

PRAISE FOR

The Great End Time Debate

Writing as one of the foremost eschatological scholars on progressive-idealist amillennialism, Dean Davis has produced a rich, edifying, and compelling survey of systematic eschatology. Breaking through the intimidating complexity of this topic, Dean's *Great End Time Debate* will be especially helpful to believers who are new to biblical prophecy. In particular, it will help them obtain a comprehensive grasp of what the Scriptures actually teach about the Kingdom of God, the Millennium, and the Consummation. This book also fairly summarizes other eschatological positions and attempts to respond to their foundational arguments in a charitable and balanced way. Like his other (and much longer) volume, *The High King of Heaven*, this book does what many others refrain from attempting: it gives us detailed amillennial exegeses of crucial Old Testament prophecies relating to the Kingdom of God. Davis's book does a truly amazing job of demonstrating how the Scriptures are unified when we consider God's plan in history from the beginning to the end. A highly recommended resource!

—Shawn McGrath

Creator of the website Amillennialism: Living the Millennium Today

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. While it is meant as an abridgment of a much longer volume, *The High King of Heaven*, it is still a big book dealing with a massively complex topic: the end times. Even so, author Dean Davis does a splendid job of conveying big ideas on big subjects in a simple way to those who may be unfamiliar with the Great End Time Debate. Maybe it's because of his many years studying the topic, or because of his pastoral work. In any case, Davis is able to discuss this subject simply and concisely. Having read *The High King of Heaven*, I truly appreciate this shorter work, for I love introducing people to sound eschatology, but have found that *The High King of Heaven* startles many souls with its 720 pages! Now I can point to *The Great End Time Debate* and say, "This book will tell you all you need to know about

the end times." What's more, I can tell them that it really is an easy read. I am grateful for Dean's new book and heartily endorse it for individual study, church Bible study, and even use in seminary classes.

—Nicholas Potts

Podcaster at The Gospel Forum Youth Director at King's Cross Church, Ellenton, Florida

Amillennarians are often accused of spiritualizing away the plain meaning of the text, especially in the case of Old Testament prophecies. But after you've read *The Great End Time Debate*, you will conclude that, on the contrary, their arguments are not only sound but also positively required by Scripture. This book will not only educate seekers of eschatological truth but will also help them wrestle with the hardest passages and attain clarity.

—Michael Rowntree

Pastor, Bridgeway Church, Oklahoma City

In his new book, *The Great End Time Debate*, author Dean Davis skillfully harmonizes both Old and New Testament Scriptures in order to make a clear, compelling, and eminently biblical case concerning what God has planned for these end times. This may be the defining work on amillennial eschatology. Whether you end up agreeing or not, you will be greatly enriched by reading this thought-provoking book.

—Steven Shepard

President, Church Planting International

The prophecies of Revelation appeared for much of history to be a mysterious allegory. But with the realities of implanted computer chips and robots so lifelike that they can pass as human beings, the prophecies of Revelation now look eerily down to earth. Many Christians are convinced that the second coming is now very close. In this context Dean Davis's latest book is strikingly relevant. There are several confident interpretations of the sequence of events foretold in Revelation. But these interpretations are so different from each other that most must be erroneous. In *The Great End Time Debate*, Dean puts forward the major contenders and gives pros and cons for each position. I certainly found this book very helpful in opening up the possibilities, opening my thinking to the probabilities, and reaching conclusions.

—Dr. Philip Stott

Creation scientist, author, and researcher in Geotechnics

Biblical eschatology nerds are quite familiar with *The High King of Heaven*, since it's an especially comprehensive book on that challenging subject. What, then, are we to make of Dean Davis's latest book, The Great End Time Debate? Here Dean writes with a pastor's heart for the sheep of God who do not have time to read a book of 721 pages! His aim is not to muddy the waters of eschatology by indulging in speculation and sensationalism (all too common in our day) but to clear the waters by means of careful expositions of God's Word. I especially appreciate his treatment of Old Testament Kingdom Prophecy (OTKP). Dean does not merely tell us what he thinks about this or that OTKP. Rather, he first takes us to the New Testament in order to show us how Christ and the apostles interpreted OTKP, so that we might be able to do the same. An excellent goal, and one that I believe he reached! While advancing a particular viewpoint—amillennialism—Dean also deals fairly and respectfully with opposing views, even as he provides soundly biblical evidence supporting his own. Although this book is meant to be shorter than *The High King of* Heaven, Davis takes ample time to discuss many difficult Bible passages, giving us plausible interpretations in dialog with opposing views. I highly recommend this book, both for the busy mom and the eschatology nerd. When we receive the key to biblical eschatology, a whole new world opens up to us. The scales fall from our eyes and we see Christ, His covenant, His kingdom, and His people in all Scripture. In The Great End Time Debate, Dean Davis offers us the key.

—Simon Wartanian

Author, A Layman's Systematic and Biblical Exposition of the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith, and blogger at www.thecalvinist.net

Great End Time Debate

Dean Davis

Great End Time Debate

Issues, Options, and Amillennial Answers



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Then a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen One. Listen to him!" And when the voice had finished speaking, they found Jesus standing there, all by himself.

Luke 9:35–36

CONTENTS

Preface

<u>Acknowledgments</u>

Part I Introducing the Great End Time Debate

- 1. What Is Biblical Eschatology?
- 2. Issues in the Great End Time Debate
- 3. Options in the Great End Time Debate
- 4. The Key to the Great End Time Debate

Part II Understanding the Kingdom of God

- 5. The Old Testament on the Promise of the Kingdom
- 6. The New Testament on the Coming of the Kingdom

Part III Understanding Old Testament Kingdom Prophecy

- 7. New Testament Principles for Interpreting Old Testament Kingdom Prophecy
- 8. Old Testament Kingdom Prophecies Considered: Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel
- 9. Old Testament Kingdom Prophecies Considered: Daniel, Zechariah

Part IV Understanding the Millennium

- 10. The Revelation: Introduction and Overview
- 11. Revelation 20: the Meaning of the Millennium

Part V Understanding the Consummation

- 12. The Purpose, Structure, and Unity of the Consummation
- 13. Crucial New Testament Texts Dealing with the Consummation

14. The Consummation: A Biblical Scenario

Part VI Resolving the Great End Time Debate

- 15. Options in Biblical Eschatology: Amillennial Critiques
- 16. Amillennialism: An Eschatology for These Last Days

Appendices

I: Old Testament Kingdom Prophecies Listed

II: New Testament Texts Touching on the Parousia/Consummation

III: Biblical Prophecies of the Last Battle

IV: The Creeds of Christendom on the Consummation

Select Bibliography

TABLES, LISTS, AND TIMELINES

The Beginner's Version of Salvation History	<u>22</u>	
Amillennialism	<u>38</u>	
Historic Premillennialism	<u>40</u> & <u>322</u>	
Postmillennialism	42 & 324	
Dispensational Premillennialism	44 & 329	
Partial Preterism	48 & 341	
Full Preterism	49 & 348	
The Coming of the Kingdom	<u>111</u>	
The Structure of the Revelation	<u>213</u>	
The Christ-Centered Unity of the Consummation	<u>267</u>	
Old Testament Kingdom Prophecies	<u>359</u>	
New Testament Texts Touching on the Parousia/Consummation	365-36	
Biblical Prophecies of the Last Battle		
The Creeds of Christendom on the Consummation	371-37	

PREFACE

his book is in fulfillment of a promise.

Back in 2014 1 - 11.1 Back in 2014 I published The High King of Heaven: Discovering the Master Keys to the Great End Time Debate (HKOH). I meant it to be a short but comprehensive discussion of biblical eschatology: of the eras and events associated with "the last days" and the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation.

Well, my short discussion came in at 721 pages! On the one hand, that didn't bother me too much, for I felt the book made a significant contribution to the scholarly debate on this subject. But on the other hand, it bothered me a great deal, for as it grew I increasingly realized that I was leaving thousands of God's busy children with a more modest appetite for eschatology in the dust. So in the preface to the HKOH I promised to write an abridged version—a shorter book that would give my readers the gist of the longer volume.

This is that book. Nevertheless, as you can see, it's still no cakewalk. That's because my goal here is the same as it was for the HKOH: to introduce you to every aspect of the Great End Time Debate and to help you discern the winner once and for all.

It's an ambitious goal. As the Contents page reveals, it involves defining the debate, isolating the four underlying issues that keep it going, discovering the biblical method for resolving those issues, applying that method to the issues themselves, and then deciding which of the competing schools of biblical eschatology is actually telling us the truth.

Yes, the journey ahead will be challenging, but also of deep interest and great importance. That's because our destination is one of the highest peaks in all Scripture: the mountaintop where the High King himself grants his people a clear vision of their one true Blessed Hope.

We cannot do without it. In all likelihood we are living in the last of the last days. The Church's long journey through the howling wilderness of the fallen world system is coming to an end. The armies of light and darkness are gathering for the Last Battle. Therefore, the Israel of God must be fully equipped: ready to fight the good fight, complete the Great Commission, and pass over into the Beautiful Land.

Brothers and sisters, as ever, our much-needed provision is in the hand of the High King of Heaven. And so, with love and longing, he cries out to us all: "Come up here! I want to prepare you for the last leg of your journey. You're almost home!"

Shall we head out?

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

he apostle wrote, "What do you have that you did not receive?" (1 Cor. 4:7). This verse is an old friend, and as I near the end of my race its truth becomes more real every day. I am a bucket under a spigot, filled with blessings from above. In regard to the present book, let me gratefully mention a large handful here.

Very special thanks to my long-time colleague and trusty copy editor, Susan Roush, who proofread this book several times, made many valuable suggestions, and, among other valued contributions, toiled to make sure that all the Scripture references are accurate. Susan, it has been a delightful tag-team match, and I do believe our team has won a precious victory!

Thanks once again to all my good friends—both old and new—at Redemption Press: Athena Dean Holtz, Becky Antkowiak, Jennifer Fedler, Colleen Jones, Carrie Del Pizzo, and Jonathan Lewis. As ever, their sincere interest, cheerfulness, and professionalism have won my admiration and deep gratitude. Was this our last hill to climb together? Not if I can help it!

Thanks also to the generous brothers who took time to read *The Great End Time Debate* and endorse my labors: Shawn McGrath, Nick Potts, Michael Rowntree, Steven Shephard, Philip Stott, and Simon Wartanian. It has been a privilege to team up with these bright and devoted men in the cause of a sound biblical eschatology.

Special thanks to my wife, Linda, who once again so graciously loaned me to my solitary labors; and also to my five (adult) kids, *cum* spouses, who have supported me and cheered me on.

Finally, heartfelt thanks to the Lord himself, who faithfully walked beside me as I strove to abridge *The High King of Heaven* and to frame its core insights in a way that would be accessible, interesting, and edifying to the Body of Christ. Scripture tells us that every good and perfect gift comes down from above. If, then, there is anything good in this book, it came from the One who dwells on high and who opened the spigot! To Him be the glory, both now and until the Day of Eternity.

PART I

INTRODUCING THE GREAT END TIME DEBATE

CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS BIBLICAL ESCHATOLOGY?

elcome to Part I of our journey through the Great End Time Debate (GETD). My purpose here is to introduce you to the debate. Some of you are acquainted with it already, others are just becoming aware of it. Because I don't want to lose a single companion on this journey, I am resolved to "start from scratch." In other words, I want to introduce you to all the key terms, issues, options, and theological ideas involved in the study of biblical eschatology. Think of this part of our study as gearing up for battle. And trust me: If you hope to win this particular battle, you *must* be geared up!

Eschatology

We'll begin at the beginning, by defining the word *eschatology*. Though a bit intimidating at first, its meaning is quite simple. It brings together two Greek words: *eschatos* and *logos*. The former means *last*, the latter means *word*, *thing*, or *teaching about*. Thus, eschatology is *teaching about the last things*: the things that will happen at the end of the story, whether of an individual life or the universe itself.

Religion and philosophy give us two kinds of eschatology. The first is called *personal eschatology*. This discipline addresses one of the most urgent questions slumbering in the human heart: What happens when we die? Its concern is to think deeply about the nature and destiny of the human personality, the self-conscious part of our being. Are we, or do we have, a soul? If so, does it survive the death of the body? If so, where does it go? If it goes somewhere, how long will it stay there? Will it remain a disembodied spirit forever? Will it ever be reunited with a body? These are the questions that personal eschatology seeks to answer.

The second kind is called *cosmic* or *universal eschatology*. Here the concern is to think deeply about the future of the universe, life, and man. Is cosmic history moving in a straight line toward a specific goal? If so, what is that goal? Will the universe come to a permanent end, or will it always be changing?

Might it even be obeying a law of eternal recurrence, such that the cosmos traverses the same history, or a similar history, over and again? These are the kinds of *big* questions addressed by cosmic eschatology.

All people are curious about personal and cosmic eschatology. Indeed, it is often with a sense of existential urgency that we ask, "What will happen when I die?" or "Where is history heading?" As Christians, we believe that in the Bible God himself has given us trustworthy answers to these burning questions. Accordingly, we also believe that the answers supplied by other worldviews are more or less in error and that they can never fully satisfy the curiosity of seekers or lay to rest their fears and concerns. Thus, if we hope to love and serve our non-Christian neighbors in these matters, we will have to acquaint ourselves not only with biblical eschatology, but also with the eschatology of other worldviews. Then, when opportunities arise to speak with our neighbor about "the last things," we will be ready to do so competently, confidently, and compassionately. 1

The Bible and Personal Eschatology

Though the focus of this book is on cosmic eschatology, I want to begin with a few words on the subject of personal eschatology, especially since the two subjects are closely related and intersect at several key points.

The Bible teaches that God created man as a bipartite being: We are spirits (or souls) who inhabit physical bodies (Gen. 2:7; Luke 1:46–47). It was never God's intention that the two parts of our being should be separated. The natural state of man is to live with God—body and soul—in the physical world that he created to be our home. However, because of Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden, death has entered the world (Rom. 5:12). This unwelcome enemy is explicitly defined in Scripture as the unnatural separation of the spirit from the body (James 2:26).

The Bible is clear that at the moment of death the spirit is not annihilated, nor does it fall into the "sleep" of temporary unconsciousness. Rather, it departs from the body to one of two spiritual destinations—Heaven or Hades (Luke 16:19–31; Phil. 1:19–26; James 2:26; Rev. 6:9; 20:4).

In our day, those who enter Heaven do so based solely upon an active personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, whose righteous life and atoning death secured for them the perfect redemption that their own works never could (Mark 10:45; John 1:12; 3:16; Rom. 3:21–22; Eph. 2:8–10). The saints in

Heaven are fully aware of their surroundings and delighted by its manifold blessings (Heb. 12:22–24). But their redemption is not yet complete. Rather, they eagerly await the Second Coming of Christ, the Resurrection of the Dead, and eternal life with him in the new heavens and the new earth (Luke 20:27–40; John 5:28–29; 1 Cor. 15; Phil. 3:20–21; 2 Peter 3:13). In other words, they await the union of their perfected soul with a new, glorified body in which they will experience the fullness of eternal life in a glorious new World to Come.

Those who enter Hades do so based upon their own evil works, and especially upon the work of suppressing the truth that God previously made known to them through his self-disclosure in nature, his moral law, and the good news about Jesus Christ, the last of these being his only provision for the forgiveness of their sins and the acquisition of eternal life (John 3:19, 36; 5:29; Acts 13:46; Rom. 1:18–19; 2:8–9; 2 Thess. 1:8; Rev. 20:12). In Hades the lost are in torment and deprived of every life-giving blessing of God. To the extent that they may be aware of it, their only prospect is the Resurrection and the Day of Judgment, when Christ will send them—body and soul—into the Lake of Fire prepared for the devil and his angels (Matt. 8:29; 10:28; 25:41; Mark 9:48; Luke 16:19–31; 2 Thess. 1:9; Rev. 20:14).

As we shall see in the pages ahead, throughout the last days in which we live it is the privilege and burden of Christ's Church not only to proclaim the good news of salvation to every creature, but also to make the eternal consequences of their decision for or against Christ as clear as we possibly can. 2 Evangelism and eschatology go hand in hand.

The Bible and Cosmic Eschatology

In the popular Christian imagination, cosmic eschatology deals with the set of events surrounding the Second Coming of Christ and the consummation of our redemption. To an extent this focus is understandable and appropriate, since it is only natural for us to be interested in the end of our own story. Nevertheless, when we examine Scripture as a whole we realize that this is a seriously truncated view. That's because "the last days" and "the last things" include far more than the *grand finale* of history, as important and fascinating as that may be. Moreover, it is not until we have discerned from Scripture the true focus of the Bible's eschatological interest that we can rightly and most richly understand what interests us most: the Consummation of all things at

the end of the present evil age.

Salvation History

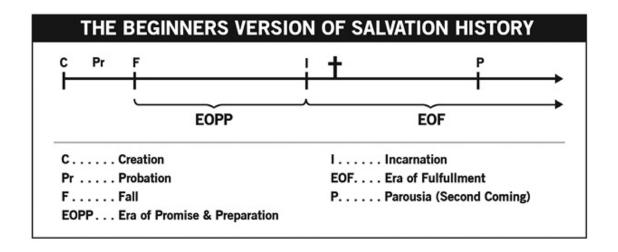
To understand all of this better, I want to introduce you to an especially helpful theological term: Salvation History. I will define this as the record of God's redemptive activity found in his Word, the Bible.

Now, even if you've never heard this term before, it's likely that you already have a feel for the basic shape of Salvation History. All who have read through the entire Bible do.

