatological positions, except for extreme spiritualizing amillennialists, acknowledge that ultimately this will be the kingdom. However, in the meantime that have another kingdom in mind, that they are fixated on, and this kingdom is as far away in their thoughts as they think that it is in the future.

CHAPTER 14

THE KINGDOM PARABLES

We have already dealt with a number of the kingdom parables. At this point we will address some of those that we not as yet expounded. It is not the purpose of this book to attempt a complete exposition of any particular eschatological position, nor is it the purpose of this chapter to expound all the kingdom parables. Our purpose here is simply to demonstrate that these parables do not really support the church-kingdom theory or the theory that the kingdom is God's reign in the heart. Our wish here is to demonstrate that these kingdom parables, even those that teach little about the kingdom itself, can all be reasonably interpreted in a manner consistent with the historic premillennialist point of view.

The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (**Matthew 13:24-32**) is another kingdom parable whose teachings support the historic premillennialist view. The field is the world and the good seed that has been sown are the children of the kingdom, those with faith in Christ. However, there is also a crop of tares, the children of the wicked one, those who reject Christ and hate his word. To establish the kingdom, now, by force, would necessitate a war between the wheat and the tares, between the children of God and the children of the devil. The lesson of the parable is such a destructive war is to be avoided, as it would do too much damage to the wheat. Instead the wheat is to be allowed to grow, together with the tares, undisturbed until the end of the age, when with divine power the tares will be dealt with and the wheat will be established forever in the kingdom. Note that this clearly teaches the premillennial doctrine that the kingdom is to be postponed until the end of the age because of the tares and is inconsistent with the teaching that the kingdom is established now either in the church or in men's hearts. This parable is particularly inconsistent with postmillennialism because rather than the tares being slowly but systematically eliminated and the wheat dominating the field they are both maturing together, side by side.

The Parable of the Treasure in the Field (**Matthew 13:44**) and the Parable of the Pearl of Great price (**Matthew 13:45-46**) are extremely short one verse parables and can teach us little about the kingdom. Particularly, these parables tell us little about the nature of, or the timing of, the kingdom. However, they tell us volumes about the worth of the kingdom. To enter this kingdom we must be willing to pay the price, no matter how high. Jesus said that we need to take up our cross and follow him. He taught that if we would save our lives we must be willing to lose them, but if we are willing to sacrifice our lives for the kingdom we will gain it. This, the Jews of the time of Christ's first advent were unwilling to do. The elders of the nation were afraid of losing their place and station with the Romans and were unwilling to make that sacrifice and accept Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. In Philippians Paul expounds how he was willing to give up all things and count them but trash that he might win Christ; that he might enter the kingdom. The lesson taught in these two parables is the great value of the kingdom and the price that we must be willing to pay to enter into it. As such they are valuable, but of little assistance in determining one's eschatology, as they are consistent with all three views.

Next we have the Parable of the Net. (**Matthew 13:47-50**) We have discussed this parable previously, however there are aspects of this parable that we need to cover as we review its meaning and how it fits into the various eschatological systems. Jesus told his disciples that he would make them fishers of men. This parable supports that analogy. As they preach the gospel they are as it were casting their nets seeking to draw men into the kingdom. They draw fish, that is men, of all sorts and bring them into the visible church. Then at the end of the age Christ will separate the sheep from the goats, as the angels "*sever the wicked from among the just.*" Then many, who thought that they were in the kingdom, will hear that terrible sentence, "*I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*" (**Matthew 7:23**) Again this parable shows that this age is for the gathering of the children of the kingdom, but the kingdom itself is deferred until the end of the age when at the final judgment the separation of the wheat and the tares, of the sheep and the goats, will take place and Christ will receive his own. This parable is perfectly consistent with the view of the end of the age as seen by amillennialist and historic premillennialists, but

it is a problem for postmillennialists. That the visible church remains a mixed multitude that is not purged until the end of the age belies their view of a glorious church age that will itself bring about the kingdom and establish millennial conditions in the land.

The Parable of the Laborers in the vineyard (**Matthew 20:1-16**) is another kingdom parable that tells us little about the kingdom itself. Its main lesson seems to concern the attitude that we ought to have as we labor to enter the kingdom. Not that we can earn a place in the kingdom by our labors or our merit, but because those who are called into the kingdom are also called to serve God in this life as they await the coming of the kingdom. Chapter 19 had ended with the statement, *"But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first."* This succeeding parable is meant to expound and elucidate that statement. The thief on the cross had almost no time left to serve God and labor in his vineyard. Yet he was told, *"This day thou shalt be with me in paradise."* Others, such as many of God's faithful prophets, and Apostles such as John, who labored most of his life until extreme old age, also go to be with God in paradise. Yet none have any right to complain. All that any of them have received is by the sheer grace of God and they can only be thankful to the Lord of the vineyard.