They know, for example, that at its heart the Bible is not a poem or a philosophical treatise. Rather, it is a story. Indeed, it is His Story: the true history of God's dealings with the universe, life, and man from the Creation to the Consummation.

Furthermore, they realize that the vast majority of this story (i.e., from Genesis 4 to Revelation 22) deals with God's specifically redemptive acts. In other words, it deals with the special actions by which God was (and is) pleased to rescue and restore a sinful but beloved people through the saving work of his uniquely begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Very importantly, alert Christians can readily discern the basic structure of Salvation History. Indeed, simply by reading straight through from Genesis to Revelation they find the narrative positively begging them to situate the main elements of its grand story on some kind of timeline. In its most basic form—I will call it the Beginner's Version of Salvation History—such a timeline will almost always look like this:



The elements of this timeline are familiar and easy to understand.

First comes *Creation* in six days, wherein God brings into being and fashions a very good world, primarily as a home for the beloved apple of his eye: the family of man.

Next comes Adam's *Probation* in the Garden of Eden: a simple test of love, faith, and obedience. It was, however, a test that he failed, resulting in the disastrous *fall* of man and nature. This fall was twofold: It was *away from* all the good gifts that God had in store for the family of man and *into* the grip of all manner of physical and spiritual enemies, the worst of which were divine wrath, condemnation, and the danger of hell.

Next comes a very lengthy *Era of Promise and Preparation*, an era described in the pages of the Old Testament (OT) from Genesis 4 to Malachi 4. Here we find God continually promising, picturing, and preparing for the gracious gift of a Redeemer: a Spirit-Anointed Prophet, Priest, and King who would rescue a believing people and their world from their many enemies and then restore them to all the blessings God had planned for them in the beginning.

Finally, there comes the lengthy *Era of Fulfillment*. As the timeline indicates, this era begins with the first advent of the Redeemer—the incarnate Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ—and extends into eternity future. Here, however, we come upon something interesting: This era is not monolithic, but is comprised of *at least* two stages (as we shall see, some Christians argue for more). For though Christ did indeed appear at the beginning of this era in order to *inaugurate* the redemption of a believing people by granting them forgiveness of sins and new spiritual life, he has not yet *consummated* that redemption by extending it to their physical bodies and the world they will one day inhabit. And so, with eager expectation, the saints wait for him to come again and do these very things.

Earlier I stated that for many Christians eschatology is all about the Consummation: the set of events associated with Christ's Second Coming. But looking at our Beginner's Version of Salvation History we now can see that it actually deals with something far greater: the entire Era of Fulfillment inaugurated by the first coming Christ.

Why do I say this? I say it primarily because of an important expression that appears over and again in Scripture: *the last days* or *the latter days*. As we shall see, the OT prophets *looked forward to* the last days: the days in which God would send the Redeemer, provide atonement for sins, pour out his Spirit,

rescue and restore his people (Jews and Gentiles alike), roll back the curse, and bring in a whole new world order marked by justice, health, peace, prosperity, and the universal knowledge of the glory of God (Isa. 2:2; Jer. 48:47; 49:39; Dan. 2:28; Hos 3:5; Mic. 4:1–2).

When, however, we step onto New Testament (NT) ground, we find to our amazement that the disciples are no longer looking forward to these things, or at least not in the same way their OT forefathers did. For even now—prior to Christ's return and the consummation of their redemption—they affirm that they are *living in* the last days.

To give but one example, the writer to the Hebrews opens his letter by saying, "God, after speaking in days of old to the fathers through the prophets in many portions and various ways, has spoken to us in these last days by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the worlds" (Heb. 1:1–2). So then: Now that Christ has entered the world—and now that the saints are beginning to experience his redemptive blessings—believers are living in the last days. They are experiencing—if only in a measure —the last things, the specifically redemptive things promised by the prophets of old. Again, this tells us that the true subject matter of biblical eschatology is the entire Era of Fulfillment inaugurated by Christ's first coming into the world.

Here, then, is my best shot at a rigorous definition of biblical cosmic eschatology: Biblical Cosmic Eschatology is the study of the last days: the days of the Era of Fulfillment, the days in which the Son of God—in fulfillment of God's eternal plan and manifold OT promises—enters history and accomplishes the complete redemption of a whole new world in Christ.

Now we are ready to proceed. Now the goal of our journey is before us: to discern from Scripture the true shape of the Era of Fulfillment, thereby arriving at a clear picture of the entire course of Salvation History, from the Creation to the Consummation. And please note well: If and when we reach our goal, we will also behold the Blessed Hope of the Church and the winner of the GETD!

Again, our journey will not always be easy, and in the chapters ahead you will see why. Here, however, I want to conclude with a question designed to encourage you. Would it not be ironic if the Beginner's Version of Salvation History turned out to be the true picture after all? Would it not be too wonderful for words if the Era of Fulfillment really was composed of two

simple stages, separated by a single consummation at the Lord's return? What a blessing that would be for multitudes of confused and discouraged sheep scattered all over the hillsides of contemporary eschatology. Why, even little lambs could understand and rejoice in a picture as clear and simple as that.

"But surely," you say, "eschatology is more complicated than that. Surely such a picture is too simple, too clear, and too good to be true."

Read on.

^{1.} For a discussion of naturalistic and pantheistic cosmologies and eschatologies, see Dean Davis, *In Search of the Beginning: A Seeker's Journey to the Origins of the Universe, Life and Man* (Enumclaw, WA: Redemption Press, 2010), chapters 2–4.

^{2.} For a more detailed discussion of personal eschatology see Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1979), chapters 7–9. Also, see Dean Davis, *The Test: A Seeker's Journey to the Meaning of Life* (Enumclaw, WA: Redemption Press, 2010), chapter 15.

CHAPTER 2

ISSUES IN THE GREAT END TIME DEBATE

In our journey so far we have seen that the proper goal of biblical cosmic eschatology is to discern from Scripture the true shape of Salvation History. Alas, it turns out that this is not an easy task. As many of us know all too well, when Christians go to create such a timeline they don't all return with the same one.

Why is this? Answer: They have issues.

Happily, one of the issues they *don't* have is identifying what I will call the *elements* of biblical eschatology. By elements I mean the revealed eras and events that, like the pieces of a puzzle, we hope to situate accurately on the timeline of Salvation History. A robust list of these elements would include the following:

- The Kingdom of God (its nature and stages)
- The Millennium (i.e., the thousand-year reign of Christ described in Revelation 20)
- The Antichrist
- The Last Battle (i.e., the final conflict between God and Satan, Christ and the Antichrist, the Church and the World)
- The Parousia (i.e., the Second Coming of Christ; also called the Revelation and the Appearing of Christ)
- The Resurrection of the Dead (and the Glorification of the Living Saints)
- The Catching Up (or Rapture) of the Saints to meet the Lord in the air
- The Judgment
- The Destruction of the Present Heavens and Earth by Fire
- The Creation of the New Heavens and a New Earth

- The Handing Over of the Kingdom to God the Father
- The Completed Kingdom of God (also called the New Heavens and the New Earth, the World to Come, the Final State, and the Eschaton)

Again, all Christians agree that these are the building blocks of biblical eschatology. But after that, the disagreements begin. They disagree, for example, as to how some of these elements should be defined. They disagree as to whether certain elements (e.g., the Parousia, the Resurrection, the Judgment) will happen once, twice, or even three times. And they strenuously disagree about the chronological sequence of the elements.

This brings us to our focus in the present chapter: the deep, underlying *issues* in biblical eschatology. Very importantly, the issues are different from the elements, though they powerfully affect the way we think about the elements. Also, they are fewer in number than the elements. In fact, I discern only four. And if I'm right, that is very good news, for it means that in order to resolve the GETD all we *really* need to do is find out what the Bible says about these four issues. After that, we should be able stand back and watch the true picture of Salvation History emerge out of the fog of complexity, confusion, and contention into the bright light of day.

Let us therefore take a brief introductory look at these four issues.

1. The Nature and Stages of the Kingdom of God

Trust me when I say that this issue belongs at the top of our list. Virtually every flashpoint of controversy in the GETD is related to differing interpretations of the nature of the Kingdom of God and the stages in which it enters the world. In this section we will touch on two aspects of this foundational issue: (1) the OT picture of the Kingdom, (2) the difficulty in accepting that picture at face value.

The Old Testament Picture of the Kingdom of God

What did our Lord have in mind when he spoke of the Kingdom of God? In the pages ahead we will carefully search the NT for a clear answer to this crucial question. For the moment, however, let me get ahead of myself just a little by offering the following tentative definition: *The Kingdom of God is the direct rule of God the Father, through his Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit, over*

all that has been redeemed by the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In this definition the key word is *direct*. Yes, by his providence God now rules over all things. But this rule is largely indirect. It is filtered through a judicial curse that he himself laid upon the creation at the time of the fall of Adam. However, when Christ came, redemption was accomplished. When redemption was accomplished, spiritual and physical rescue and restoration became possible. And whenever such rescue and restoration actually occur, the Kingdom comes. Why? Because henceforth God is ruling *directly*, through his Son, by his Spirit, over the persons and things he has redeemed, and is introducing all the blessings that such a rule entails. In other words, *the Kingdom of God is a sphere of redemption in which God directly reigns over all that he has made his own*.

As we shall see later, from the very dawn of time God has given us promises and pictures of this blessed sphere of redemption. But it was not until the giving of the Mosaic Law (ca. 1500 BC) and the resulting constitution of Abraham's family as a nation (i.e., as a kingdom) that God, through the OT prophets, began to *explicitly* predict a coming King and Kingdom. Seminal prophecies of the Kingdom appear in the Law itself (Deut. 30, 32). Many more appear in the Psalms (Ps. 2; 18; 22; 72; 89; 96; 132). But the vast majority appear in the writing prophets (i.e., Isaiah to Malachi). In our journey I will refer to the body of these predictions as Old Testament Kingdom Prophecy (OTKP).

OTKP began as a trickle and ended in a torrent. In other words, beginning with Moses and culminating with the prophet Malachi, God gave his OT people a *progressive OT revelation* of the Kingdom. Sadly, this ever-swelling stream ran closely parallel to Israel's ever-deepening apostasy from their God. The farther the nation wandered from her King, the more fervently the prophets warned that God's covenant curses (i.e., judgments) were about to fall upon them, up to and including the twin curse of expulsion from their homeland and captivity in (and to) foreign nations (Lev. 26; Deut. 28).

But there was hope. For even as the prophets threatened the apostates with coming judgment, they also comforted faithful Israelites with promises of an ultimate restoration: the once-and-for-all return of a believing remnant of true Israelites to their homeland, where, in company with a very special heaven-sent Prophet, Priest, and King (i.e., the Messiah), a new Spirit-filled Israel would forever enjoy God's covenant blessings in peace and prosperity.

Indeed, the more closely we examine these prophecies, the more we realize that here God was promising nothing less than *complete cosmic redemption*. Godly Jews were to know and understand that when the LORD finally steps into history to accomplish the promised restoration, he will *rescue* his people from every effect of sin—both theirs and Adam's—and *restore* them to every spiritual blessing offered to mankind in Paradise.

Here, then, is the essence of the OT revelation of the Kingdom of God: In the days of Israel's final restoration to the Promised Land the LORD will *reign* over people as never before: through the Messiah, by the Spirit, and in perfect holiness, peace, and joy—world without end. What's more, when the promised King and Kingdom arrive, multitudes of Gentiles will also be included in the blessedness of eternal life under God's redemptive reign.

Later in our journey we will examine the OT promise of the Kingdom more closely. Here, however, two initial observations are in order.

The first concerns what I will call the *Representative Idea of the Coming of the Kingdom*. I use the word *representative* because most OTKPs conform to this picture, but not all of them. Thus, we may say that as a general rule the OT prophets picture the coming of the Kingdom as follows:

- Exile
- Return
- The Coming of the Messiah (who inaugurates the Last Days)
- The Days of the Messiah (during which he reigns over Israel and some of the Gentiles)
- The Last Battle (between Israel and her worldwide enemies)
- The Day of the LORD (which brings the Resurrection of the Dead, the Judgment, eternal retribution, and eternal reward)
- The World to Come (the New Heavens and the New Earth, the Kingdom of God in its eternal form)

This brings us to our second observation. Together with the Representative Idea of the *Coming* of the Kingdom there is also a Representative Idea of the *Nature* of the Kingdom. And again, most OTKPs conform to this idea, but not

all. Thus, we may say that as a general rule the OT prophets pictured the Kingdom of God as an eternal, universal theocracy: a government of God mediated to the nations by ethnic Israel and her Messiah, administered in accordance with the Law of Moses and set in a spiritually and physically renewed cosmos.

Later on we'll take a closer look at the elements of this idea and examine its scriptural basis. But to get a feel for it, let's consider a classic OTKP found in the book of Micah:

Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it. Many nations shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion the law [or instruction] shall go forth, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. (Micah 4:1–2 NKJV)

Notice first that Micah says these things will take place in "the latter days." Those words are a marker, signaling that the events under discussion will occur in the days of the Kingdom, when God will once again rule over the world.

But here is something interesting and—for Christians—problematic: It appears that in those days the Mosaic Law will still be in effect! As in the glory days of Solomon, so in the last days: A great temple will rest on top of Mount Zion. Many peoples of the world—Gentile nations—will make pilgrimages to it. The LORD himself will dwell in this temple, presumably between the cherubim of the Ark of the Covenant. And, however it may be that he teaches the peoples, it will be out of "the Law": that incomparable body of statutes, judgments, and ordinances of which Moses said that they are Israel's "wisdom" and "understanding," intended by God to provoke the nations of the world to admiration, jealousy, and conversion (Deut. 4:5–8).

Importantly, all of this is quite typical of OTKP. For example, according to David, God will install his Messianic King on Mount Zion, and through him stretch forth his strong scepter to rule over Israel and the nations (Ps. 110:2). According to Isaiah, eunuchs and foreigners who hold fast to the covenant and honor God's Sabbaths will serve as priests on his holy mountain and in his house, placing burnt offerings for sin upon his altar (Isa. 56:6–8). According to

Jeremiah, when the Messianic son of David finally appears, the Levitical priests will never lack a man to present burnt offerings and prepare sacrifices before God; and they will do so "all the days" (Jer. 33:17–18). According to Ezekiel, Gentile nations will look with amazement upon Israel as God once again takes up residence among his people in their ancient homeland, and in a new and everlasting temple (Ezek. 37:24–28). Moreover, at that time the princes will offer the full spectrum of burnt offerings, grain offerings, and drink offerings on all the appointed feast days, new moons, and Sabbaths (Ezek. 45:17). According to Haggai, God will soon fill his temple with the wealth of all nations (Hag. 2:6–9). And according to Zechariah, in the days of the Kingdom all the families of the earth will be required to make an annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem, there to worship the LORD by observing the Feast of Booths (Zech. 14:16–19).

So again, the Representative OT Idea of the Kingdom—the picture of the Kingdom purveyed by a host of OTKPs such as these—is of an eternal, universal theocracy: a government of God mediated by ethnic Israel and her Messiah to the nations, administered in accordance with the Law of Moses, and set in a spiritually and physically renewed cosmos. For the sake of simplicity, I will hereafter refer to this idea as the theocratic view of the Kingdom of God.

Difficulties in Accepting This Picture at Face Value

Careful students of Scripture—especially those steeped in the NT—have great difficulty accepting the theocratic view of the Kingdom at face value. The reasons are many and easy to understand.

First, the OT itself occasionally advances a diametrically opposed view. For example, in a passage much cited in the NT we find Jeremiah saying:

"Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers on the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. "For this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD: "I will put My law within them and write it on their heart; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each

one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their wrongdoing, and their sin I will no longer remember."

(Jeremiah 31:31–34)

Here God is speaking about the days of the coming Kingdom (Jer. 30–33). But is this Kingdom—this rule of God over his people—mediated by the Mosaic Law? Clearly not. Rather, Jeremiah foresees a new covenant different from the Law of Moses, a covenant that will introduce a direct spiritual reign of God over the hearts of his inwardly transformed people. Thus, even in OT times God seemed to hint that his coming reign would *not* conform to the theocratic idea of the Kingdom found in most OTKPs.

Secondly, our Lord himself seems clearly to have affirmed this very thing. Much like Jeremiah, he consistently represents the Kingdom as a direct spiritual reign of his heavenly Father over his people and their world, a reign that may be entered by simple faith in the One whom he has sent (Matt. 11:28–30; 18:3; John 3:3–5). And just like Jeremiah, he associates this reign, not with the Old Covenant, but with a new covenant that he himself is about to bring into the world (Luke 22:20).

And there is more. For Christ explicitly teaches that this new covenant will not only fulfill (the symbolism of) the Old, but will also render it obsolete (Matt. 5:17). Now that we can drink the wine of the New Covenant, new wineskins are required, and the old wineskins must be cast aside (Matt. 9:17). Now that the tree of the New Covenant has been planted in the earth, the tree of the Old is forever cursed, never again to bear fruit (Matt. 21:19). Now that God's ultimate Moses has ascended the Mount to give his disciples the New Covenant, men must henceforth build their lives upon it and it alone, even to the end of the age (Matt. 7:24–27; 28:18–20). Now that the Messiah has come, his Father is building a new temple, a temple not made with human hands (Mark 14:58; John 2:19; Eph. 2:11–22). Now that the last days have arrived, men no longer need to worship God on Mount Zion, or on any other mountain, since now they can worship the Father in spirit and truth (John 4:21–24; Heb. 12:18–19).