Parable of the Vineyard (**Matthew 21:33-46**) is more instructive for our purposes, especially regarding the timing of the kingdom. The parable again is based on the passage from Isaiah that states, *"For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry."* (**Isaiah 5:7**) As we have previously noted, the Old Testament nation of Israel, established in the land of promise, a land flowing with milk and honey, was a prototype of the kingdom of God. God had provided everything necessary for this vineyard to flourish. Nonetheless, it would not bring forth the required fruit, faith and repentance, righteousness and holiness, because of the wickedness of the husbandmen, the sharecroppers, that had the care of the vineyard. Constantly God had sent his prophets only to have them persecuted and slain. Finally, the parable is speaking prophetically now, he sent his son. And him also these wicked men slew. The husbandmen, the leaders of Israel, *"the chief priests and elders of the people"* referenced in verse 23 are ripe for judgment. The kingdom will be taken from them (verse 43). Which kingdom? Not only the prototype which was destroyed in 70 A.D., but the true kingdom of heaven that was announced by John the Baptist and proclaimed by Jesus and his disciples. The kingdom of God that was offered to them they have proven unworthy of. It *"shall be taken from (them), and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof."*

What nation is that? Peter identifies it when he writes to the Christian churches, addressing them as *"Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father,"* and stating that they are *"...a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation."* (**1 Peter 2:9**) The kingdom will be given to those who have faith in Jesus Christ, those who are in the New Covenant, those who have brought forth the fruits of faith and repentance, whether Jew or Gentile. This calling out of the Gentiles, this forming of a new holy nation fit to receive the kingdom will take time. When the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled and Christ returns at the end of the age the kingdom will be established and given to this holy nation, to the elect of God in Jesus Christ, called out from every tribe and tongue and nation on the face of the earth. Again, this parable supports the belief that the kingdom denied to the Jews because of their unbelief will be established at the end of the age.

It is important to note that Jesus does not make any attempt to correct the concept of the kingdom held by the leaders of the nation. He does not intimate that their idea of the kingdom is all wrong, that it will never come to pass, and that a different kingdom that they neither understand nor are fit for will be established with others. Rather he states that the very kingdom that they expected will be taken from them and given to others. That earthly kingdom that was prophesied by the prophets and that they expected, where the Messianic King, the Son of David will rule over his people forevermore, that kingdom will be established, but they will be shut out of it and others will enter into it. As Christ put it elsewhere, *"...many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."* (**Matthew 8:11-12**)

The Parable of the Marriage of the King's Son (**Matthew 22:1-14**) parallels and reinforces the above one. Here the kingdom of heaven is likened unto a marriage feast. The invited guests were the Old Testament covenant people of God, the physical descendants of Abraham, Israel according to the flesh. However, when the wedding feast was ready, when the forerunner John the Baptist had done his work, when Christ had come, when the gospel of the kingdom was being preached, and the kingdom was at hand, Israel rejected their Messiah. They would not go to His wedding feast. For various reasons they, the invited guests, refused to come, they would not enter into the proffered kingdom. Like the generation in the wilderness, they too could not enter in because of unbelief. They refused to pay the price of admittance, to bring forth the necessary fruits of faith and repentance. And in their pride and self-righteousness they hated the prophets who called them to repentance and they beat them and killed them.

And then the king, who is none other than Jahweh, the true King and covenant God of Israel, was angry and destroyed them and their city. Here again Christ is speaking prophetically of the terrible events of A.D. 70, when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem, burned the temple, and scattered the nation. And again as in the previous parable other guests are invited as the gospel goes forth to the Gentiles. All this again reinforces three things. That the kingdom was offered to them, that they rejected it, and it will now be offered to others. This second round of invitations to the wedding feast, this call of the Gentiles, this invitation to enter the kingdom that has gone out through all the highways and byways, into all the world, is still going all. Only when it is complete, when the gospel has gone out throughout all the world, when all of the elect have been called out, when the wedding feast has been fully furnished with guests will it take place. At that is, as we know from the Olivet discourse and elsewhere, is at the end of the age, at the second coming of Jesus Christ, when the Son returns. This parable beautifully reinforces and elucidates the former one.

The Parable of the Ten Virgins (**Matthew 25:1-13**), while instructive of a different point, again sustains the teaching of the foregoing parables concerning the timing of the kingdom. To comprehend this parable we need to understand how a traditional Jewish wedding of that day was conducted. To that end Lenski's comments are helpful...

After the Jewish betrothal a certain time, usually not a very long time, was allowed to elapse, and then on a certain evening the groom, accompanied by his friends, proceeded on a festive procession from his own or his father's house to the home of the bride to bring her and her maiden companions to the groom's home for the consummation of the marriage with its days of wedding festivities.¹⁹

In this parable the Son, Jesus Christ, leaves his father's house in heaven, and at the second coming at the end of the age comes for his bride, his church. He will take her home to his kingdom, the millennial kingdom, which will be inaugurated by the wedding feast of the Lamb. Meanwhile, here below the church is awaiting the coming of her Lord, occupying till he comes. However, the visible church is not homogeneous. It is composed of those that are wise and those that are foolish. The foolish are characterized by a lack of oil for their lamps. Oil is frequently used in Scripture as symbolic of the anointing of God's Spirit. The foolish lack true spiritual life worked in us by the Spirit and lack the attendant graces of faith, repentance, etc. and are unworthy of attending the wedding feast of the Son. Therefore there are in the visible church those who truly live for the Lord and are his and those whose profession of faith is vain and empty. And the heart of this parable, its lesson, is to warn the latter to be ready for the coming of the bridegroom, when he will separate the wheat from the tares, the grain from the chaff, the sheep from the goats. The lesson is that once Christ returns, once the second coming has taken place, it will be too late to prepare for the wedding feast. The door will be shut and the Lord will answer with those awful words, "Verily I say unto you, I know you not." Those who are not prepared will be shut out of the kingdom.

However, for our purposes, as we again seek to ascertain from Scripture the timing of the kingdom, the key phrase in this parable is in verse 5 where we are told "...the bridegroom tarried." The second

¹⁹ Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*, p. 962, Augsburg Publishing House, 1964.

coming and the establishment of the kingdom, the wedding feast, is delayed. This is the same delay spoken of in the previous parable of the evil servant. There we are told that the evil servant "...shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming." (**Matthew 24:48**) This is the same thought as the wicked of Peter's day had saying, "Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." (**2 Peter 3:4**) And it is this delay of the kingdom until the coming of the bridegroom, until the second coming of Jesus Christ, that is again the teaching of this parable also.

The Parable of the Talents (**Matthew 25:14-30**) is another kingdom parable that sustains our view with respect to the timing of the kingdom. The wealthy man is clearly Jesus Christ. He is going abroad into a far country. He is turning his assets over to his servants so they can utilize them to his profit in his absence. We, his professed people here on earth are his servants. He has given us all talents. These consist not only of the spiritual gifts imparted by the Spirit he has sent us, but also our knowledge, wisdom, education and skills that he has given us. All these we are to use to his honor and glory and for the profit of his church. When he return after a long absence he judges his servants on how they have fulfilled his commission. This return of the wealthy man to call his servants to account is clearly the return of Jesus Christ, his second coming, at the end of the age. Then we will have the last judgment when God will judge all men by his Son, Jesus Christ. Then his faithful servants will "enter into the joy of (their) lord." They will be invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb and will enter that glorious kingdom that will have no end. The key point again of the parable is the spiritual lesson that we have to be ready for our Lord's return and especially that we have to be prepared to give an account of how we have served him in this life. And the key eschatological point for our interest is that Christ, who left this world at the Ascension, will be gone a long time.²⁰ This confirms our belief about the timing of the kingdom, that it will be at the end of age when our Lord returns, and when the last judgment will take place.

It is important to note that a common element in the above parables is that the second coming and the wedding feast, when Christ comes for his church is delayed. Elsewhere from Scripture, as is also intimated in these parables, we know that it will take place at the second coming, at the end of the age. That is when the kingdom will be established. All these parables speak of such a delay. This delay is occasioned by the rejection of the Messiah by Israel and Israel's unworthiness to enter the kingdom. The purpose of the delay is to furnish the wedding feast with guests, the kingdom with citizens. This requires the call of the Gentiles, the gospel to go out to the ends of the earth, to gather that great multitude, as the sand of the seashore in number, gathered out of every tribe, and tongue, and nation, that will amply furnish the wedding feast with guests. This of course occasions a very long delay. The church fathers took the sleeping of the ten virgins to be the sleep of death. This would be consistent with the length of the delay and would obviate the problem of having the wise virgins sleeping after all the Lord's persistent warnings to wake and be watchful for his return. This interpretation can create other issues,²¹ however we have to remember that it is a parable, that it cannot be made to walk on all fours, and that every detail cannot be pressed to reveal spiritual truths.

Another consistent thread in these parables is that Christ treats the kingdom as something that is perfectly understood by all his hearers. Even his enemies understood them, for Scripture tells us "And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them." (**Matthew 21:45**) Yet, it is the stock in trade of many, especially ammillennialists, that the Jews had no true conception of the kingdom and only grossly carnal notions of a kingdom that have more in common with pagan notions of paradise than the spiritual kingdom of they profess. While it is true that the kingdom of heaven is spiritual, and that the requirements for entering are spiritual, yet the kingdom itself is material, earthly. It is a real kingdom here on this earth and will exist forever not in some

²⁰ We know this as Christ has been gone almost two thousand years, however for many of the earlier saints this would have been a helpful revelation.

²¹ For those holding to a general resurrection having all the virgins resurrected to either be admitted to the kingdom or rejected is not an issue. However, for those, such as historic premillennialists, who hold to a thousand year interval between the resurrection of the just and of the unjust it would not fit.

immaterial state in heaven, but in the new heavens and the new earth. While the Jews in their spiritual pride may have been blind to the true requirements for entering the kingdom, they properly understood that at the coming of the Messiah an earthly kingdom would be established where the Messiah would reign over his people in Jerusalem sitting on the throne of David forevermore. Thus spake the prophets and so believed the Jews.

These parables are therefore perfectly consistent with the historic premillennialist view. They are however a problem for those who hold the church-kingdom theory, as they are for postmillennialists who have the millennial kingdom established here on earth before the second coming.

CHAPTER 15

ESCHATOLOGY IN HISTORY

Only the Bible is authoritative in the realm of spiritual truth. It is our only rule of faith and practice, of our doctrine and our ethics, of how we believe and how we live. Nonetheless, church history has its place. If nothing else it provides a reality check. If we hold a doctrine that has never been professed before in church history we need to reflect. Are we so enamored of our ability to discern spiritual truth that we can say that the church of Jesus Christ has been wrong for two thousand years until we finally got it right. That may be possible, but it is hardly likely. We can learn much from those who have gone before, from godly men who spent a lifetime serving God, studying his word and proclaiming his truth. There is a reason that church history is a required course in most seminaries. We can learn the lessons of history and benefit from the wisdom and experience of those who have gone before. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to see what the faith of those who have gone before can teach us about eschatology, our doctrine of future things.

The Jewish Church

Let us start with the faith of the Jewish Church. What did they believe with respect to the kingdom? We will start with Abraham, the father of the faithful, in whose household the Jewish church began. The Apostle Paul tells us,

By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. (Hebrews 11:8-10)

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city. (Hebrews 11:13-16)

Paul tells us that Abraham left the land of his nativity to go to far country “*which he should after receive for an inheritance.*” Paul adds that Abraham, along with the other patriarchs, “*all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.*” Paul, under inspiration tells us that the patriarchs never received the land they were promised but “*were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.*” This is was also the dying testimony of Stephen who, confronting the unbelief of the Jews, stated,

Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall show thee. Then came he out of the land of the Chaldaeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell. And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child. (Acts 7:2-5)

Although Abraham and the patriarchs believed God’s promise concerning the land, they looked past its fulfillment in this life to its eternal fulfillment in the kingdom of God. As Paul states it, “*For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God,*” and “*But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.*” Paul does not say that they were regarding heaven as their hope, but a heavenly country, heavenly in nature not in location. Their hope was the kingdom of heaven that will be established on this earth at the coming of the Messiah.