And as if all this were not enough, we also have the testimony of Christ's apostles, the appointed heralds and interpreters of the New Covenant that

Christ instituted through his death, resurrection, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It is, if possible, even more decisive.

In the book of Acts, for example, we find the apostles preaching the good news of the Kingdom of God (Acts 8:12; 19:8; 28:31), yet at the same time ferociously protecting Gentile believers from the slightest suggestion that they must convert to Judaism or observe the Mosaic Law (Acts 15:1–21). And in the Epistles we find Paul doing much the same, carefully explaining the nuanced relationship between the Law (i.e., the Old Covenant) and the Gospel (i.e., the New Covenant). Like his Master, he concludes that the New Covenant fulfills the Old, supersedes the Old, and renders the Old obsolete. Indeed, it is nothing less than the Eternal Covenant: the "mystery" of God, hidden from human sight in ages past, but now, through Christ, brought into the world and out into the open. It is, says Paul, the eternal "substance" or "body" of which the events and institutions of the Old Covenant were merely passing "shadows" (Col. 2:17; Heb. 8:13; 13:20).

Summing up, then, it certainly appears that Jeremiah, the Lord Jesus, and all the apostles agreed that the Kingdom of God is a direct spiritual reign of God the Father, through the Son (and Redeemer), by the Holy Spirit; that it is closely associated with the New Covenant; and that the New Covenant not only fulfills the Old Covenant, but also renders it forever obsolete. For the sake of simplicity, I will be calling this *the New Covenant* view of the Kingdom. And if the New Covenant view of the Kingdom is correct, it hardly seems possible to interpret OTKP literally, thereby arriving at the theocratic view of the Kingdom of God.

2. The Interpretation of Old Testament Kingdom Prophecy

This brings us to the second foundational issue in the GETD: the proper interpretation of OTKP. In light of the difficulties we've just encountered, how are we to understand these prophecies? Happily, Church history shows us that in the end there are only two possible solutions.

On the one hand, we may adopt a typological and figurative interpretation of OTKP. According to this view, in OT times God was pleased to *veil* his revelations of the coming Kingdom under types and shadows; that is, under symbolic imagery drawn from the history and institutions of his OT people. In effect this rendered the true nature of the Kingdom a *mystery*: a secret that would not be fully unveiled until the coming of the Messianic Prophet

(Teacher), Priest, and King.

If indeed this was God's way, there are major consequences for prophetic interpretation. It means that when we step onto OT ground and encounter OTKPs, we cannot interpret them literally. Rather, we must use the Rosetta Stone of the New Covenant to translate and decode the mystical utterances of the Old. In so doing, our goal will always be the same: to behold in the mysterious promises and pictures of OTKP the manifold blessings of the New Covenant, and to savor them as we do. All of this is, of course, a big theological mouthful, a mouthful that we will carefully chew and digest in the pages ahead.

On the other hand, there is the solution advanced by prophetic literalists. These are the brothers who say, "No, we can't allow ourselves to spiritualize OTKP, for down that road lies endless speculation, controversy, and uncertainty. Rather, we must approach OTKP just as we would any other part of the Bible. Therefore, unless there is a clear textual warrant for doing otherwise, we must interpret OTKP *literally*. And if you doubt the wisdom of this approach, just look again at all the OT prophecies that were literally fulfilled. Even more importantly, look at all the *Messianic* prophecies that have been literally fulfilled: prophecies giving us minute details about Christ's incarnation, birth, miraculous ministry to Israel, triumphal entry, rejection, death, and resurrection. Surely, then, both the Old and New Testaments admonish us to interpret all OT prophecy—including OTKP—literally."

I don't believe I have ever met a Christian who has not felt the force of this argument, an argument that is both reasonable and commendable. It is reasonable because no one can deny that many OT prophecies have indeed been literally fulfilled. And it is commendable because it displays a fierce loyalty, not only to the divine inspiration of the Bible, but also to what theologians call its perspicuity, or clarity. The idea here is that God, in giving us a revelation of his truth, actually *wants* us to understand it, and therefore couches it in straightforward language that we should straightforwardly receive. Again, it is hard to deny this premise.

Nevertheless, a big problem remains for the prophetic literalist. It is this: If OTKP really is to be interpreted literally, how is it that the Lord Jesus, who welcomes everyone who believes in him into the Kingdom of God, does not insist that they live under the Mosaic Law? Indeed, how is it that both he and his holy apostles and prophets effectively divorced God's NT people from

Judaism, placing them under a completely different—and decidedly non-theocratic—set of institutions: preaching, teaching, baptism, the Lord's Supper, church discipline, etc.? For over two thousand years the spiritual citizens of Christ's Kingdom, following the rule of the NT to the best of their ability, have never yet felt compelled or warranted to institute anything like the theocratic idea of the Kingdom. How then, for the prophetic literalist, are OTKPs to be fulfilled?

The answer, of course, is precisely what it would have to be in order to retain even a semblance of the divine inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture: The OT prophecies of a future theocratic Kingdom are literally fulfilled, not in the present Era of Gospel Proclamation, but in a future stage of the Kingdom in which God, for wise reasons, will revert, at least in part, to the institutions of the OT Law.

And with this we arrive at the third underlying issue in the GETD.

3. The Millennium

Only once in all of Scripture do we read of a one-thousand-year reign of the Messiah: in chapter 20 of Revelation. But what a huge theological ruckus that little chapter has raised! In part, this is because its interpretation has proven difficult. Is John speaking here about a literal one thousand years, or is this number, like so many of the images in the Revelation, a symbol? Does this reign of Christ occur *after* his Second Coming (see Rev. 19:11–16) or *before* it? What about "the first resurrection"? Is it spiritual or physical? Do Christ and his saints reign in Heaven or upon the earth? And what exactly do they reign over? These are only a few of the questions over which interpreters divide, making it difficult for Christians to fit this particular piece of Scripture into the overall eschatological puzzle.

It is crucial to understand, however, that the *primary* reason for the controversy over Revelation 20 is not found in the chapter itself. Rather, it is found in the vast treasury of OTKPs that seem to promote the theocratic idea of the Kingdom; that seem to anticipate a Mosaic theocracy centered in Palestine. Now it is obvious that those who favor a literal interpretation must find a time slot in Salvation History where those prophecies can be literally fulfilled. Or to state the case a bit more precisely, it is obvious that they must find room in Salvation History for a specifically *theocratic* stage of the Kingdom of God. Moreover, it is a matter of considerable urgency that these

interpreters find *an explicit NT warrant* for believing that God has indeed planned such a stage. For as we have just seen, in the present stage of the Kingdom—in the present Era of (Gospel) Proclamation—God is certainly *not* calling his New Covenant people to live under a Jewish theocracy. Indeed, the overall teaching of the Gospels and Epistles seems decidedly hostile to any suggestion of a reversion to the now-fulfilled and now-obsolete institutions of the Mosaic Law. So then: OT prophetic literalists find themselves in a big NT pinch.

This is why Revelation 20 is so important to them. Here, they argue, is where we find an explicit NT promise of a *future* phase of the Kingdom of God: a thousand-year theocratic phase in which all (or most) of the OTKPs will be literally fulfilled at last.

Since these interpreters argue that Christ will come again *before* this second stage of the Kingdom begins, they are usually called *premillennarians*, and their eschatological school, *Premillennialism*. Yes, premillennarians make a very big deal of the Millennium. Now we see why, and also why this is one of the hottest flashpoints of controversy in the GETD.

4. The Consummation

The fourth and final issue in the GETD is the Consummation. This is the word theologians use to describe the set of events associated with the Second Coming of Christ and the wrap-up of God's judicial and redemptive activity in history.

Very importantly, our view of the Consummation will depend on our view of the Kingdom of God and the Millennium. As we will see on the next leg of our journey, some interpreters believe that the Kingdom enters history in just two stages: the present Era of Proclamation, followed by an eternal Era of Reward and Retribution. These folks believe that in Revelation 20 the Spirit is describing events set to occur in the Era of Proclamation. They do not deny the existence of a Millennium, only that the years are literal, and that the Millennium occurs in the future, after Christ's return. Traditionally, such interpreters are called amillennarians. But they also can be called *present-millennarians*, since they believe that we are living in the Millennium now. Their view of the Kingdom results in a very simple view of the Consummation: Christ will come again *once* at the end of the present evil age to raise the dead, judge the world in righteousness, transform the physical

cosmos, and inaugurate the Kingdom in its full and final form.

On the other hand, we have *premillenarian* (or *future-millennarian*) interpreters. As we just saw, these brothers believe that the Kingdom of God enters history in *three* stages: the present Era of Proclamation, the Millennium, and the eternal Era of Reward and Retribution (or the World to Come). Their view of the Kingdom results in a more complicated picture of the Consummation. The reason is clear: Once we multiply the stages of the Kingdom, we also must multiply the elements (or key events) of the Consummation. For example, once we insert a millennium between the Era of Proclamation and the World to Come, we must have the Consummator (i.e., Christ) coming (at least) twice: once at the beginning of the Millennium and once at its end. And because of this, we also must have him presiding over (at least) two resurrections, two judgments, and two transformations of nature, for the Scriptures are emphatic that he himself will do all these things at his coming(s) (Matt. 24–25; John 5:19–29; 1 Cor. 15:20–28, 50–58; Phil. 3:20–21; 1 Thess. 4:13–18; 2 Thess. 1:3–10; 2 Peter 3:1–13).

Does the GETD involve the Consummation? Definitely. But is it the *real* crux of the controversy? Definitely not. The real crux is the interpretation of OTKP, for our stance on this issue will radically affect everything else: our understanding of the Kingdom of God, the Millennium, and the Blessed Hope of the Church: The Consummation of all things at the return of Christ.

Conclusion

In our journey so far we've been gearing up: equipping ourselves to think clearly and biblically about the GETD. We've seen that the great prize in this debate is the one true timeline of Salvation History, which in turn will give us a clear view of the Consummation: the Blessed Hope of the Church.

We've identified the main elements of biblical eschatology: the eras and events that we hope to properly situate on that timeline. They include: (1) the Kingdom of God, (2) the Millennium, (3) the Antichrist, (4) the Last Battle, (5) the Parousia, (6) the Resurrection of the Dead (and the Glorification of the Living Saints), (7) the Catching Up of the Saints at Christ's return, (8) the Judgment, (9) the Destruction of the Present Heavens and Earth by Fire, (10) the Handing Over of the Kingdom to God the Father, and (11) the Completed Kingdom of God.

But most importantly, we've isolated the four issues underlying this debate,

the issues that must be resolved if we hope to discern the true shape of Salvation History: (1) The nature and stages of Kingdom of God, (2) the proper interpretation of OTKP, (3) the meaning of the Millennium, and (4) the true nature of the Consummation.

And now, by way of encouragement, let me repeat what I mentioned earlier: In isolating these four underlying issues we have *already* taken a giant step toward resolving the GETD, for now we know where to focus our attention. All we need to do is find out what Christ and his apostles taught us on these issues. We already know that they addressed them, and we already know that in the progress of divine revelation they have given us *definitive* light on each one. Therefore, our way is clear and our success is sure.

If, however, I were immediately to plunge into a discussion of the issues, I fear I would be betraying the present generation of God's children (Ps. 73:13). That's because you cannot fully participate in the GETD without a working knowledge of the *options*: of the various schools of contemporary eschatology to which evangelical Christians are drawn. In particular, you will need to know how each of these schools deals with the four underlying issues, and how they situate the various elements of biblical eschatology on the timeline of Salvation History. So then: To be kind, I must be a little cruel. To bring sweet healing, I must inflict a little pain. How? By asking you to join me on a short day-hike through the lowlands of evangelical eschatology. Yes, at first glance the sights will be a bit intimidating. But good Bereans that you are, you understand that this hike is both necessary and profitable. For once you have mastered these views, you will never again be afraid of the GETD. What's more, you will then be ready for one of the most exciting parts of our journey: the part where you catch a fresh vision of God's appointed Teacher, the One who holds in his hands the master keys to all biblical eschatology, and who, by placing them in ours, will show us the true winner of the GETD.

CHAPTER 3

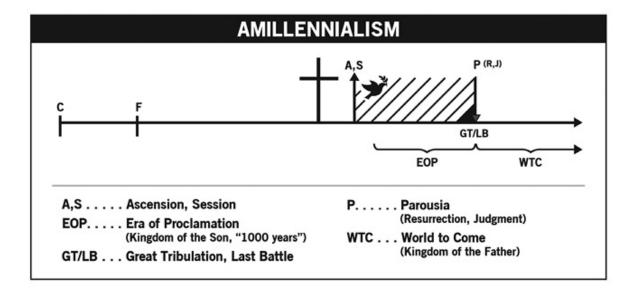
OPTIONS IN THE GREAT END TIME DEBATE

I have said that mastering the options in eschatology is work, but I have no desire that it should be torture. Accordingly, I have kept the present discussion as simple as possible. My primary goal is to introduce you to the competing views of Salvation History in their most basic form. I will not delve into their history, alleged scriptural foundations, details, or countless modifications of this or that particular view. A simple introduction should suffice for the one thing necessary: clarity about the basic nature of each option, so that we can bring it—and ourselves—to the feet of the Teacher for a final judgment.

In the discussion ahead we'll be looking at five different views of Salvation History currently embraced by Bible-believing Christians. In each case I will explain its name, offer a bit of history, and cite its major proponents, both ancient and modern. With the help of timelines I will explain how each school envisions the course of Salvation History and understands the four underlying issues of the GETD. My approach will be chronological, considering the older views first and the more recent last.

Before we embark, let me offer yet another word of encouragement. As we shall soon see, it turns out that at the end of the day there are really only two main contestants in the eschatological ring. I mentioned them in the last chapter: *present-millennialism* and *future-millennialism*. The names are self-explanatory. Present-millennial eschatologies say that we are living in the Millennium now (or soon will). Future-millennial eschatologies say that the Millennium will begin after the Second Coming of Christ. In the pages ahead I will give more details. But for the moment, I urge you to take heart: The fact that there are only two basic eschatological options tells that us that our subject is much simpler than we may have thought. It means that there is no need for any good Berean to be intimidated by the GETD.

1. Amillennialism



The word *Amillennialism* means *no millennium*. The term is not ideal, since amillennarians do not deny the *existence* of a millennium, only that it begins *after* the Parousia, and that it will last for a literal one thousand years. Instead, amillennarians teach that the thousand years of Revelation 20 symbolize the present Era of Proclamation, during which Christ reigns in life with the departed spirits of his saints in Heaven. Amillennialism is the first and most fundamental form of present-millennialism.

In the early Church there was a lively debate between amillennarians and premillenarians. Careful study shows that the majority of the early church fathers tilted amillennarian. They include Clement of Rome, Polycarp, the author(s) of the *Didache*, Barnabas, Caius of Rome, Hippolytus, and Origen. By the early fourth century Lactantius was the only theologian of note defending Premillennialism. Shortly thereafter, Eusebius, Athanasius, and Augustine established Amillennialism as eschatological orthodoxy; and so it remained up until post-Reformation times.

Notably, all the early creeds were amillennial: the Apostles' Creed (third century), the Nicene Creed (fourth century), and the Athanasian Creed (sixth century). Amillennialism is the traditional eschatology of the Catholic and Protestant churches and appears in nearly all their creeds, confessions, and catechisms. In this book I will argue that it is the eschatology of the Lord Jesus Christ, the apostles, and the entire Bible. Contemporary defenders of

Amillennialism include Greg Beale, Floyd Hamilton, Anthony Hoekema, Dennis Johnson, Kim Riddlebarger, Sam Storms, Sam Waldron, and Rodman Williams.

Amillennialism gives us a simple picture of Salvation History; indeed, it is essentially the same as the Beginner's Version of Salvation History that we looked at earlier. We can best understand Amillennialism by examining how it addresses the four underlying issues in the GETD.

Amillennarians teach that the Kingdom of God is a direct spiritual reign of God the Father over his redeemed children and their world. This reign is made available to sinners through the redemptive work of Christ and is entered by means of the preaching of the Gospel, the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, repentance from sin, and faith in the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This kingdom enters history in just two stages: the Kingdom of the Son, followed by the Kingdom of the Father (Matt. 13:36–43). The Kingdom of the Son, which began on the Day of Pentecost, is coextensive with the Era of Proclamation and is identical with the one thousand years of Revelation 20, symbolically understood. The Kingdom of the Father will begin immediately after the Consummation, which is effected by Christ at his Parousia. It may also be called the World (or Age) to Come. In the World to Come the experience of redemption that began in the hearts of the saints during the Era of Proclamation is now extended to their glorified bodies and the beautiful new world they will inhabit forever.

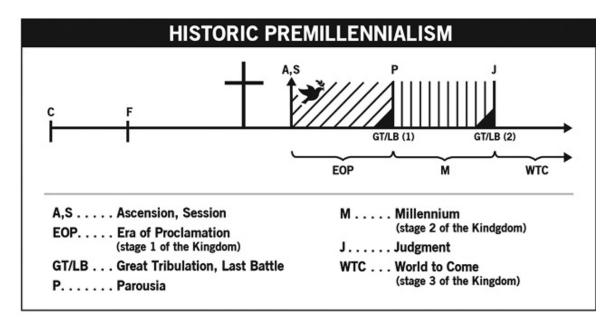
Amillennarians contend that in OT times the Holy Spirit moved the prophets to use ideas and images drawn from Israel's history and Law to give God's people a *veiled revelation* of the coming Kingdom of God. Accordingly, for amillennarians OTKP can only be understood beneath the brighter light of the NT, where the exact truth about the nature and stages of the Kingdom is finally revealed. It was Augustine who first articulated the amillennarian's guiding principle for the interpretation of OT Scripture, stating pithily, "The New Covenant is in the Old concealed; the Old Covenant is in the New revealed." Armed with this principle, amillennarians offer a typological and figurative interpretation of OTKP.