That this was true, especially in Abraham’s case is evidenced by his actions. Consider his actions regarding his nephew Lot. When their herdsmen clashed and a separation seemed necessary he gave Lot

the first choice of the land. Abraham could have said that all the land was his by promise. He could certainly have chosen the best land for himself. Since God had given him all the land he could simply have assigned Lot whatever land he felt like. However, as Paul stated it, he was mindful of a better country, a heavenly one. Abraham made no attempt to seize the land in his own lifetime. Here is prince, who waged war successfully against a coalition of kings to rescue Lot, but never used his might to take at least a portion of the land in his lifetime. Abraham was willing to wait on the Lord, and on the Lord's time for receiving the land in fulfillment of the promise. Abraham was willing to wait until the resurrection, until that day when the meek shall inherit the earth, until that day that the kingdom is established, to receive the land he had been promised. So he generously allows Lot the first choice of the land. This was an act of faith. He will trust in God to fulfill the promise, rather than greed or success in a conflict with Lot. And what is God's response to Abraham's act of faith. As Moses records it...

And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee. (Genesis 13:14-17)

God blesses Abraham's act of faith by renewing the promise, not only regarding the land, but also with respect to innumerable descendants. That this was typical of Abraham's thinking is demonstrated later in the matter of the trial of his faith when God called him to sacrifice Isaac. Again, Abraham acts in faith. He is willing to lose Isaac for a season, because he had implicit faith in God's promise regarding an innumerable seed that would come through Isaac, for the Lord had said, "*In Isaac shall thy seed be called.*" Again, as Paul stated it,

By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure. (Hebrews 11:17-10)

Abraham walked by faith and not by sight. His eyes were on the kingdom of God, still unseen, and not on the temporal things that were seen. His hope was not in the present things of this world, but was fixed on Messiah's day when all the promises and covenants would be fulfilled. If he never received an acre of the land in this life he was not troubled. If the Lord took Isaac away from him in this life he would accept the Lord's will. He knew that in the Lord's time all the promises, including the promise of the land and of an innumerable seed through his son Isaac, from whose loins would someday come the Messiah, in whom all the families of the earth would be blessed. Abraham truly was the father of the faithful.

Now what does all the above have to do with eschatology in history? The importance of the foregoing exposition stems from the fact that this was how the Jews reasoned eschatologically. At the time when our Lord was on this earth the Jews were divided in their opinions on these matters. The Sadducees were liberals and denied the supernatural in general and the resurrection of the dead in particular. The Pharisees, for all their faults, believed in the resurrection. They reasoned from the very fact that the promises, particularly of the land, were not fulfilled in Abraham's lifetime, that therefore there must be a resurrection from the dead when the promises that were particularly made to him would be fulfilled. They were convinced that if God was faithful and his word was true then a resurrection was absolutely necessary that all these things might be fulfilled.

Secondly, the faithful Jews believed in the prophets. The prophets spoke of a literal kingdom on this earth in Messiah's day. For example the prophecies of Daniel spoke of four kingdoms that would span this age before Messiah's day. Then Daniel spoke of a fifth kingdom. Of this kingdom Daniel prophesied,

I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like 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 him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed. (Daniel 7:13-14)

This is a kingdom that succeeded the four previous earthly kingdoms. It is heavenly in its nature but earthly in its location. Daniel sees the Messiah coming on the clouds of heaven and establishing an eternal kingdom that will encompass all nations and peoples on this earth. This is what the faithful Jews believed. This was their hope. This was their eschatology. This was the faith of the Jewish church. We could review many more Scriptures that reflect the faith of the Jewish church, many of which have already been commented on in previous chapters. However, this should suffice to establish the point, that this was the faith of the Jewish church, that this was the belief of the faithful Jews as we entered the Apostolic age.

The Apostolic Church

What was the eschatological faith of the Apostolic Church? This is a crucial question. Repeatedly Christ sent forth the apostles to preach the gospel of the kingdom. He taught them, instructed them, and sent them forth. If anyone is likely to have correct perceptions of the kingdom it would be the apostles. No modern commentator or contemporary preacher has the benefit of direct divine instruction in these matters. Paul when he was undergoing criticism responded that he had not received the gospel that he proclaimed from men, but directly from the risen Christ. Similarly, the apostles received their eschatology directly from Jesus himself.

We are not privy to the exact content of the eschatological instruction that Christ gave his apostles, but we know that it was inspired, infallible, and inerrant. What we do know is that the kingdom parables that he spoke, taught the Apostles that Christ would leave and at his return at the end of the age the Messianic Kingdom would be established. That they understood these parables is also obvious. First of all the meaning of these parables was so clear that even Christ's enemies understood them. Secondly, after speaking a number of kingdom parables Christ checks to make certain that they have understood them. *"Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea, Lord. (Matthew 13:51)* Thirdly Christ sends them out to preach the gospel of the kingdom. Are we to believe that Christ sent incompetent and ignorant men, whose perceptions of the kingdom were grossly inaccurate to preach that kingdom? That is unthinkable.

Finally we return to the issue of Acts 1:6. This text is a favorite of those whose stock-in-trade is to condemn the apostles for their beliefs with respect to the kingdom. The entire passage reads,

When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. (Acts 1:6-9)

It is important to note that this took place just prior to the ascension. This therefore is the last word between Christ and the apostles regarding the kingdom. The nature of the question, *"Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"* is a clear indication of the eschatological views of the apostles. The question is perfectly consistent with someone holding to the historic premillennialist view. It is however inconsistent with the views of postmillennialists and amillennialists. It is even inconsistent with the views of dispensationalist premillennialists. The latter are looking for the pretribulationist rapture to take place first and could not logically expect the kingdom to be established first. Postmillennialists are looking for a kingdom composed of a glorious church age with the nations walking in God's law, and are not expecting Christ to restore a kingdom with Israel. That kingdom they expect later at the return of Christ when he will establish what they call *"the kingdom of glory."* And neither would amillennialists believing in a spiritualized kingdom, however they may define that, ask a question of the nature that the apostles did.

As we think on this question it is important to note its exact meaning. Lenski, again, is helpful. He says...

*The point of the question is the time, whether "at this time" Jesus is restoring the kingdom to Israel. In his answer Jesus distinguishes "times" (longer stretches) from seasons (shorter ones, each marked in a certain way). So the apostles do not mean "right away" but "before so very long." The fact that the kingdom is indeed to be restored to Israel is taken for granted. The scepter had, indeed, sadly departed from Judah – would it now be restored in Shiloh, in Jesus?*²²

Lenski goes to state that the apostles "...thought of a glorious earthly rule for Israel...through Jesus, the Messiah, who would soon return in his Parousia...The fact that the apostles still expressed strong earthly conceptions (of the kingdom) can scarcely be denied."²³

Now we can better understand the apostle's questions. They knew that Christ was departing, that his ascension was at hand. And they knew that he would return. At that return, at the parousia, they expected the kingdom to be established, as the prophets had prophesied and as Christ himself had taught in the kingdom parables. Their question was when, when would Christ return, when would the kingdom come? How long would his absence be? And to this Christ answers that it is not for them to know. As he had previously taught them, "*But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.*" (Matthew 24:36) This does not reflect poorly on the apostles because the question is so compelling. Christ is leaving them and they long to know when they will see him again. Then the resurrection of the just and the establishment of the kingdom will take place. This is the "*Blessed hope,*" and it is their hope, and they long to know when they will see their Lord again.

The question as such, properly understood, is a strong argument for historic premillennialism. Additionally, Lenski states that the apostles "...thought of a glorious earthly rule for Israel...through Jesus, the Messiah" and "...The fact that the apostles still expressed strong earthly conceptions (of the kingdom) can scarcely be denied." Lenski, a Lutheran who is probably an amillennialist, admits that this text clearly shows the apostles taking a premillennial position. As this is Christ's final word on the kingdom with his apostles this is another powerful argument for the correctness of the apostle's understanding of the kingdom. It is unthinkable that Christ would have left them with a grossly perverted concept of the kingdom as many presume. This is not only dishonoring to the apostles, the inspired founders of Christianity, but also highly dishonoring to Christ. Yet, the frequent response of commentators, particularly amillennial ones, to this question of the apostles is to severely criticize them for their carnality and inability to comprehend spiritual truth.

Even Calvin, who is generally an excellent commentator, falls into this trap. Take the following comments by him on this passage.

*He showeth that the apostles were gathered together when as this question was moved, that we may know that it came not of the foolishness of one or two that it was moved, but it was moved by the common consent of them all; but marvelous is their rudeness, that when as they had been diligently instructed by the space of three whole years, they betray no less ignorance than if they had heard never a word. There are as many errors in this question as words. They ask him as concerning a kingdom; but they dream of an earthly kingdom, which should flow with riches, with dainties...with external peace...They are also greatly deceived herein as that they restrain Christ's kingdom unto the carnal Israel... but in the meantime, they declared thereby how bad scholars they were under so good a Master.*²⁴

Calvin goes to state in further comments on this passage...

*Therefore, when he saith, you shall receive power, he admonisheth them of their imbecility...It may be read very well either way, You shall receive the power of the Spirit; or, The Spirit coming upon you; yet the latter was seemeth to be the better, because it does more fully declare their defect and want, until such a time as the Spirit should come upon them.*²⁵

²² Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, p. 29, Augsburg Publishing House, 1964.

²³ Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, p. 29-30, Augsburg Publishing House, 1964.

²⁴ Calvin's Commentaries, John-Acts, Associated Publishers and Authors, Wilmington, Delaware 19808, p 942.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 943.

One is tempted to quote Calvin again that “*there are as many errors in (his comments) as words.*” Where does Calvin get such notions as that the Apostles dreamt of riches and dainties? Certainly, not from the text. Or his idea that the apostles sought an external peace. This is all pure conjecture based on Calvin’s preconceived prejudice against their views. And as for the vicious charge “*that they restrain Christ’s kingdom unto the carnal Israel,*” where is the textual support for that? Does Calvin think that the apostles were unaware of the spiritual state of “*carnal Israel,*” of the unbelieving branches? *Carnal Israel* had crucified their Lord and was preparing to persecute them. They had preached the gospel of the kingdom and were only too aware of the spiritual requirements for entering therein, and that “*carnal Israel*” was unqualified for the kingdom, not being able to enter because of their unbelief. Calvin speaks of their “*foolishness*” and their “*rudeness.*” Are these fair conclusions from the text. In the light of the fact that Christ makes not the least effort to correct them, and answers their question properly, it is obvious that he did not share Calvin’s opinion of his apostles. And then Calvin goes on to make an even more radical conclusion. He states that the reason the apostles are going to receive the power of the Spirit is to cure them of their “*imbecility!*” Calvin then winds up showing his prejudice against the apostles, stating he prefers the translation that makes them look the worst, although there is no more textual support for that than the alternate translation.