Amillennarians teach that in the Revelation we are given the Grand Finale of All Scripture. Here the Holy Spirit draws richly upon both Old and New Testament history to depict for us, in largely symbolic language, the course and character of Christ's heavenly reign. Amillennarians believe that this approach opens up chapter 20, where, under a host of Old and New Testament symbols, the Holy Spirit speaks mystically about crucial events set to occur in the Kingdom of the Son.

Concerning the Consummation, Amillennialism gives us a simple and powerful picture. Just prior to the return of Christ there will be a brief season of great tribulation. It will be characterized by solemn judgments on "the inhabitants of the earth" and by severe persecution of the true spiritual Church. Thankfully, the High King of Heaven will cut this season short with his Parousia. The Parousia and the Consummation it brings will take place *once* at the end of the present evil age, when Christ returns to raise the dead, judge the world in righteousness, destroy the present earth and its works with fire, and create new heavens and a new earth, the eternal home of the redeemed.

Most would agree, I think, that this is a sheep-friendly eschatology. But as we have seen, it is not the sole contender in the eschatological ring.

2. Historic Premillennialism



This view is called *premillennial* because it teaches that Christ will come again *before* a literal thousand-year reign upon the earth. It is called *historic* because it appeared early in the history of the Church, and then again in post-Reformation times.

There are two kinds of Historic Premillennialism (HP). The first may be called New Covenant (or Christian) Historic Premillennialism (NCHP). Its chief characteristic is that it places the Church at the center of the millennial scenario. The second may be called Old Covenant (or Jewish) Historic Premillennialism (OCHP). Its chief characteristic is that it places ethnic Israel at the center of the millennial scenario. Apart from this important difference, the two views are much the same.

Ancient proponents of NCHP include Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Lactantius, the Montanists, Papias, and Tertullian. Post-Reformation proponents of this view include Joseph Bengel, Millard Erickson, John Gill, Jim Hamilton, George Ladd, Cotton Mather, J. Barton Payne, and John Piper. The modern proponents of OCHP include David Baron, the Bonars, Franz Delitzsche, George Peters, J. C. Ryle, Charles Spurgeon, Samuel Tregelles, and Nathaniel West. Arguably, HP in one form or another is the majority position of modern evangelical theologians, though not of the people in the pews.

With the help of our timeline, let's see how HP understands the four issues in the GETD.

HP teaches that the Kingdom of God enters history in three stages. The first is the present Era of Proclamation. The second is the Millennium, understood as a literal one-thousand-year reign of Christ upon the earth. The third is the eternal World to Come.

The two schools diverge sharply in their interpretation of OTKP. NCHP largely follows Amillennialism in interpreting OTKP figuratively, arguing that the OT prophets used Old Covenant language and imagery to speak of New Covenant realities. As we shall see, OCHP takes a more literal approach. The result is that the two schools agree that the Kingdom enters history in three stages, but differ as to the nature of Christ's millennial reign.

To understand this better, let's look at how HPs view the Consummation. In what follows I will give the version favored by OCHPs. Shorn of its emphasis upon the exaltation of ethnic Israel and a temporary return to OT theocratic institutions, NCHPs would largely agree with this scenario.

According to OCHPs, in OT times God promised, pictured, and prepared for an eschatological Kingdom that would enter history in three stages: The Era of Proclamation, the Millennium, and the World to Come. Throughout the first stage, God's redemptive purpose will advance infallibly, but also with great difficulty for the Church. Toward the end of this era the world will

plunge into deep spiritual darkness, thereby triggering the rise of the Antichrist, a brief season of great tribulation, and the apostasy of many professing believers.

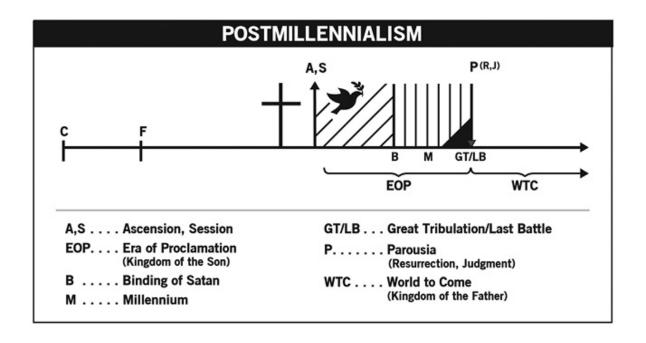
Then Christ will come again. When he does (or shortly before he does), the great mass of Jews, now returned to Palestine, will be converted. Acting in judgment, Christ will first destroy the Antichrist and his followers, and then confine Satan to the abyss. Acting in redemption, he will resurrect the saints of all time (but some say only the martyrs), glorify living believers, partially lift the curse from the earth, and welcome believing Jews and the spared children of unbelievers into the Millennium.

Now begins the theocratic stage of the Kingdom, when Christ and his glorified saints reign over Israel and the nations. Christ's kingship emanates from the earthly Jerusalem, where (according to some) a glorious new temple is situated, animal sacrifices (commemorative of the work of Christ) are offered, and the ancient Mosaic feasts are again observed. By means of special prerogatives, ethnic Israel is exalted as the priestly nation she was always meant to be. In essence, the Millennium is a lengthy season of universal piety, peace, and prosperity, vindicating God's OT promises of Israel's glory and the Messiah's universal reign.

And yet, mysteriously enough, it ends in war. Released from the abyss, Satan again uses his deceptive powers to incite a global rebellion against Christ and the saints. It does not succeed: God (through Christ) immediately steps in so that fire falls from Heaven, the rebels are consumed, and Satan is cast into the Lake of Fire. This leads to the fullness of the Consummation, wherein Christ raises the unrighteous dead (and, according to some, the sleeping millennial saints), judges the world in righteousness, destroys the present universe by fire, and creates new heavens and a new earth. Then the third and final stage of the Kingdom begins, in which Jew and Gentile will forever dwell together with God as a single glorified Church in the World to Come.

Please note from the timeline that by positing a three-staged Kingdom, HPs effectively give us two consummations. Here all is duplicated: There are two great tribulations, two parousias, two resurrections, two judgments, and two transformations of the physical universe. In the pages ahead we will look closely to see if the NT confirms this complex scenario.

3. Postmillennialism



The word *postmillennial* means *after the Millennium*. Thus, like amillennarians, postmillennarians teach that Christ will come again *after* the one thousand years of Revelation 20. Nevertheless, the two schools are different, primarily because postmillennarians are highly optimistic about the progress of the Gospel during the Era of Proclamation. The seeds of this persuasion were planted by Augustine, who spoke glowingly about the redemptive power and future growth of the City of God (i.e., the Church). In Reformation times certain Dutch theologians modified his view, asserting that the one thousand years symbolize *a later portion* of the Church Era, during which the Jews will be converted and the faith will triumphantly overspread the world.

Though hardly the majority position of the Church, Postmillennialism has had some astute defenders. Most of the American Puritans were postmillennarians. They believed that God would use the American experiment to advance his universal Kingdom. Notable modern postmillennarians include Charles Hodge, Benjamin Warfield, Lorraine Boettner, David Chilton, John Jefferson Davis, Marcellus Kik, Keith Mathison, James White, and Doug Wilson. The disciples of Rousas Rushdoony—the founder of a theological school called Christian Reconstructionism—are also postmillennial. They include Greg Bahnsen, Ken Gentry, Gary North, and Martin Selbrede.

Postmillennarians agree with their amillennarian brothers that the Kingdom of God enters history in two stages: the Kingdom of the Son, followed by the Kingdom of the Father. Today, most of them think of the Millennium as a distinct phase of the Kingdom of the Son, in which Christ will suddenly bind Satan and triumphantly extend his spiritual reign over the face of the whole earth. Strictly speaking, we cannot regard these interpreters as present-millennarians, since for them the Millennium is still to come.

Like amillennarians, postmillennarians interpret OTKP spiritually, as being fulfilled under the New Covenant. However, where amillennarians find the prophets speaking of the World to Come, postmillennarians often find them speaking of the triumphs of the Gospel in the millennial portion of the Kingdom of the Son (see, e.g., Psalm 72; Isaiah 65:17–25). Later in our journey we will take a close look at a number of their favorite supporting texts.

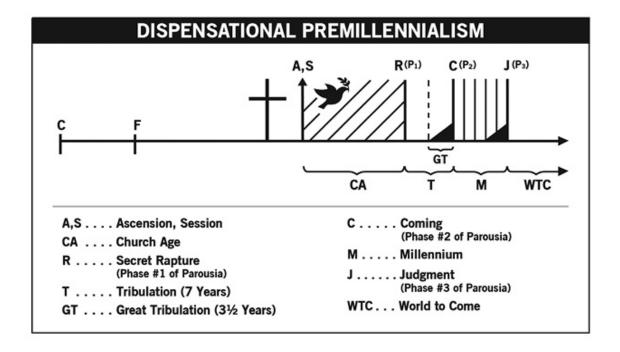
Again, postmillennarians differ among themselves as to the nature of the one thousand years of Revelation 20. Some identify it with the entire Era of Proclamation, others with its final one thousand years, still others with a season of indeterminate length situated near the end of the present evil age: a season that will commence with a special, latter-day binding of Satan, possibly leading to the conversion of ethnic Israel at large (this is the view I have pictured on the timeline above). All agree, however, that the basic trajectory of Church history, despite occasional setbacks, is one of Gospel triumph.

Regarding the Consummation, postmillennarians concede that Revelation 20:7–10 does indeed anticipate a final global rebellion against Christ and his faithful people. They insist, however, that it will be very short and largely unsuccessful. This painful interlude—so out of character with the preceding years of Gospel victory and blessing—will quickly lead to the Parousia, the several elements of the Consummation, and the World to Come.

Summing up, we find that for most postmillennarians the true locus of Christ's victory over the powers of evil is the Era of Proclamation itself, with Christ's Parousia serving largely as a glorious capstone laid upon all that he previously accomplished through the faithful preaching of the Church.

Does Scripture justify this optimistic scenario? And does the course of church history to date confirm it? In the pages ahead we will be sure to address these important questions.

4. Dispensational Premillennialism



Dispensational Premillennialism is a recent, complex, and increasingly controversial form of premillennial eschatology. It was developed in midnineteenth century England by John Darby, a leader of the small but influential Plymouth Brethren Movement. In a day when theological liberalism was rotting out the foundations of mainline Protestantism, dispensationalists held loyally to a high view of Scripture, thereby winning favor among biblical conservatives. Also, as the murderous twentieth century progressed, their interpretation of biblical prophecy—which was decidedly pessimistic about the future of world society—seemed to make good sense of the tumultuous times in which people were living.

For all of these reasons Dispensationalism enjoyed a large following. It included many devoted apologists: men like C. I. Scofield, Harry Ironside, William Blackstone, and A. C. Gabelein. Evangelist D. L. Moody did much to spread the new eschatology among Christian laymen, as did the popular *Scofield Reference Bible* and the Prophetic Conference Movement. In time, dispensational Bible colleges and seminaries began to spring up, from which flowed a continuous stream of teachers, pastors, writers, and conference speakers. Familiar contemporary proponents of Dispensationalism include Jonathan Cahn, W. A. Criswell, Norman Geisler, Dave Hunt, Thomas Ice, John Hagee, David Jeremiah, Tim LaHaye, Hal Lindsey, John MacArthur, Joel

Rosenberg, Charles Ryrie, Chuck Smith, Charles Swindoll, Jack Van Impe, and John Walvoord.

At the heart of Dispensationalism lies a novel and controversial thesis; namely, that God has always had two different plans for two different ethnic groups: one for Israel and another for the (largely Gentile) Church. This conviction is reflected in its picture of Salvation History, which is divided into seven different *dispensations*. These are defined as seasons during which God tests people in a particular way. Accordingly, dispensationalists break up the Era of Promise and Preparation into four separate dispensations: the dispensations of Conscience (Adam), Human Government (Noah), Promise (Abraham), and Law (Moses/Israel).

Among these, the fourth is of special importance, since it was during this troubled season of Israel's moral failure that God, through his OT prophets, ever-increasingly promised that he would restore his (scattered) people to their homeland in Canaan, send them a Messianic king, and set up a global theocracy with Israel as the head and the Gentiles as the tail. Dispensationalists interpret these OTKPs *quite* literally, and therefore anticipate a future "dispensation of the Kingdom" wherein God's earthly people—ethnic Israel—will again be situated in Palestine, reigning triumphantly with their Messiah over the other nations of the world.

This brings us to the NT era. Here God finally sends his Son into the world for the express purpose of offering the promised theocratic kingdom to Israel. However, as the four Gospels make painfully clear, Israel largely refuses to submit to Christ, thereby failing their test and forfeiting the theocratic kingdom. But this does not spell the death of God's kingdom promises. Instead, God graciously postpones the dispensation of the Kingdom until the Millennium. Meanwhile, about midway through his earthly ministry, Christ unveils a new plan by which God will now create a new (heavenly) people and introduce a new dispensation: the Dispensation of Grace, or the so-called Church Age (Matt. 11:25–30; 13:1–52).

Some dispensationalists speak of this new era as the "mystery form" of the Kingdom, since here Christ does indeed rule over his saints, but only inwardly, by his Spirit. Very importantly, most dispensationalists insist that this new plan was a *pure* mystery. That is, the OT prophets *never* foresaw or spoke of it. Rather, Christ introduced it altogether *de novo* during the days of his flesh when he realized that the Jewish nation would reject him. And reject him they

did, with the result that on the Day of Pentecost the glorified Christ gave birth to the Church, pouring out the Holy Spirit on his disciples, and seating them in heavenly places with him. And this he would continue to do throughout the entire Church Age, causing all who believe in him to become part of the heavenly people of God.

This brings us to the most complicated part of the dispensational system, the part that deals with the Consummation. I will sketch it as simply as I can. As we work our way through the timeline, observe that dispensationalists go one better than historic premillennarians, giving us a *three-phased* consummation.

First comes the secret Rapture. This is "phase one" of the Consummation, the phase in which Christ descends from Heaven for his saints. When he does, he will resurrect the OT saints (but some say this will happen later, at the close of the Tribulation), transform the living believers, gather them all to himself in the sky, and then take them with him to Heaven, where, for the next seven years, they will enjoy the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Again, the Rapture is a "secret" event: No (unbelieving) person on earth sees Christ coming to the earth, or the Church departing into Heaven. It is also an "imminent" event, in the sense that God has not given us any signs by which we may certainly know that it is at hand. In short, no one can know when the great Catching Up will occur. The saints must be prepared for an "any-moment Rapture."

Next comes the *Tribulation*. Based on their distinctive interpretation of Daniel 9, dispensationalists assert that this brief season of severe judgment and persecution will begin when the Antichrist enters into a seven-year covenant with ethnic Israel, a covenant that he will break midway through, thereby triggering a Great Tribulation of three and a half years. But while the Tribulation is indeed a time of unprecedented judgments upon sinful mankind, and of strong persecution for the Jewish saints and their converts, there is also mercy. For throughout the Tribulation 144,000 converted Jews will preach the Gospel of the Kingdom to the nations: the good news of Christ's coming millennial reign, and of access to it through faith in him (Rev. 7). Also, during the Great Tribulation two supernaturally empowered prophets will call the nations to repentance, endure persecution, and suffer martyrdom at the close of their ministry (Rev. 11). The Tribulation will end with the Battle of Armageddon: a military conflict centered in Palestine that will scarcely get underway before Christ returns visibly, in power and glory, to rescue his beleaguered people, and to destroy their enemies (Rev. 16).

This return is "phase two" of the Consummation (and is sometimes called the Revelation). Here Christ will come with his saints (and all the holy angels). His feet will touch down on the Mount of Olives. More Jews will be converted. According to some, the OT saints—as well as believers who died during the Tribulation—will be raised from the dead. Then Christ will judge the living Gentile nations, punishing many, but allowing those who treated his Jewish brothers well to enter the Millennium. Likewise, he will also judge between believing and unbelieving Jews. Finally, he will cast Satan into the abyss for a thousand years. Some dispensationalists believe that the glorified saints will return to Heaven; others say they will remain on earth. In any case, the promised Kingdom Age will now begin.

Throughout the Millennium Christ will reign on the earth and over the earth from the earthly Jerusalem. A glorious rebuilt temple will become the center of the global worship of God. In commemoration of Christ's atoning death, priests will again offer animal sacrifices, and the nations will observe Jewish feast days. Though sin and death will be marginally present, the Millennium will largely be a time of widespread peace, prosperity, longevity, righteousness, and joy. On those rare occasions when rebels rise up against the King, Christ will swiftly punish them with a rod of iron, possibly with the help of his glorified saints. At the end of the Millennium God will permit Satan and his demon hosts to arise from the abyss and deceive the nations one final time. A final battle will ensue, wherein a confederacy of rebellious nations will attack the camp of the saints. But God (or Christ) will quickly intervene, destroy his foes, cast Satan into the Lake of Fire, and raise the millennial saints from the dead.

Now comes the Last Judgment. Here the focus is upon the unbelieving dead, who will be raised and brought before the Great White Throne, where Christ will judge them according to their works and then cast them into the Lake of Fire.