What are we to make of all this? Calvin was a good and godly man, greatly used of God in the Reformation. Yet, here he seems to be almost ranting against the apostles. And why is he doing this? Merely because he cannot tolerate their views of the kingdom? But this is a dangerous game for Calvin to play. In his zeal to establish his spiritualizing eschatology and discredit the apostle’s beliefs, he is attacking the inspired founders of the Christian faith. He is calling them fools and imbeciles. He is undermining the very foundations of Christianity. Calvin may have felt he had no choice. If he regards them as those who were personally instructed by Christ and were faithful to his teachings, then he has a problem, for they are premillennial in their beliefs. Calvin would have been better off defending his spiritualizing amillennialism some other way.

Now let us return to the subject at hand, the eschatology of the apostolic church. It seems obvious, and is acknowledged by even the most ardent opponents of historic premillennialism, that the apostles were premillennialist. From the text we have just dealt with it is clear that they persevered on those opinions right up to the ascension of our Lord. Those who would contest that the apostolic church was premillennial would have to hold the view that they subsequently changed their minds. This however leaves them with the problem of how Christ could send them out to preach and leave them at the ascension, with such erroneous views of the kingdom. And they would be arguing from the silence of scripture, as there are no further Biblical passages that deal with the eschatological views of the apostles as a group.

That leaves us only with the eschatological views of the individual apostles, recorded in Scripture not only after the ascension, but long after Pentecost and their empowerment by the Holy Spirit. The classic passage in that regard is of course Revelation 20. That passage literally and in detail teaches a thousand year millennium, here on this earth, at the return of Christ, and separating the resurrection of the just from the resurrection of the unjust. One has to really allegorize or spiritualize this passage to make it teach anything else. And as we noted above, while the book of Revelation has many highly symbolic passages using figurative language, the final chapters of Revelation, from chapter 19 forward, are remarkably clear and straightforward. So, unless one is willing to spiritualize the second coming, or the new heavens and the new earth, one needs to take these passages in a literal, straightforward sense. We can therefore put the Apostle John clearly in the premillennial camp. As the Book of Revelation was the last book of the New Testament to be written it is the final testimony of the apostolic age with regards to eschatology. And it is premillennial. From the time that the apostles were sent forth preaching the gospel of the kingdom, until John’s last years in exile on the island of Patmos, the apostolic church was premillennial.

The Early Church

Historical Premillennialism: This belief was held by a large percentage of Christians "*during the first three centuries of the Christian era, and is found in the works of Papias, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Methodius, Commodianus, and Lactantius.*" ² The Antichrist first appears on earth and the seven year Tribulation begins. Next comes the Rapture. Christ and his Church return to earth to rule for a Millennium. The forces of evil will be conquered. The faithful will live during this thousand years of peace in Jerusalem, while occupying spiritual bodies. After this period, all people are judged. The faithful will spend eternity on a new earth, (not in heaven).

After Christianity became the official religion of Rome in the fourth century CE, this was declared a heresy and suppressed. www.religioustolerance.org/millenni.htm

The Medieval Church Roman Catholic Eschatology.

As we have seen the early church was overwhelmingly, if not exclusively, premillennial, because exceptions were so rare. This however radically changed at the time of Constantine.

End times beliefs among Roman Catholics:

Roman Catholics generally follow the teachings of Augustine and the Protestant reformers, and accept Amillennialism. However, they do not generally use the term. They anticipate Jesus coming to Earth and gathering the Church together. But they generally do not use the term "*rapture*" either According to *Catholic Answers*, "*The Church has rejected the premillennial position, sometimes called 'millenarianism' (see the Catechism of the Catholic Church 676). In the 1940s the Holy Office judged that premillennialism 'cannot safely be taught,' though the Church has not dogmatically defined this issue.*" ¹³ www.religioustolerance.org/millenni.htm

The Reformation Church

Never had eschatological unity

Luther and Calvin-both amill

Historical theology

Luther:

-Soteriology

-Justification by Faith

Calvin:

- Soteriology plus ecclesiology
- Worship-iconoclasm and purity of worship
- Church government and battles with Geneva civil government

The Reformers were not agreed Ulrich Zwingli was a premillennialist

All three positions at the Westminster Assembly

WCOF eschatologically neutral

Except perhaps the statement about a general resurrection accepted by the premillennialists because they interpreted it as one resurrection in two phases separated by a thousand years.

John and Charles Wesley were premillennialists.

Have not yet had a time in history where the church really thrashed out its eschatology and came to sufficient unity to make it matter of confessional doctrine that all are required to subscribe to.

Presbyterians predominantly postmillennial

The Reformed predominantly amillennialist

Lutherans predominantly amillennialist

But all have a minority of those who hold to historic premillennialism

None of them have ever had a noticeable number of dispensational premillennialists.

And of course contemporary evangelicals, fundamentalists, and charismatics are overwhelmingly dispensational premillennialists.

This is a doctrine, an eschatological system that was unknown at the time of the Reformation.

This is the latest and most recent view of the kingdom and eschatology in general.

The pretribulation rapture is a fairly recent doctrine first publicly taught in the 1830's

Dispensationalism itself is a nineteenth century doctrine.

Dispensational Premillennialism: (a.k.a. **Dispensationalism**) Premillennialism, declared a heresy in ancient times, was reintroduced circa 1830. Most people credit John N. Darby with its resurrection. He was a minister of the *Church of Ireland*, a denomination in the Anglican communion, and the founder of the *Plymouth Brethren*. However, author Dave MacPherson claims that British pastor Edward Irving was the actual person responsible, and that a conspiracy was organized to give Darby the credit. ¹⁴ Premillennialism received general acceptance by most Fundamentalists and other Evangelical Christians after the publishing of the Scofield Reference Bible in 1909. www.religioustolerance.org/millenni.htm

Conclusion:

CHAPTER 16

THE THREE REFORMED VIEWS

Amil

Postmil

Hist Premill

Also: Futurist, historicist & preterist – define these terms

Preterism is a belief that the events prophesized in the New Testament have already happened. The great war of Armageddon in the book of Revelation occurred in the late 60's and early 70's CE when the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, many Jews were killed and the rest were driven from Palestine. When Jesus talked about the end of the world, he did not mean that the physical world would be no more. He taught that the old worldview held by various contemporary Jewish groups was coming to an end, to be replaced by a new concept, the Kingdom of God. Thus, all of the major elements in the book of Revelation (Tribulation, Armageddon, Rapture, etc.) actually took place in the first century CE. ⁸

www.religioustolerance.org/millenni.htm

In [Christian eschatology](#), **Historicism** is a school of interpretation which treats the eschatological prophecies of [Daniel](#) and [Revelation](#) as finding literal earthly fulfillment through the history of the church age, and especially in relation to the [Protestant-Catholic](#) conflicts of the [Reformation](#). A common feature of Historicist interpretations, which makes them very controversial, is the identification of the [Antichrist](#) (1 and 2 John), the [Beast](#) (Revelation 13), the [Man of sin](#) or Man of [Lawlessness](#) (2 Thessalonians 2) and the [Whore of Babylon](#) (Revelation 17) with the [Roman Catholic Church](#), the [Papal](#) system and each successive [Pope](#) himself (a common position held by Protestants in the Reformation, which is not prevalent today). However, it must be noted that such an identification is not unique to Historicism, has not been held by all Historicists, and has been and is currently, held by some Futurists. The [day-year principle](#) is unique to historicism.

A historicist approach was taken by Martin Luther and John Calvin, and prevailed among Protestants from the Reformation until the rise of [dispensationalism](#). ^[citation needed]

One famous proponent of historicism, for whom eschatology informed on politics, is [Ian Paisley](#), leader of the [Democratic Unionist Party](#) in [Northern Ireland](#) and Moderator of the [Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster](#). Paisley's party is the largest in the region, and many believe ^[citation needed] that his political philosophy based on his [eschatological](#) view was one of the major exacerbations of the [political violence](#) that prevailed for so long.

Historicism stands in contrast to [Preterism](#), [Futurism](#) and [Idealism](#). **From Wikipedia**

Idealism (also called the 'Spiritual view') in [Christian eschatology](#) is an interpretation of the [Book of Revelation](#) that sees all of the imagery of the book as non-literal symbols which are perpetually and cyclically fulfilled in a spiritual sense during the conflict between the [Kingdom of God](#) and the forces of [Satan](#) throughout the time from the first advent to the [Second Coming](#) of [Christ](#).

As such it is distinct from [Preterism](#), [Futurism](#) and [Historicism](#) in that it does not see any of the prophecies (except in some cases the Second Coming, and [Final Judgment](#)) as being fulfilled in a literal, physical, earthly sense either in the past, present or future.

Preterism is a variant of [Christian eschatology](#) which holds that some or all of the [biblical prophecies](#) concerning the *Last Days* (or [End Times](#)) refer to events which actually happened in the [first century](#) after Christ's birth. The term **preterism** comes from the Latin *praeter*, meaning "past". Adherents of Preterism are known as Preterists. The two principal schools of Preterist thought are commonly called [Partial Preterism](#) and [Full Preterism](#).

There is substantial disagreement over the terms used to denote these divisions of Preterist thought. Some Partial Preterists prefer to call their position Orthodox Preterism, thus contrasting their agreement with the creeds of the Ecumenical Councils with what they perceive to be the Full Preterists' rejection for the same.^{[[citation needed](#)]} This, in effect, makes Full Preterism unorthodox in the eyes of Partial Preterists and gives rise to the claim by some that Full Preterism is heretical. (Partial Preterism is also sometimes called *Classical Preterism* or *Moderate Preterism*.) Some Full Preterists prefer to call their position Consistent Preterism, reflecting their extension of Preterism to *all* biblical prophecy and thus claim an inconsistency in the Partial Preterist [hermeneutic](#).^{[[citation needed](#)]} The correct labeling of the positions in relation to each other is a matter of heated dispute amongst some Partial Preterists and Full Preterists who would reject those labels and argue for others, most notably, which view may simply be called "preterism."^{[[citation needed](#)]}

Sub-variants of Preterism include one form of **Partial Preterism** which places fulfillment of some eschatological passages in the first three centuries of the current era, culminating in the [fall of Rome](#). In addition, certain statements from classical theological liberalism are easily mistaken for Preterism, as they hold that the biblical record accurately reflects Jesus' and the [Apostles'](#) belief that all prophecy was to be fulfilled within their generation. Theological liberalism generally regards these apocalyptic expectations as errant or disappointed, though, so it is not strictly accurate to class this view as a form of Preterism.