Finally, God (or Christ) will create the World to Come, the eternal home of the redeemed. The Church—God's heavenly people—will descend to the new earth to join Israel, God's earthly people. Though (according to some) they will remain distinct forever, they both will live and serve together in the eternal Kingdom of God and Christ.¹

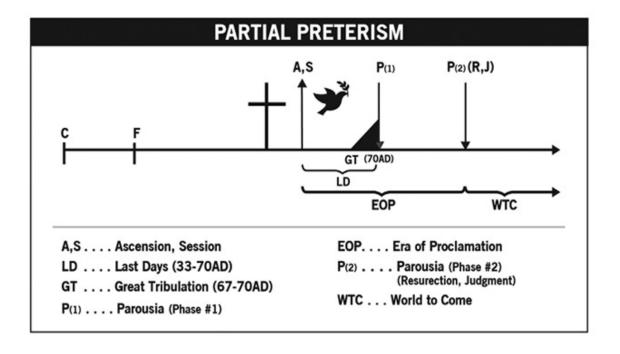
Today, Dispensationalism has fallen out of favor with Bible scholars. Nevertheless, it is still defended by many pastors, for which reason it has acquired a large following among the people in the pews. For over 150 years evangelical Christians have been saturated with dispensational thinking, whether through sermons, books, conferences, novels, or movies. If this eschatology really is in error, it will require considerable time, effort, and retraining on the part of many Christians to unlearn it. But if they are good Bereans, they will be willing to pay the price.

5. Preterism

In recent years a small but influential group of theologians in the Reformed wing of evangelicalism have defended an eschatological view called *Preterism*. The name comes from the Latin *praeter*, meaning *past*. It fits well, since interpreters of this persuasion argue that events traditionally associated with the Consummation have *already* occurred. They believe that some or all of the eschatological predictions found in the Gospels, the Epistles, and the Revelation were actually fulfilled between the years AD 33–70, and especially during the Battle of Jerusalem (AD 66–70).

Most historians agree that preterist eschatologies originated in the seventeenth-century writings of the Jesuit priest Luis de Alcazar, Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius, and English Bible scholars Henry Hammond and John Lightfoot. Later, the English Congregational pastor J. S. Russell became the father of *Full Preterism*, while the American professor Moses Stuart defended a milder version called *Partial Preterism*. In the next two sections I will briefly describe these two schools of thought.

5a. Partial Preterism



Partial preterists agree with their Reformed forefathers in teaching that the Kingdom of God enters the world in two stages: the Era of Proclamation followed by the World to Come. They also agree that we must interpret OTKP figuratively, as using types and shadows to point "mysteriously" to New Covenant institutions and blessings. However, on a number of other crucial points they differ sharply with their Protestant predecessors.

For example, we see from our timeline that partial preterists do not identify "the last days" as the eternal Era of Fulfillment introduced by the New Covenant, but rather as the closing years of the Mosaic dispensation: the brief season between Pentecost (ca. AD 33) and the events of AD 70. Also, they do not identify the Great Tribulation as the present evil age, or as a short season of judgment and persecution just prior to the Lord's return in glory, but rather as the Battle of Jerusalem, which took place in AD 67–70, when Titus attacked and destroyed the city.

As for the Parousia, we observe yet another departure from Protestant orthodoxy. According to the latter, Christ will return once at the end of the present evil age to consummate all things. But according to Partial Preterism, the "one" Parousia has two distinct phases. The first, sometimes referred to as the Judgment Coming, occurred in AD 70, when Titus destroyed Jerusalem. This judgment marked "the end of the age"; that is, the end of the Mosaic

dispensation. It was not a supernatural judgment, but a providential judgment. The second phase of the Parousia is supernatural. It includes the bodily return of the Lord in glory, the Resurrection, and the Last Judgment. This coming marks the end of the Era of Proclamation.

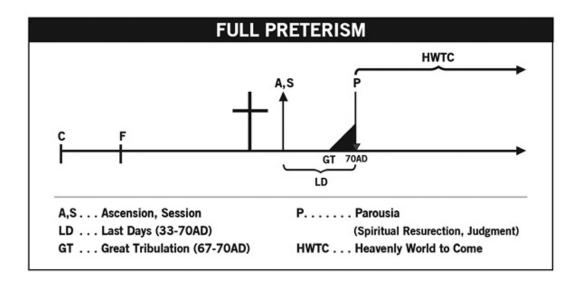
In order to make this kind of distinction work, partial preterists have introduced a new *hermeneutic:* a new way of interpreting many NT eschatological texts. Thus, they tell us that in Matthew 24:27–31 the Lord used OT apocalyptic language to speak symbolically about his providential Judgment Coming, whereas in Matthew 25:31–46 he used straightforward language to speak about the events of his supernatural coming. Here again we have a sharp departure from Protestant orthodoxy, since most interpreters find Christ speaking quite literally in both of these texts, and therefore, between the two of them, giving us the true contours of his one supernatural Parousia.

Partial preterists bring their new hermeneutic to several other NT passages, and also to the Revelation, which they insist was written prior to AD 70, the year of the fall of Jerusalem. Accordingly, all partial preterists agree that chapters 1–19 of the Revelation mystically picture the events of "the last days" (i.e., AD 33–70), and especially those of "the great tribulation" (i.e., AD 66–70), when the Church endured severe affliction at the hands of Israel and Rome.

Regarding chapter 20, some partial preterists identify the Millennium with "the last days" (i.e., AD 33–70), during which Satan was bound so that the Church could preach the Gospel to Israel and the nations. Others advance a futuristic and postmillennial interpretation, arguing that at some point in the Era of Proclamation (future even to us) God will grant his people a season of extraordinary evangelistic success, with the result that ethnic Israel will finally turn to Christ and the world will become largely Christian. Some in this camp—the Christian Reconstructionists I mentioned earlier—also argue that during this millennial era global society will become *theocratic*: that is, that the nations will be governed by the principles and/or statutes of the Mosaic Law.

With notable differences among them, Greg Bahnsen, (the early) Gary de Mar, David Chilton, Ken Gentry, Peter Leithart, R. C. Sproul, Hank Hanegraaff, Rousas Rushdoony, and Martin Selbrede all embrace a partial preterist understanding of biblical eschatology.

5b. Full Preterism



Full Preterism is the natural result of a consistent application of the preterist hermeneutic discussed above. If our Lord used mystical, apocalyptic language in the Olivet Discourse to describe an invisible Parousia that occurred in AD 70, who is to say that he and his apostles did not use the same kind of language to describe all the other events biblically associated with the Consummation: the Parousia, the Resurrection, the Judgment, and the advent of the World to Come? Who is to say that these too were not accomplished in AD 70?

This is the position of the full preterists. In AD 70 Christ came again: not visibly and bodily, but providentially and spiritually. At that time he raised the dead: not physically, but spiritually. At that time he judged the world in righteousness: not physically, but spiritually. And at that time he also created new heavens and a new earth: not physically, but spiritually. You will ask, "But how exactly did he do all these things?" Alas, the full preterist answers are frustratingly diverse (and exegetically strained to the breaking point). Nevertheless, on this all are agreed: the Parousia, the Resurrection, the Judgment, and the advent of the World to Come all occurred in or around AD 70.

Needless to say, Full Preterism is a dramatic break with historic Christian orthodoxy—a break that the late David Chilton, Max and Tim King, John Noe, Don Preston, and Edward Stevens all have made. Accordingly, these men do not hesitate to remind us that the historic creeds of the Church are not

infallible, and that a majority of theologians can be, have been, and (in this case) are wrong.

Unsurprisingly, Full Preterism has not gained much traction among evangelical Christians; indeed, many theologians regard it as eschatological heresy. In chapter 15 I will offer a critique of both forms of Preterism, and of all the other eschatological options as well.

Conclusion

Is there a Great End Time Debate? You bet; and the present chapter has shown us just how challenging it can be! Nevertheless, there are several biblical reasons why good Bereans should take heart.

First, we know that God has made some parts of his revealed truth a little harder to understand than others (2 Peter 3:16). But hard is not the same as impossible. God means for all of his truth to be understood. It is just that in some cases good Bereans will have to dig a little more to find it, and will cherish it all the more when they do.

Secondly, we also know that Satan does his best to obscure any revealed truth that is especially vital for the health of the Church. However, in God's providence this only serves to point good Bereans in the right direction. As John Piper likes to say, the richest spiritual treasures are often found buried in the broad plain of controversy (1 Cor. 11:19).

Thirdly, we have already taken some major strides in our journey to eschatological clarity and conviction. For example, in chapter 2 we learned that the GETD centers on just four underlying issues: the Kingdom of God, the proper interpretation of OTKP, the Millennium, and the Consummation. This enables us to focus our attention on the subjects that will take us most swiftly to our goal. And here in chapter 3 we have confirmed what we learned in chapter 2: that in the end there are really only two contenders in the present-millennialism eschatological ring: (e.g., Amillennialism, Postmillennialism, Partial Preterism, and Full Preterism) and futuremillennialism Premillennialism (Historic and Dispensational Premillennialism). This also helps us, for by reaching a decision as to which of the two is most biblical, we immediately rule out several of the other options.

But the fourth and final encouragement is perhaps the most important of all. I will introduce it here with a few deceptively simple questions, and then follow up in the next chapter. Why do you think the evangelical Church is mired in a great end time debate? What exactly are we doing wrong when we go to interpret the eschatological texts of the Bible? Why do we keep stumbling into complexity, confusion, and controversy? In short, what is the *root* cause of the GETD?

Well, if these questions have roused your curiosity, please read on. For unless I am very much mistaken, we are about to hear God himself give us the answer!

1. Alive to criticisms emanating largely from the Reformed wing of evangelicalism, so-called *progressive dispensationalists* are now seeking to modify their traditional view. These theologians admit that the New/Eternal Covenant is indeed God's one and only instrument of salvation, that the promised Kingdom of God is indeed present in the Church, and that the OT prophets did indeed foresee and speak (darkly) of the Church. They contend, however, that the prophets' words will also be literally fulfilled in the coming millennial stage of the Kingdom, when ethnic Israel once again becomes the head and not the tail. Indirectly, I will address this view throughout our study.

CHAPTER 4

THE KEY TO THE GREAT END TIME DEBATE

ome with me now to the Mount of Transfiguration, and let us hear the voice of God our Father telling us the single most important way to resolve the GETD:

So six days later Jesus took with him Peter, James, and his brother John; and he brought them up into a high mountain by themselves. And *there* he was transfigured before them, so that his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared before them, conversing with Jesus. So Peter, in response, said to Jesus, "Lord, it's good for us to be here! If you like, I will set up three tents in this place: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." *But* while Peter was still speaking, a bright cloud suddenly overshadowed them, and a voice *came* out of the cloud, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to him!" Now when the disciples heard *that*, they fell face down *to the ground*, deathly afraid. But Jesus came to *them*; and when he had touched them, he said, "Stand up, and don't be afraid." And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus himself, *standing there all alone*. (Matthew 17:1–8)

Truly, it was not by accident that Moses and Elijah appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration with the radiant Christ. God had a great educational purpose for this mysterious rendezvous. Moses represented the Law. Elijah represented the Prophets. The two of them together represented the Jewish Scriptures as a whole. Peter is inclined to put the three teachers on a par, to accord them equal honor. But God swiftly disabuses him of the idea, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

Here God is telling us something of great importance. He is identifying his beloved Son as the supreme channel of divine revelation, as a Teacher and Authority greater than the Law and greater than all the prophets. Moreover, he is also identifying him as the supreme Interpreter of the Law and the Prophets, as the One who holds the keys to a full and accurate understanding of what was meant by what they said. In sum, here God is publicly identifying his Son as the authorized spiritual Teacher of the human race: as the supreme fountainhead of his truth, the supreme interpreter of his truth, and the supreme arbiter of all debates about his truth, including debates about eschatology.

Theologians speak of all this by saying that God was pleased to make the revelation of his truth progressive. In other words, over the course of several millennia he gave the world more and more of his truth, and gave it to us more and more clearly, until, at the very end, he gave it to us definitively through Christ. Because this subject is so important for our study, let us take a moment to explore the idea of progressive revelation in relation to three fundamental stages of universal history: eternity past, Old Testament times (The Era of Promise and Preparation), and New Testament times (The Era of Fulfillment).

Progressive Revelation and Eternity Past

Students of the NT understand that Christ and his apostles opened a window onto certain events that occurred in eternity past. In particular, we learn that before the founding of the world God already had a plan for the salvation of sinners (Matt. 25:34; Eph. 1:4; 1 Peter 1:20). The writer to the Hebrews speaks of this plan as *the Eternal Covenant* (Heb. 13:20). Starting at the Reformation, theologians began to realize that this concept was an important key for rightly understanding God's plan of salvation and the shape of Salvation History.

Let us therefore think for a moment about covenants. In essence, a covenant is a binding agreement between parties. In the Bible, the Noahic, Abrahamic, and Davidic covenants were essentially binding promises of God to men. But the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant were more complex. They involved (1) divine and human *parties*, (2) *promises* of God to sinful man, (3) a *provision* (i.e., a gift from the holy God, making the covenant with sinful man possible), (4) a *proviso* (i.e., a condition that man must meet in order to enter and remain in the covenant), and (5) the threat of a *penalty* for failure to meet the proviso. Again, all of these elements are present in the Eternal Covenant that God planned before the founding of the world.

The words of our Lord in John 3:16 give us Scripture's simplest and most

powerful description of this covenant: "God so loved the world that he gave his uniquely begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in him would not perish but have eternal life."

In this verse we see all the elements of the covenant into which the God of love calls sinful mankind in these last days. The *parties* are God and those who believe in his Son. The *promise* is eternal life: the life lived by the triune God, and that life lived forever. The *provision* that makes the covenant possible is the gift of God's uniquely begotten Son. His incarnation, righteous life, and atoning death enable believers to receive the forgiveness of their sins and the free gift of eternal life. The *proviso* is faith, biblically understood as repentance from sin and active trust in the all-sufficient Person and Work of Jesus Christ. The threatened *penalty* for spurning the covenant is perishing, biblically understood as eternal separation from the life and blessings of God under his wrath and retribution. The NT tells us much more about God's eternal plans and purposes, but the Eternal Covenant in Christ—the Gospel—lies at the heart of them all.

The Eternal Covenant is the great theme of progressive revelation. It is the one redemptive plan that God, in eternity past, first devised and then purposed to reveal throughout all Salvation History, both in the events of Salvation History and in the written record and exposition of it. The apostle Paul speaks of the Covenant as a *mystery* (Rom. 16:25; Eph. 1:9; Col. 1:26; 1 Tim. 3:16). A biblical mystery is simply an *open secret*: a truth or reality that formerly was kept secret, but now has come to light. So it is with the Eternal Covenant: In ages past God kept it a secret, but now he has brought it to light through the coming of his uniquely begotten Son (John 3:16; Eph. 3:9).

But how exactly did the revelation of the Eternal Covenant progress? The answers are manifold. It progressed out of eternity and into time. It progressed through time, with God revealing more and more about it as time went by, until, after some four thousand years, it was fully out in the open. But as time went by, it also progressed in the way God was pleased to reveal it. I have just said that his revelation of the Covenant progressed out of eternity past, through the Old Testament Era of Promise and Preparation, and into the New Testament Era of Fulfillment. But corresponding to this, we may also say that it progressed out of darkness, through shadow, and into the full light of day. There is no overstating the importance of this truth for resolving the GETD. In OT times God did indeed reveal the Eternal Covenant, but he draped those

revelations in shadow. Let us therefore consider those times and those shadows with some care.

Progressive Revelation in Old Testament Times

When we speak of OT times we mean the four-thousand-year Era of Promise and Preparation: all of Salvation History prior to the first advent of God's Son. In our journey to eschatological clarity I will have much to say about this long era. But here is the single most important thing we need to know about it: During this time God gave the world a *veiled* revelation of the Eternal Covenant. Yes, in OT times the secret was out; but it was not out in the open. Rather, it was partially concealed. To use the language of Scripture, in OT times the Eternal Covenant was disclosed to Israel *beneath a veil of types* (Rom. 5:14; Col. 2:17; Heb. 11:19). A type (Greek: *tupos*, meaning *figure*, *image*, *picture*) may be defined as any OT person, place, thing, event, or institution that symbolically points forward to—that foreshadows—the Person and Work of Christ and the various other elements of the Eternal Covenant.

Close students of Scripture have a good feel for biblical types. They know, for example, that the NT identifies Adam, Melchizedek, Moses, and David as types (i.e., pictures) of Christ. At the time of the exodus, Egypt was a type of the fallen world system. Canaan was a type of the true Promised Land: Heaven up above, and a brand-new world up ahead. Noah's ark was a type of the Person and Work of Christ, who carries God's people over the waters of judgment to a new world completely cleansed of sin. The burning bush was a type of the Incarnate Christ, whose human body ever radiates the glory of God; and Moses (at that point in the story) was a type of the Church, which turns aside to see this great sight! The bronze serpent, lifted up on a pole for the healing of sinful Israelites, was a type of Christ lifted up on the cross (and in the preaching of the Gospel) for the salvation of all who will look to him in faith. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was a type of the destruction of the present earth and its works by fire. The fall of Jericho was a type of the final collapse of the world system, once the Church has finished marching around it and trumpeting the Gospel to its inhabitants. Prophets, priests, and kings were all types of Christ, who fills and fulfills all three of these OT offices. Animal sacrifices, such as the Passover Lamb, were types of the one true Lamb of God. The Tabernacle and the Jewish temple were types of Christ and the Church, the habitation of God. The Sabbath was a type of the rest of faith, and

of the eternal rest that God's people will enjoy in the World to Come. Astonishingly and delightfully, the list goes on and on.