Partial preterism is a form of [Christian eschatology](#) that holds much in common with but is distinct from [Full preterism](#) (or 'consistent' or 'hyper' preterism) in that it places the events of most of the [Book of Revelation](#) as occurring during the [destruction of Jerusalem](#) in 70 AD (and/or the [Fall of Rome](#) several centuries later) yet still affirms an orthodox future bodily return of [Christ](#) to earth at an unknown day and hour. Partial preterism sees [Matthew 24](#), [Matthew 25:31-46](#), the [Book of Daniel](#) and most of the [Book of Revelation](#) (besides its last 2 or 3 chapters) as speaking about events no later than the first century AD, and about *a coming* of Christ in judgement, not [the \(second, final and bodily\) coming of Christ](#) and [Last judgement](#).

Most (but not all) Partial Preterists also believe the term *Last Days* refers not to the last days of planet Earth or the last days of humankind, but rather to the last days of the Mosaic [covenant](#) which God had exclusively with national [Israel](#) until the year AD 70, see also [Supersessionism](#). As God came in [judgment](#) upon various nations in the [Old Testament](#), Christ also came in judgment against those in Israel who rejected him. The "last days," however, are to be distinguished from *the* "last day," which is considered still future and entails the [Second Coming](#) of [Jesus](#), the [Resurrection of the righteous and unrighteous dead](#) physically from the grave in like-manner to Jesus' physical resurrection, the [Final Judgment](#), and the creation of a literal (rather than covenantal) *New Heavens* and a *New Earth* free from the curse of sin and death which was brought about by the fall of [Adam and Eve](#), also called the [Kingdom of](#)

[God](#). Thus partial preterists are in agreement and conformity with the historic eucemenical [creeds](#) of the Church and articulate the [doctrine of the resurrection](#) held by the early [Church Fathers](#). Partial preterists hold that the [New Testament](#) predicts and depicts many "comings" of Christ and that the phrase *Second Coming* means second of like kind in a series for the Scriptures record other comings even before the judgment-coming in AD70, thus eliminating that event as the "second" of any series, let alone the second of the series in which the example is the earthly, physical ministry of Christ. Partial Preterists believe that the new creation comes in redemptive progression as Christ reigns from His heavenly throne, subjugating His enemies, and will eventually culminate in the destruction of physical death, the "last enemy" (1 Cor 15:20-24). If there are any enemies remaining, the resurrection event cannot have occurred.

Partial preterism is consistent with [Covenant theology](#) in that its basis lies in the outworking of the covenant judgements of [Deuteronomy](#) 28 - 32 and [Leviticus](#) 26 and as such opposes [Dispensational Premillennialism](#) and [Futurism](#) popular in [evangelical](#) circles today with such works as the [Left Behind](#) series. Preterism also is distinct from [Dispensational](#) eschatology in that it does not have specific modern political directives attached (see Dispensationalism's connection to [Christian Zionism](#)).

Nearly all Partial Preterists hold to [amillennialism](#) or [postmillennialism](#). Many postmillennial Partial Preterists are also [theonomic](#) in their outlook.

A variant form of Partial Preterism developed within [Catholic](#) tradition that identified the woman in Revelation 12 as [Mary](#) rather than being symbolic of [Israel](#) and/or the [Church](#) in Protestant forms of Partial Preterism.

Partial Preterism relies heavily on the account of [Flavius Josephus](#) in describing the [destruction of Jerusalem](#) as a first hand account of the recorded fulfillment of the Book of Revelation.

Because of the widespread acceptance of [Dispensational Futurism](#) amongst American [evangelicals](#), Partial Preterism is often considered unorthodox by many. Partial Preterism is also criticised for claiming that the Book of Revelation was written before the [destruction of Jerusalem](#) sometime during the reign of [Roman emperor Nero](#) in the 60s AD rather than in 95 AD which is the widely held belief among [Dispensationalists](#). [Kenneth Gentry](#), a prominent Partial Preterist, wrote his [PhD](#) thesis [Before Jerusalem Fell](#) (which has since been made into a book) on a defense of placing the writing of the Book of Revelation during Nero's reign.

Amills and premills =futurists

Although not all postmills are preterist, almost all preterists are postmills

CHAPTER 17

AGREEMENTS & DISAGREEMENTS

With Amills-Boettner p. 114 Yet there view of future things is basically acceptable to historic premills with the addition of the millennium! Only the details of Rev. 20 separate historic premills from the scheme of the amills! Main difference is spiritualizing tendencies that pervade all of their eschatology and much of scripture interpretation.

(Pre&Post Trib, the Rapture (Another word that Reformed love to hate!)) Main difference is spiritualizing tendencies of Amills Main difference is spiritualizing tendencies that pervade all of their eschatology and much of scripture interpretation. This turns off HistPremills while the Amills are turned of by all Premill relating it to Dispensationalism.

A lot of the differences are based on the extent one applies the concept that the church is a present aspect of the future glorious kingdom of God.

A Kingdom Without A King?

The Blessed Hope!

CHAPTER 18

CONCLUSIONS

In politics there is a saying, "*The devil is in the details*". Political agreement can vanish and melt away as one begins to develop a broad consensus into a specific plan. And that is just the way that is in eschatology. As we have seen there are broad areas of agreement between the three "Reformed" positions. The differences can be minimized and a mutual tolerance of competing positions seems assured. However, as soon as one starts to flesh out one's eschatology and has to deal with the interpretations of a myriad of texts this can change swiftly and drastically. Separate communions have come into existence over issues such as baptism and church government. Yet there are only relatively few texts that deal with either subject. By contrast there are literally hundreds and hundreds of texts that have eschatological import. After all the grand theme of scripture is paradise restored, the eternal kingdom of Jesus Christ that he has purchased with his blood. In that sense it is amazing that churches have split over so many less significant issues, but have frequently allowed eschatological liberty.