Now let me pose a question: Why do you read the Old Testament? When you step onto OT ground, what is it that you hope to see? If you're at all like me, you do indeed go there to learn about the origin and history of things: of the universe, life, man, sin, the promise of redemption, the family of Abraham, the nation of Israel, and the triumphs and vicissitudes of that nation, through which God had purposed to send the Redeemer into the world. But more than that, you go in search of Christ. With the truth of Christ in your mind, and with the Spirit of Christ in your heart, you go in search of types: veiled revelations of the Lord Jesus Christ and the several elements of the Eternal Covenant. And every time you come upon one, you are thrilled. It's like spotting gold nuggets in a mountain stream, or finding chests full of treasure buried in a field.

And yet there is a note of sadness as well. For as you are walking on OT ground, it dawns on you that your OT brothers and sisters continually dwelt in a land of shadow. They longed to see the things that you have seen, but did not see them (Matt. 13:17). They longed to be complete, but could not be complete apart from you (Heb. 11:40). While they did indeed have seasons of joy, they were, for the most part, like a pregnant woman groaning to give birth (Isa. 26:18; Rev. 12:1–2).

Yes, Christians delight to see the things of the Eternal Covenant mystically hidden away in the OT. But the more they see, the more they thank God that they themselves were born in the fullness of time, when the shadows were finally banished by the light, and when the great spiritual secret that God had conceived before the founding of the world was no longer veiled, but set out before the eyes of all men (Rom. 3:21–26).

Progressive Revelation in New Testament Times

You have heard the expression "What you see is what you get." As a rule, it applies to people who are open and transparent, who harbor no hidden motives or agendas. We can apply this expression to God's revelatory work in Salvation History. In eternity past God planned what he meant for his people to get: Christ and the Eternal Covenant. In OT times he allowed his people to see types and shadows of what he meant for them to get. But in NT times, when the fullness of time had come, he finally allowed his people to see—and get—all that he meant for them to get (Rom. 3:21–26; Gal. 4:4; Heb. 11:40).

In other words, when God sent his Son into the world to institute the New Covenant, he was in fact revealing and instituting the one Eternal Covenant that he had planned in eternity past, and beneath which alone his people would live in eternity future. The New Covenant and the Eternal Covenant were, are, and forever will be one. Now that Christ has come, God's great redemptive secret is out in the open. Progressive revelation has reached its goal.

How exactly did this definitive revelation occur? For the purposes of our study it is important that we consider the steps involved. First, God sent his Son into the world to complete his redemptive work. Next, he exalted him to his own right hand, placing all things beneath his feet, and giving him—as head over all—to the Church (Eph. 1:22–23). Then, through his Son, he poured out the Holy Spirit, giving birth to the Church, opening the minds of his holy apostles and prophets to understand the mystery of the Eternal Covenant, and enabling them to see it in the OT (Luke 24:44–45; Eph. 1:7–10). In time, and under the inspiration of the Spirit, he moved some of them to write narratives of Christ's life and teachings: the four Gospels. He moved Luke to write an authoritative history of the birth and growth of the early Church (Acts), and others to write authoritative expositions and applications of the Gospel mysteries (the Epistles). Finally, he moved the apostle John to write the Revelation: a majestic celebration of the exaltation of Christ, the High King of Heaven.

Henceforth God's progressive revelation was complete. Like a newborn baby, the mystery of God—the good news of the Eternal Covenant—had been delivered once and for all to the saints and to the world (1 Tim. 3:16; Jude v. 3). Henceforth the Church could take this revelation to all nations. Henceforth she was commanded and equipped to do so, so that God might test all men and gather his elect from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation. And henceforth she would continue to do so until the return of Christ and the Consummation of all things (Matt. 24:14; 28:18–20; Rom. 16:25–27; 1 Peter 4:7; Rev. 5:9).

Why We Should Listen to Him

I opened this chapter by quoting the words of God the Father concerning his beloved Son: "Listen to him!" I have suggested that unless we obey those words there is no hope of resolving the GETD. Having briefly considered the phenomenon of progressive revelation, we are now in a position to see why. God the Father has appointed his incarnate Son—the Lord Jesus Christ—as the authoritative spiritual Teacher of all mankind, and especially of the Church. Therefore, he means for us to take all our questions to Christ, including our questions about eschatology. Keeping the latter in view, here are three important reasons why we should listen to him.

First, we should listen to Christ because he teaches us how to understand the relationship between the Old Covenant and the New, between the Law of Moses and the Gospel of Christ. Jesus himself describes it as a relationship of *promise* and *fulfillment*. Because the Old Covenant, like all previous covenants, included veiled revelations of the Eternal Covenant, it mystically pointed ahead, promising the Eternal Covenant to Israel and the nations. But when Christ came into the world and unveiled the New Covenant, he fulfilled the Old and rendered it obsolete. As he said to his disciples, "Do not think that I have come to destroy the Law or the Prophets: I have not come to destroy, but to fulfill" (Matt. 5:17). Jesus Christ is the One who fulfills. Indeed, in the spectrum of events comprising his humiliation and exaltation, the Lord Jesus fulfills all OT things: its history, covenants, laws, offices, promises, pictures, and predictions. And in so doing he thereby fulfills the eternal purposes and plans of God.

While the metaphor is not perfect, we may therefore think of the New Covenant as God's redemptive butterfly, and the Old Covenant as his caterpillar. A caterpillar feebly hints at its final form, thereby giving promise of a butterfly to come; but the caterpillar is far from the butterfly itself. Likewise, the events and institutions of the Old Covenant hinted at the Eternal Covenant, even as the essential powerlessness of the Law and the religious failures of Israel demonstrated the profound need for a better covenant. Thus did the Old Covenant mystically promise that in the fullness of time a new and eternal covenant would emerge from its OT chrysalis and take flight forever (Gal. 4:4–5).

But if the butterfly has now emerged—if the Old Covenant has given way to the Eternal Covenant—then there is no going back. The butterfly will never again be the insect that foreshadowed it. The writer to the Hebrews affirms this explicitly. "In that he [God] said, 'A new covenant,' he has made the first obsolete. But whatever is growing old and becoming obsolete is ready to disappear" (Heb. 8:13). Likewise, the apostle Paul states that the various events and institutions of the Law served as mere shadows, whereas Christ and the

things of the Eternal Covenant are the substantial realities that cast the shadows (Col. 2:17). Why then would God forsake the substance and force his people back into the shadows? By describing the two covenants in terms of promise and fulfillment, the Teacher is telling us that God will never again place them under OT theocratic institutions. And in so doing, he implicitly rules out both Old Covenant Historic Premillennialism and Dispensational Premillennialism.

Secondly, we must listen to Christ in order to understand how New Covenant saints should use Old Covenant revelation. It is vital that the Church come to grips with this truth. Prior to the coming of Christ, God's people lived under the Law. Now, however, they live under Christ and the New Covenant, so that for them the Mosaic Law has become "the Old Covenant" (2 Cor. 3:14). Therefore, they now realize that the Old Covenant wineskins (i.e., institutions) were never meant or able to contain the new wine of eternal life in the Spirit of the triune God (Matt. 9:14–17; Heb. 7:18).

This does not mean, however, that the old wineskins are useless. Far from it! For now the Law—and indeed the whole body of OT revelation—has a new evangelical purpose. Together with the words and works of Christ, and together with the eyewitness testimony of the apostles, the OT has become a powerful witness to the Gospel. Now it has become a vast treasury of promises, pictures (types), and predictions, all of which were designed by God to further the cause of Christ in these last days. As it is written, in eternity past God ordained that the mystery of the Gospel should be "made known through the prophetic scriptures to all nations for obedience to the faith" (Rom. 16:25–27). The New Covenant introduces an entirely new purpose for the whole Old Testament: that it should join the panoply of witnesses to the truth of Christ and the Gospel (John 5:33-47).

This brings us to our third and final point: We should listen to the Teacher because he shows us the proper method for interpreting the OT Scriptures. In the pages ahead I will refer to this method as the New Covenant Hermeneutic (NCH). At its heart, it is really quite simple. Knowing that the OT contains veiled revelations of Christ and the Covenant, we also know that when we step onto OT ground we must look for those very things. Thus, when we read about the institution of marriage, the rescue of Noah's family, the call of Abraham, the Exodus, the giving of the Law, Israel's journey through the wilderness, or their occupation of the Promised Land, we must ask: "How are

the things of Christ and the Eternal Covenant hidden away under these dark OT revelations?" (Psalm 78:1-3).

The Lord himself taught us to do this. With his disciples listening in, he said to his Jewish opponents, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life. But these also testify about me; yet you are unwilling to come to me so that you might have life" (John 5:39–40, 46). He was telling them all that God meant "the Scriptures"—all recorded OT history, covenants, laws, institutions, promises and predictions—to serve as witnesses to his Person and Work. But it would take time for his disciples to see it. First, he had to complete his work: to die and rise again. Then he had to further reveal his deity and the redemptive significance of his work. And finally he had to illumine their minds so that they could see those things in the OT Scriptures.

This work of revelation and illumination began shortly after Christ's resurrection. Addressing his close disciples, he said, "This is what I told you when I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Having recorded these words, Luke then adds, "Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures" (Luke 24:44–45). And he does the same today. Having given us the NT Scriptures, and having filled us with his Spirit, he walks us back onto OT ground, lifts the veil, and opens our eyes to see the things of the New and Eternal Covenant hidden away in the things of the Old (2 Cor. 3:12–18; Rom. 15:4). Thus does he persuade us over and again that Augustine was right: "The New Covenant is in the Old concealed; the Old Covenant is in the New revealed."

I trust that the application of all this is clear. If at its heart the entire OT is meant to bear witness to Christ and the several elements of the Eternal Covenant, then surely the OT prophecies of a coming King and Kingdom must also be doing the same. In other words, progressive revelation will require us to use the NCH to interpret OTKP. In particular, it will require us to interpret it typologically and figuratively, rather than literally. This principle, standing alone, does not necessarily rule out all Premillennialism, for some historic premillennarians teach that the writing prophets used OT imagery to speak about NT life and worship in a future millennium. However, if the Teacher also says that the Kingdom enters history in just two stages, if he says that the entire Consummation occurs at his Parousia, and if he enables us to

see that Revelation 20 is actually speaking about the Era of Proclamation rather than a future millennium, then indeed all forms of Premillennialism are ruled out, and other eschatologies as well.

It appears, then, that if we hope to resolve the GETD we shall have to rededicate ourselves to obeying the good word of our heavenly Father concerning his beloved Son and the Teacher of all mankind: "Listen to Him!"

How We Should Listen to Him

On the Mount of Transfiguration God told us how to find "true truth"—clear truth, complete truth, and definitive truth—on any given doctrine of divine revelation: We must come to his beloved Son and listen to him. But how exactly shall we do so?

The answer is as important as it is short: We must go to the *Didactic New Testament* (DNT). That is, we must go to those portions of the NT that are specially designed to *teach* us God's truth on any given subject. It is true, of course, that the whole NT is instructive. Nevertheless, it is also true that some parts of it are explicitly didactic. One thinks, for example, of the discourses and extended dialogues of Christ found in the Gospels, or of the sermons of the apostles in the book of Acts, or of the Pauline and General Epistles in their entirety. These are the teaching portions of the NT. Here is where we go to listen to the definitive word of Christ on any given subject.

But what about the Revelation? How shall we understand the nature and purpose of that most eschatological of all NT books? Is it also part of the DNT, or did God perhaps intend it to be something else entirely? In the pages ahead I will argue for the latter. That is, I will argue that the Revelation is designed to serve as a final recapitulation and celebration of all that God previously taught us in the DNT, but now artistically cast in beautiful, powerful, and memorable apocalyptic imagery drawn from the entire Bible. In short, I will argue that God meant it to serve as the Grand Finale of All Scripture. As such, the Revelation is not designed to teach us eschatology, but rather to celebrate it.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have been searching for the underlying cause of the GETD. I have suggested that in the end it is a failure to obey our heavenly Father. It is a failure to listen to his Son. It is a failure to bask in the bright

light of the DNT so that we might have eyes to see and ears to hear all that he taught us about the four underlying issues of the GETD.

With these failures in mind, let me conclude this chapter by lovingly asking some rather pointed questions:

What if we all had begun our search for eschatological truth in the DNT instead of in the OT prophets or the Revelation?

What if we had seen that the deep, underlying theme of the whole Bible is the mystery of God: the Eternal Covenant instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ? What if we had understood that "The New Covenant is in the Old concealed; the Old Covenant is in the New revealed." And what if we had let these fundamental truths guide us in our interpretation of OTKP?

What if we had turned first to the Teacher and the DNT in order to learn the true nature of the Kingdom of God, and also the number of stages by which it enters the world?

What if we had sought out Christ and his apostles on the doctrine of the Consummation: its purpose and structure?

And what if, after hearing them on these subjects, we had brought what we learned to Revelation, asking ourselves, "What is the purpose of this book? Is it part of the DNT? Would God really have given us new eschatological truth in such mystical language? And is it likely that in a closing chapter of the last book of the NT he would introduce, for the very first time, the idea of a future one-thousand-year stage of his Kingdom?"

Yes, it is for failure to listen to God's appointed Teacher that the modern evangelical Church is mired in a GETD. But here is the good news: Insofar as our heavenly Father has shown us where we got off track, he also has shown us how we can get back on!

Let us, therefore, do as he says. In our search for God's eschatological truth, let us now turn to his Son. Let us anchor to the DNT, and let us hear him on the four underlying issues in the GETD. And as we draw near, let us hear him first on the subject of the Kingdom of God. Yes, this is indeed the most challenging of the four issues; but it is also the master key to the other three. So then, let us boldly forge ahead. For once we have heard the Teacher on this issue, we will be well on our way to discovering the winner of the GETD!

PART II

Understanding the Kingdom of God

CHAPTER 5

THE OLD TESTAMENT ON THE PROMISE OF THE KINGDOM

Teacher on the subject of the Kingdom of God. In the present chapter we'll look with NT eyes at the OT testimony as to the nature and coming of the Kingdom. In chapter 6 we'll examine the DNT itself on these two central themes.

The Kingdom Briefly Defined

Before venturing onto OT ground, I want to let the Teacher give us a short, preliminary definition of the Kingdom of God. Think of this as a seedling. As we progress in our journey, it will grow larger and larger until we behold it in full flower at the end of chapter 6.

In the Sermon on the Mount our Lord taught us to pray, "May your kingdom come. May your will be done: as it is in heaven, so too upon *the* earth" (Matt. 6:10). Here we receive precious insight into the true nature of the Kingdom of God: It is an earthly state of affairs in which God's will is being done just as it is in Heaven. However, to understand the Lord's thought we must be clear on two points: What does he mean by his Father's will, and what is the difference between the way it is being done in Heaven and on earth?

Concerning the first question, I believe that here the Lord had in mind what theologians refer to as God's will of precept (or moral will or will of command). This may be defined as that which God expressly desires his creatures to be and do, so that they may fulfill all his good pleasure, thereby promoting his glory and their joy. Long ago a young scribe asked Jesus to sum up God's will of precept for his life. Jesus replied, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' . . . And . . . 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Mark 12:28–31). All of the mandates found in Holy Scripture are but elaborations of these two great

commands. This is God's will of precept for his people.

Up in Heaven God's will of precept is being done perfectly. Why? Because up in Heaven he reigns *directly* over the spirits of his saints and angels. His will and their will are one. This is what makes Heaven Heaven. In Heaven God's *direct reign* conforms all of its inhabitants to his will of precept, so that all of its inhabitants reflect his glory and partake of his joy.

But down here on earth: not so much. In the case of unbelievers, his will of precept is not done at all, for whatever is not of faith is sin, and unbelievers do not (yet) have faith (Rom. 14:23). In the case of believers, it is done occasionally, but always imperfectly due to the influence of residual sin in their members (Rom. 7). This is why Christians are constantly crying out to God for progress in holiness, and why they long for Heaven. Their deepest desire is for God's *perfect* reign over their bodies, souls, and spirits (1 Thess. 5:23). All too well do they realize that God's will (of precept) is *not* being (fully) done on earth as it is in Heaven.

There is, of course, an important sense in which his will *is* being done on earth. That's because everything that happens on earth happens according to God's *will of purpose*, according to his eternal decrees. Mysteriously enough, his will of purpose includes conditions and events that are contrary to his will of precept. For example, Jesus asks, "Are not two sparrows sold for a single copper coin, yet not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father?" (Matt. 10:29; see also John 19:11; Acts 2:23; Eph. 1:11). No, it is not God's positive desire—his will of precept—that sparrows should fall to the ground. But yes, for wise reasons it is, for the moment, his will of purpose.

Here, then, is a great mystery: God does indeed rule as King over all that happens on the earth, yet that does *not* mean that his Kingdom has come. Why? Because for the moment he is largely reigning *indirectly*. In other words, his sovereign reign over all things is mediated by a judicial curse that he himself, for wise reasons, laid upon the creation when Adam sinned—a curse that terribly wounds and distorts the ideal nature of all things, causing them to fall far short of his will of precept (Gen. 3:15–17; Rom. 3:23; 8:20). Thankfully, God has a specifically redemptive will of purpose for his people and their world. When at last it is fully accomplished, his will of precept will be done on earth as it now is being done in Heaven. In that day, his Kingdom will have fully come.

Our Lord commands his people to pray—and labor—for this very thing.

We are to ask our heavenly Father to continually advance his redemptive purpose on earth so that in the end he may lift his hand of judgment, remove all wounds and distortions, and see his will of precept done on earth just as it now is in Heaven. In other words, Christians are to ask the Father to extend and consummate his *direct* reign over his redeemed children and their world. We are to pray for the coming of the Kingdom of God.

Here, then, is our seedling definition of the Kingdom: The Kingdom of God is the direct reign of God the Father over his redeemed children and their world, with all the wholeness and blessing that such a reign entails; and it is the realm created by that reign.

Glimpsed in Eden in Seed Form

The Bible reveals that in the beginning God created the heavens, the earth, the seas, and all that is in them; and that when he had completed his creation he rested, looked out upon it, and declared that it was all *very good* (Gen. 1–2; Ex. 20:11). Why was it very good? It was good because the good God was directly ruling over it, thereby imparting to it all the integrity and blessing that such a world would necessarily display.

Here we catch our first glimpse of the Kingdom of God. Indeed, here we behold the Kingdom in seed form. Now a seed, though not yet a plant or a tree, nevertheless contains within itself the properties of what it is destined to become. Such is the case here: The Edenic world inhabited by our first parents displayed the properties of the Kingdom of God, but was not yet the Kingdom itself. Why so? As we shall see, it was not yet the Kingdom because God could not *fully* and *permanently* bestow his direct reign upon the family—had successfully completed his probation in the Garden of Eden. The coming of the Kingdom, the inward knowledge of the King, the enjoyment of his reign, the growth of his domain, and the final glorification of his entire realm all depended upon Adam passing a test.

In passing, we should note carefully that when the prophets spoke of the Kingdom in its final form they did not exclusively picture it as an eternal Mosaic theocracy. Far from it. Rather, they primarily pictured it as a return to Paradise. And not simply to Paradise, but to Paradise enlarged, magnified, and consummated: Paradise bathed in the presence and glory of God. Thus it is written that when the LORD's reign fully takes hold of the earth he will

comfort the waste places of Zion, making her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the Garden of the LORD (Isa. 51:3). From beneath the eastern threshold of the House of the LORD a River will flow forth, bringing life to all it touches; and on either side of the River there will be trees whose fruit is good for food, and whose leaves are for the healing of the nations (Gen. 2:9–10; Ezek. 47:1–15; Rev. 22:1–2). Then the saints will eat freely from the Tree of Life (Rev. 2:7; 22:14), the tabernacle of God shall be among men (Rev. 21:3), and in the cool of an everlasting day he shall dwell among them and walk with them (Gen. 3:8; Rev. 21:3).

In Eden we catch a glimpse of the Kingdom in seed form; in the World to Come we will behold it in full flower.

Glimpsed in the Mystery of Marriage

Applied to Genesis 2, the NCH gives us yet another pre-fall picture of the Kingdom of God. We find it in God's method for creating the woman, a method that the apostle Paul says contained a great *mystery*: a veiled revelation of the core elements of the Eternal Covenant. Thus, the first Adam represented the Last: Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:45). The first woman represented the Church: the Bride of Christ (Eph. 5:22–23; Rev. 12:1–17). And just as Eve came out of Adam's side, so too does the Church come out of Christ's side; for at the cross God cast the Last Adam into the deep sleep of death and opened his side for a flow of the blood that had purchased the redemption of a sinful but beloved Bride (John 19:34). And just as the LORD brought Eve to the freshly awakened Adam, so too does God the Father now bring a lovingly fashioned Bride to his risen and exalted Son, so that he (the Son) might not dwell alone (Gen. 2:18), but have her as his eternal companion, helper, lover, and (spiritual) mother of his children (Gen. 2:18; John 6:44, 65; Rev. 12:17).

And there is more. God's method for creating the woman also reflected his will for the proper relationship between a husband and his wife. God created Eve *after* Adam, *from* Adam, and *for* Adam, thereby revealing that she was always to live *under* Adam in a hierarchy of benevolent authority and rulership. The apostle Paul explains: It pleases God to lovingly rule over a believing woman through her husband (1 Cor. 11:3). But again, this is a mystery: an earthly picture of a heavenly reality. For in the institution of marriage we see that it pleases God to rule over the Bride of Christ through Christ himself, whom he has appointed as Head over the Church (Eph. 5:22–24; 1 Tim.

2:13). Or, to change the metaphor only slightly, God's procedure for creating the woman shows that he desires to rule over his Kingdom through Christ, whom he has appointed as its High King (Matt. 22:1–14; 1 Cor. 11:1–16). And who is sufficient for these things?

Now, please note: Only two chapters into the Bible and we have already seen the Kingdom of God depicted by a very good creation and in the mystery of marriage. This is important. It tells us that the *idea* of the Kingdom predates the Mosaic Law by thousands of years; that it is separable from, prior to, and more fundamental than the idea of a universal Mosaic theocracy. Yes, in the process of time God would indeed be pleased to use a Mosaic theocracy to picture the Kingdom. However, the Kingdom itself would be something other than a Mosaic theocracy. It would simply be a direct rule of God over his (redeemed) creation, with all the wholeness and blessing that such a rule entails. If, then, we seek to know what the completed Kingdom will *really* look like, it would be wise to look back to the beginning. It would be wise to gaze upon Christ and his beloved Bride, living together in a world of Edenic beauty and splendor, naked and unashamed (Gen. 2:25).

Offered in Fullness and Perpetuity at the Tree of Life

When we bring the Teacher with us to Genesis 2–3, we see much that Adam did not. We see that in Paradise Adam stood as the head and representative of the entire family of man. We see that he was on probation. We see that his decision to disbelieve and disobey God had dreadful consequences for man and nature (Rom. 5:12–14; 8:18–23). But we also see something else; namely, that God offered both him and his family the fullness of his eternal Kingdom at the Tree of life.

True, we do not find this explicitly stated in Genesis, nor do we learn it elsewhere in the OT. But we do in the NT. There we learn that the Tree of Life served as a type of the eternal life that God now offers to sinful man in the Gospel (John 17:3; Rev. 2:7; 22:2, 14). This crucial fact enables us to fully understand the situation in Eden. The Tree of Life represented the *kind* of life lived by the triune God, and that life lived *forever*. The fruit of the Tree represented the Son of God, the "receivable" part of God.¹ Accordingly, Adam had only to partake of this fruit, and he and his family would have entered immediately, immutably, and eternally into the fullness of the trinitarian life. Through the gift of the indwelling Helper they would have come to know and

live under the direct reign of the Father, through the Son, by the Holy Spirit (John 14:16–23; 17:3).

And there is more. For if Adam had passed his probation he would have begun to experience God's eternal purpose for his Son, and also for the universe, life, and man. The DNT unveils that purpose. There we learn that God meant for his Son to be Head over all: to be the firstborn over all creation (Eph. 1:9–10; Col. 1:14–18; Heb. 1:2). And so we know that by partaking of the Tree of Life Adam and his family would have come under the benevolent rule of the Son of God. In other words, they would have entered the Kingdom of the High King of Heaven. What unimaginable blessings would have been theirs! For now—with all creativity, fruitfulness, and joy—the Sovereign Son would have shepherded both man and nature down the great corridor of universal history (John 10:1–30), brought them faithfully and fruitfully to their appointed ends (Phil. 1:6), crowned them with divine glory (Rom. 8:18–25; 1 Cor. 15:50–58), and then—in a cosmic grand finale—handed over this glorified Kingdom to his Father, so that God would be all in all (1 Cor. 15:20–28).

Yes, what a world, what a journey, and *what a Kingdom* awaited Adam and Eve at the Tree of Life. Tragically, it was forfeited by Adam's sin. Happily, it was not forfeited irrevocably. God was not caught by surprise. Already he had a plan. The mystery of the Eternal Covenant was settled deep in his heart. Another Adam, a better Adam, a triumphant Adam was soon to come.

In passing, let us note yet again that the Kingdom Adam forfeited in Eden had nothing to do with a universal Mosaic theocracy. Rather, it had everything to do with a direct spiritual reign of God the Father, through his Son, and by His Spirit over his beloved children and their world.

Supplanted by the Domain of Darkness

We have seen that by his sin Adam forfeited the possibility of entering the Kingdom of God. But his sin incurred more than tragic loss. That's because he "gained" something as well, something he could not have imagined, and something he would always regret: entrance into the Domain of Darkness. And he incurred this not only for himself, but also for his entire family and the beautiful world God had given him as his home and domain.

As ever, progressive revelation supplies us with all the light we need to understand the origin and nature of the Domain of Darkness: the deadly

counterfeit kingdom that Adam bequeathed to the family of man.

The story here begins with an angel of extraordinary wisdom, beauty, and rank. In Isaiah he is referred to as Day Star, Son of the Morning, suggesting that he was the first of God's angelic creations. Like Adam, he and the other angels were on probation. The Bible says nothing about the nature of their test, only that this angel was the first to fail it, since shortly after he was created there came a solemn moment when unrighteousness was found in him (Ezek. 28:15). This cryptic phrase marks the entrance of evil into the universe. Henceforth, the entire course of Day Star's existence would be determined by a sinful twofold animus: pride and hatred. In his pride he would seek to supplant God by usurping both his worship and his sovereignty (Isa. 14:12–15; Matt. 4:8–11). In his hatred he would seek to wound God, primarily by using his formidable spiritual resources to destroy his beloved creations (John 10:10). Thus did the fallen Day Star become Satan (Heb., *adversary*): the adversary of God, and the adversary of all God loves, including his human image-bearers, the family of man. (Job 1:6; Zech. 3:1; Mark 1:13).

Moved by his new and evil nature, Satan immediately undertook to build a kingdom of his own. His first prey were the other angels, a large minority of which quickly succumbed to his temptations (Rev. 12:4). Through their sin they too corrupted their original nature, and so transformed themselves into demons (Mark 5:1–20). Some of them were cast into Hades, a place of darkness and torment created for the punishment of God's angelic foes (Matt. 25:41; Luke 8:31; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 1:6). Others, for wise reasons, were permitted to remain in the heavenly realms, where Satan, their overlord, arranged them into a hierarchy of evil rulers (Eph. 2:2; 6:10–12). Thus was born the kingdom of Satan, an alien Domain of Darkness that so far was confined to the heavenly places. But the adversary of God and his creation could not be content to leave things there.

The NT illumines the deep significance of Satan's attack upon "the Man." Because Adam had been appointed as the head and representative of man and nature, the NT likens him to a door, a door through which great good or great evil might enter the universe (Rom. 5:12). So long as he remained on probation there were two possible futures for the world. If Adam partook of the Tree of Life he would be forever united with the triune God, subjected to his loving rule, and honored as the one through whose obedience God would one day lift both man and nature into eternal glory. If, however, he partook of

the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, he would subject both man and nature to a dark reign of Satan, evil, suffering, and death. It appears that Satan understood this, or at least something of it. And so, with God's permission, he entered Eden, intent on getting Adam to sin, and hoping to incorporate the family of man into his growing Domain of Darkness. Most aptly does the DNT therefore describe him as a roaring lion, seeking whom and what he may devour (1 Peter 5:8).

We cannot linger here to explore the nuanced record of Adam's temptation and fall. Suffice it to say that the true locus of the divine test was not a tree, but the Word of God. Would Adam use his gift of freedom to express love and loyalty to his creator by choosing to believe and obey his word? Would he therefore come to understand that goodness consists of faith and obedience toward God, and of all that lies in store on the other side of these two virtues? Would he therefore realize that evil consists of unbelief and disobedience toward God, and of all that lies in store on the other side of those two vices? Or would he abuse his gift of freedom to express distrust and disobedience toward his creator, and so dishonor him by believing and obeying a contradictory voice and following its lead? All too well do we know what Adam chose, and what his high treason has cost the world. Nevertheless, if we hope to fully understand the Kingdom of God, we must count the cost in some detail.

Again, in Eden the head of the family of man stood as a door. Accordingly, when he sinned many dear friends went out the door: his easy relationship with God, his spiritual and physical integrity, his perfect freedom, the beauty and wholeness of his world, and—most tragically of all—the possibility of securing and enriching these blessings by partaking of the Tree of Life (Gen. 2:17; 3:7–8, 14–19, 22–24; John 5:42; 8:44; Rom. 6:1–14).

But that is not all. For just as many precious friends were going out the door, so too were many deadly enemies entering in. What's more, they did not enter simply to harass Adam and his family, but rather to take them captive and, if possible, drag them down to eternal destruction. Let us look briefly at four of the most important.

First, there were *interior spiritual enemies*, enemies that took hold of the spirit (or soul) of man. Chief among them were *sin* and *guilt*. The NT represents sin as an indwelling force: a complex of dark, powerful, and unnatural passions (or lusts) that effectively bend every human faculty toward

the self: self-satisfaction, self-exaltation, and self-rule over and against the rule of God. Adam sold his posterity under sin, with the result that henceforth all would be born in sin's chains (Mark 7:21–23; John 2:25; Rom. 7:14; Ps. 51:5). As for guilt, it is an inner awareness of an outer fact: that one has transgressed the law of God and fallen short of his glorious standards (Rom. 3:23). Guilt typically involves fear (of divine punishment) and shame (Gen. 3:7–8; Eph. 4:19; 1 Tim. 4:2; 1 John 4:18). It is a formidable enemy indeed, well able to darken the entire sky of a man's existence, crush his spirit, and even sicken his flesh (Ps. 5; Mark 2:1–12; Luke 7:36–50).

Secondly, there were *physical enemies*. These entered when God placed a curse on the realm of nature, thereby subjecting the entire physical creation to a principle of *decay, futility, suffering,* and *physical death* (Gen. 3:14, 17; Isa. 25:7; Rom. 8:18–25). These enemies include such natural evils as drought, famine, plague, pestilence, earthquake, storm, fire, flood, animal predation, mutations, extinctions, accident, injury, sickness, disease, pain, fatigue, old age, and physical death. Importantly, in this list it is death alone that is the true *punishment* for sin (Gen. 2:17; Ezek. 18:4; Rom. 5:12). The rest are best understood as "severe mercies," wisely designed by a loving creator and judge to show fallen man the ugliness of his sin, warn him of its dangers, and (along with the far more numerous tokens of his goodness) lead him to repentance, faith, and salvation from a far worse judgment waiting up ahead (Deut. 28; Luke 13:1–5; Acts 14:17; Rom. 2:4).

Thirdly, there were *satanic enemies*. Through his sin Adam rejected the rule of God, unwittingly forfeited the spiritual headship of his Son, and fell instead under the spiritual headship of the devil, thereby incorporating himself and his family into Satan's growing kingdom of darkness (Luke 4:5–7; John 8:44).

Very importantly, this aspect of the fall marked the beginning of what the Bible refers to as the *world*, or the *world system*. It may be defined as human society insofar as it is alienated from God and organized, energized, and directed by its unseen "prince" or "ruler"—the devil and his demonic hosts (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; Eph. 6:10–12).

Here, however, a caveat is in order. While the NT does indeed style Satan as the ruler of this world, it also assures us that his rule is not absolute. From the very beginning God has graciously poured out manifold blessings upon all his creatures, including his enemies (Matt. 5:45; Acts 14:17; 17:28). Moreover, along the way he has also been taking a believing people *out of* the world and *to*

himself (Gen. 3:15, 21; John 15:19; 17:6, 15). Martin Luther said it well: The devil is God's devil. He is indeed permitted to work in the world, but only within the confines of God's all-sovereign will.

Finally, Adam's sin brought upon the world a dark trinity of *divine enemies*: *condemnation, wrath,* and *the peril of eternal punishment.* Though hidden in God, there are none more dangerous. Because Adam represented all, his sin condemned all. All are reckoned transgressors of God's law, worthy of death in every form: spiritual, physical, and eternal (Rom. 5:12, 16, 18). Similarly, Adam's disobedience exposed his sinful children to God's *wrath*. This is not to be understood as an impersonal spiritual principle, like the *karma* of the Hindus and Buddhists. Rather, it is a true passion in a true Person. Sinners awaken and treasure up God's wrath whenever they "suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:18–19; see also Ex. 32:11; Deut. 29:28; 31:17; Ps. 5:5–6; 7:11–13).

This brings us to the most fearsome enemy of all: *the peril of eternal punishment*. It is twofold: eternal separation from every life-giving blessing of God, and subjection to his wrath under painful retributions throughout the eternal Age to Come (Matt. 25:46; 2 Thess. 1:9; Rev. 14:11). No biblical figure speaks of this enemy more often or more solemnly than Jesus Christ: "And have no fear of those who kill the body, but who cannot kill the soul; but fear instead him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Gehenna" (Matt. 10:28). Just as condemnation and wrath loom from above, so too the peril of Hades lurks beneath. For the moment—amongst the living, at least—these three enemies stand strangely at bay. Yet they will not do so forever. If God has made a way of escape, men must do all they can to find it now. They must seek the God-appointed door through which they may safely "flee from the wrath to come" (Matt. 3:7; 7:13; 1 Thess. 1:10).

Here, then, is the Domain of Darkness. There is no overstating the plight of a man who dwells in it. He is locked up in a spiritual and physical prison house. He lives as a slave to the world, the flesh, and the devil. He abides under the wrath, curse, and condemnation of God, and is sleepwalking toward death and judgment. Moreover, even if he wanted to, there is nothing that he alone could do to rescue himself from all his enemies, or to restore himself to all that he had enjoyed in Paradise, or to receive all that might have been his at the Tree of Life. He is without strength (Rom. 5:6), without hope (1 Thess. 4:13), and without God in the world (Eph. 2:12).

Planned in Eternity Past

Now, please brace yourself, for here we must take a sharp U-turn. Hand in hand with the Teacher and his apostles we must now go back to a time before time began: to a time before the founding of the world. When we do, we will see at once that mankind's fall into the Domain of Darkness did not catch God by surprise. On the contrary, even before he created the universe, he foresaw our need and devised a plan to meet it (Titus 1:2; Eph. 1:4; 1 Peter 1:20). Let us take a moment to discuss them both.

1. The Need

Foreseeing the fall of man and nature into the Domain of Darkness, God also foresaw that they would have two great needs.

The first was *redemption*. As we have seen, redemption is best understood as *rescue* and *restoration*: rescue from all our enemies in the Domain of Darkness, and restoration to all the friends that God originally planned for us in the Garden of Eden. In other words, redemption alone would make it possible for mankind to enter the Kingdom of God. But given mankind's inability to rescue and restore himself, how could he possibly be redeemed?

This brings us to the second need: *a redeemer*. Since mankind could not rescue and restore himself, it was clear that someone else—a redeemer—would have to do it for him. As to his work, this redeemer would have to function just as the first Adam did. That is, he must serve as the head and representative of a new family of God. Acting on behalf of that family, he must do for them all that they and the first Adam failed to do, and also undo for them all that they and the first Adam did. In other words, he must enter the world and work in such a way as to allow the holy and sovereign God *justly* to transfer his new family out of the first Adam and into a last; to transfer it out of the Domain of Darkness and into the Kingdom of God.

Seeing this need, God devised a plan to match.

2. The Plan

Bear with me now in a little foolishness, for we know that the finite cannot describe the infinite, nor can the temporal describe the eternal. Nevertheless, though things were not exactly like this, Scripture assures us that in some sense they were.

Imagine, then, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit seated around a conference table, taking counsel with one another before the creation of the world. The topic for discussion is the redemption of man and nature. Each Person is fully aware of the need. The need elicits a plan. The plan flows from the Father to the Son and the Spirit. The Son and the Spirit sweetly concur.

What did the plan look like? Broadly, it looked like all of Salvation History. More narrowly, and with a view to the heart of Salvation History, it looked like this:

There shall be a redeemer: the Son of God. In the fullness of time the Father will send him into the world to become the Last Adam. He will be conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of a virgin, and therefore born as a true human being, but with no taint of sin.

Unlike the first Adam, he will live a perfectly righteous life, believing and obeying every word of God, and passing his every test. This life will enable the Father to credit the Redeemer's perfect righteousness to all who believe in him.

At the end of his life the Redeemer will freely surrender himself to an unjust death on a Roman cross. There the Father will credit the sins of his future family to the Redeemer, punishing him instead of them, thereby satisfying his own justice and propitiating his own wrath. This death will enable him to grant forgiveness of sins to all who will afterward trust in the Redeemer for salvation.

After his death and burial, the Redeemer will rise from the dead, ascend into Heaven, and sit down at the Father's right hand, there to serve as the High King of Heaven and Earth.

His first act as High King will be to pour out the Holy Spirit upon his nascent Church. She, in turn, will go out and preach the Gospel to all nations. As she does, the Father will test each man's love of God, truth, and righteousness. As she does, the Father will effectively call his future family to repentance and faith in his Son. He will bring them into the bond of the New and Eternal Covenant. He will transfer them from the Domain of Darkness into the spiritual Kingdom of his beloved Son.

Henceforth, the Father's ever-growing family will eagerly wait for the Redeemer's return. For in that Day he will consummate their redemption by raising them from the dead, judging the world in righteousness, and granting them rich entry into the glorious World to Come: the completed Kingdom of God.

These were the essentials of the plan; these were the building blocks of the Eternal Covenant.

But there was more. As we have seen, part of the plan was that the Eternal Covenant should be administered *progressively*. In particular, God planned to divide Salvation History into two great blocs. The first would be a fourthousand-year Era of Promise and Preparation, in which he would *partially* reveal the elements of the Covenant under type and shadow to his OT people; and in which he would *partially* bestow the blessings of the Covenant upon the OT faithful, even as Israel's troubled history manifested the "weakness and ineffectiveness" of the Old (Mosaic) Covenant and a desperate need for a New (Jer. 31:31–34; Heb. 7:18). The second would be an Era of Fulfillment, in which he would *fully* reveal and administer the Covenant among his NT people. But, as we shall see in Chapter 9, the administration would progress. The first part would be an Era of Gospel Proclamation and Probation, in which he would test the nations through the preaching of the Gospel and effectively gather in his elect. The second would be an Era of Reward and Retribution, begun at the High King's Parousia and the Consummation of all things, and lasting to all eternity.

Here, then, in a cameo, is the plan agreed upon by the Holy Trinity in eternity past; the plan by which the three divine Persons would redeem a beloved human family and their world, rescuing it from the Domain of Darkness and transferring it into the two-staged Kingdom of God.

And now that we are ready to do so, let us continue our journey through Salvation History, allowing the Teacher to show us some of the amazing ways in which God (partially) revealed and administered his Eternal Covenant among his OT people.

Pictured and Promised in the Protoevangelium (Genesis 3:15)

In the beginning God pictured his coming Kingdom in the beauties of Eden and the mystery of marriage. After the fall, he added explicit promises to the implicit pictures.

He begins with the Mother Promise of redemption, the *Protoevangelium*: the first biblical prophecy of the Gospel. Like all of the OT, it is thickly veiled in typological language; but with the Teacher at our side we can easily decode its message and behold how richly it speaks to us about the Kingdom of God.

Because of their sin, God might justly have destroyed Adam and Eve. But he

decided against it. Indeed, he actively sought them out; and with love, mercy, and an eternal purpose to redeem, he made them a promise. With all the guilty parties assembled before him, he spoke directly to the serpent, and especially to the spirit behind the serpent. But deep in his fatherly heart he also was speaking to Adam and Eve—and to us (Rom. 15:4).

He said, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel" (Gen. 3:15, author's translation; see Rom. 16:20).

As everywhere in the OT, so here: the physical points to the spiritual, and the historical to the eschatological.

Physically, God's words would be fulfilled in the perennial enmity between humans (especially female humans) and snakes (especially venomous snakes). Until the world passes away, serpents lurking in the grass or coiled beside the path will strike at the heel of human passersby, who in turn will swiftly crush their heads under foot.

This, however, is but a type, a physical picture of a spiritual reality. It is a picture of the Gospel. Let us therefore explore our text phrase by phrase, seeking to understand its fulfillment in Christ, the New Covenant, and the Kingdom of God.

God says that he himself will put enmity between the serpent and the woman. The serpent represents Satan (2 Cor. 11:3). Eve represents the Church: she who is not only the Bride of Christ, but also the Mother of the Living (Gen. 3:20; Eph. 5:22–23). Mercifully and graciously, God will draw the Woman into a new (covenant) relationship with Christ and himself. He will give her a new nature that causes her to love and trust him, even as she learns to hate and distrust the evil master she formerly chose to obey (John 5:42; Rom. 5:5). Here we have a prophecy of the new spiritual birth that will bring the Church into the Eternal Covenant, and under the benevolent reign of Christ and God (John 3:3).

Our text also says that God will put enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. The seed of the serpent is Satan's children: people like Cain, Nimrod, Korah, Ahithophel, Ahab, Jezebel, Antiochus IV, Herod, Judas, Caiaphas, Pilate, Nero, and the Antichrist himself (Matt. 13:38; John 8:44). The seed of the Woman is Christ (Gal. 3:19; Rev. 12:1–2), but also those who are united with Christ through the evangelistic ministry of the Mother of the Living: the Church (Gal. 3:29; Rev. 12:17). Christ himself will

oppose and judge the impenitent seed of the serpent (Rev. 19:11). And because of the new birth, the Church will stand separate from, and in (loving) opposition to, the world (1 John 2:15; Eph. 4:15; Rev. 18:4). Until the very end there will be enmity between the kingdom of Satan and the kingdom of Christ (Gal. 4:28–30).

Finally, we learn that the Seed of the Woman will crush the serpent's head, but also that the serpent will bruise him on the heel. For spiritual depth and richness, these words are unparalleled. On the one hand, they point to the death of Christ, which Satan himself will effect through the agency of hostile Jews and Gentiles (John 14:30–31; Rev. 12:4). This will be a real death, as it must be for justice's sake. And yet, because of the resurrection, it will only be a bruise. Christ will be healed: raised to eternal life. On the other hand, the words also point to the destruction of Satan and his evil kingdom. Christ will strike a crushing blow to his head: first to his temporary and ill-gotten authority (Ps. 110:6; John 12:31; Col. 2:15; Rev. 12:7–12), and finally to Satan himself, along with all his followers, whether human or demonic (Matt. 13:40–41; Rom. 16:20). As it is written: Christ will bind Satan at the beginning of the Era of Proclamation (Rev. 20:1–3), and cast him into the Lake of Fire at the end (Rev. 20:7–10).

We see, then, that our text is rich with eschatological meaning. Why? Because it speaks to us richly about the Eternal Covenant and a coming Kingdom of God. It tells us that the LORD (the divine party of the Covenant) will send a Seed (the divine provision of the Covenant) who will live, die, and rise again to rescue the Woman and her seed (the human parties of the Covenant) from the Domain of Darkness. It tells us that he will restore them —through faith in the Christ (the proviso of the Covenant)—to eternal life beneath his loving reign (the promise of the Covenant). It tells us that in the end the LORD will destroy Satan and his entire evil kingdom (for human beings, the penalty of spurning the Covenant). And between the lines it tells us that in the end, at Christ's return, God will bring his people into the greater Eden; into the new heavens and the new earth, the eternal home of the redeemed.

In sum, the message of Protoevangelium is this: One day up ahead, through the redemption that is in Christ, God will once again reign *directly* over the universe, life, and man. One day up ahead, through the Person and Work of Christ, the Kingdom of God will come. Will this Kingdom be an ideal Mosaic theocracy? Not according to the Protoevangelium. According to the Protoevangelium it will be a direct spiritual reign of God the Father through his Son: a Son who will be the Husband and Head of his redeemed Bride, and who will bring her again to Paradise, where they will live together forever in matrimonial joy.

Pictured in the Life of Noah and His Family

Like the Protoevangelium, the story of the redemption of Noah and his family is rich with eschatological meaning. Accordingly, it too contains precious glimpses of a coming Kingdom of God.

It is clear, for example, that the world of Noah's day pictures the dark backdrop of the Kingdom: the Domain of Darkness, a realm in which, apart from the common grace of God, all that men think or imagine is inclined toward evil from their childhood up (Gen. 6:5; 8:21). Also, we learn from the NT that as it was in the days of Noah, so it shall be at the end of the present evil age: The world system will go over to Satan, descend into lawlessness, and therefore perish in an eschatological flood, not of water, but of fire (Matt. 24:12, 37; Luke 17:26; 2 Thess. 2:1–4; 2 Peter 3:7).

Similarly, the new world into which Noah and his family descended corresponds to the Kingdom of God in its consummate form, a kingdom in which God not only reigns directly over his people's spirits, but also over their bodies and their world. It corresponds to the new heavens and the new earth, onto which the glorified Church will descend after the Judgment and the creation of the World to Come (1 Thess. 4:13–17; Rev. 21:1–3).

But what of the ark, and what of the year or so that Noah's family spent inside it, safely floating upon the roiling waters of the flood? What do they signify? The NT points the way. The ark represents the Person and Work of Christ, God's one and only vessel of salvation (1 Peter 3:21). Accordingly, the year of their "pilgrimage" upon the waters corresponds to the Era of Proclamation, the longish season between Christ's first and second advents. It is a time when God's wayfaring people are safely shut in with their Comforter and King (Gen. 7:16; Eph. 2:6); a time when he lovingly nourishes them from his heavenly stores (Gen. 6:21; Rev. 12:6); a time when he bids them to patiently love, serve, and proclaim the Good News until that happy Day when he himself, like Noah, will descend with them onto the eschatological mountain of God (Gen. 8:4; Isa. 11:9; John 5:24; 2 Peter 2:5; Rev. 21:1–3).

In sum, the Flood narrative pictures the coming of a two-staged Kingdom of God: a stage of sojourn over troubled waters, followed by a stage of rest in a new world cleansed of sin. Is this kingdom a Mosaic theocracy? No, it is a reign of God's eschatological Noah over the hearts of his trusting family. It is the reign of the One whom God has seated as King over every flood (Ps. 29:10).

Promised and Pictured in the Life of Father Abraham

Beneath the light of the DNT we catch precious glimpses of the Kingdom of God both in the promises that the LORD gave to Abraham, and also in the overall arc of his life. Let us briefly consider them both.

1. The Kingdom Pictured in God's Promises to Abraham

In an *implicit* covenant with the woman and her seed, the LORD promised to grant them a very special Seed who would one day do battle with the serpent, overthrow his evil works, and create a new spiritual family that is loyal to God and hostile to his perennial foe.

Now, in an *explicit* covenant with Abraham and his seed, God promises to do the same, only in a more elaborate manner. In particular, he promises to create a *chosen family*—soon to become a *chosen nation*—through which the very special Seed will one day be born. Thus, in God's dealings with Abraham and his family Salvation History progresses and the several elements of the Eternal Covenant come more clearly into view.

Let us focus for a moment on some of the promises that the covenant-keeping God gave to Abraham and his seed. He promised that they would be numerous: as numerous as the dust of the earth and the stars in the sky (Gen. 13:16; 15:5; 16:10). He promised that they would become a great nation (Gen. 18:18). He warned that they would live as strangers in a strange land, and therefore in danger from enemies (Gen. 15:13). But he also assured them that they would possess the gate of their enemies (Gen. 22:17), and that they would inherit the land of their sojournings—all the land of Canaan—for an everlasting possession (Gen. 12:7; 13:15; 15:18; 17:7–8). And above all, he promised that he would be their God, and that they would be his people (Gen. 17:7; cf. Ex. 6:7).

Very importantly, the DNT tells us that all these promises have a double fulfillment. Yes, they were partially fulfilled among Abraham's physical seed:

first in Joshua's conquest of Canaan (Josh. 21:43–44), then later in David and Solomon's conquest of the surrounding nations (1 Kings 4:21). But, says the apostle Paul, the physical and historical were pictures of the spiritual and the eschatological. The promises are *fully* fulfilled in the Church: in all who walk in the footsteps of Father Abraham by placing their trust in the promised Son and Seed, Jesus Christ (Rom. 4:1–25; Gal. 3:15–4:7).

How then do we see the Kingdom of God in the promises given to Abraham? Perhaps the best way to answer is to say that we see it in the one promise that contains and guarantees all the rest: "I will be [your] God" (Gen. 17:7–8). What does this mean? Only in the NT is its full significance unveiled. It means that through the redemption that is in Christ, all the believing children of Abraham will be rescued from the Domain of Darkness and transferred into the Kingdom of God's beloved Son, so that henceforth God is their Father, and they his beloved children, people, family, and nation (John 17:3; 20:17; Rom. 5:21; Col. 1:13; Heb. 8:10; Rev. 21:3). Through spiritual adoption into the family of God the spiritual seed of Abraham become subjects of the High King of Heaven, living under the direct spiritual reign of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Because they are now the subjects of the High King—and parties in the Eternal Covenant—believers in Jesus have inherited all the promises that God made to Abraham and his seed. Yes, like Abraham they must sojourn a little while longer as strangers in a strange land. And yes, they will encounter some enemies as they do. But even now they are more numerous than the dust of the earth and the stars of the sky. Even now they have become a great nation. What's more, at the soon return of their King they will completely possess the gates of their enemies, and fully inherit the Promised Land. Thus, in the promises that God made to Abraham we see the promise of the Eternal Covenant; and in the promise of the Eternal Covenant we see eternal life in a glorious kingdom where the triune LORD is our God, and we his glad and grateful people.

2. The Kingdom Pictured in the Overall Arc of Abraham's Life

Gazing through the window of the NT we can also see that God gave us precious pictures of the coming of the Kingdom in the overall arc of Abraham's life.

For example, we first meet Abraham as a citizen of Babylon, dwelling among

idolaters, serving other gods (Josh. 24:2). This pictures God's elect prior to their conversion, living as deluded slaves of Satan in the Domain of Darkness.

Then we learn of the call of Abraham, a call that comes with lavish promises, all of which he heartily embraces by faith (Gen. 12:1–3). This corresponds to the effectual call of God, by which, through the preaching of the Gospel, he brings a believing people to faith in Christ, seals them with the Spirit, places them under his heavenly reign, and bids them walk with him in holiness and obedience as citizens of his spiritual Kingdom all the days of their life.

In the remainder of Abraham's life God gave his NT saints inspiring pictures of their walk in the Spirit. For like them, Abraham was a sojourner in a land of promise, raising a family, serving his friends, eluding his enemies, continually growing in wealth, and regularly meeting and worshiping God along the way. Interestingly, it appears from Scripture that Abraham initially hoped to find or build a city of his own. But it was not to be. Providence was pleased to make him a sojourner, a man with no place to lay his head (Matt. 8:20). Thus did God teach him to look for something far better: a city with eternal foundations, whose architect and builder was God (Heb. 11:9–10).

Again, all of this richly pictures the Church Militant—the family of God—making her pilgrim way through the world during the Era of Proclamation. Presently this world is under the control of an alien ruler (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). As a result, it is a spiritual wilderness where the family is often hated and persecuted, since, through the new birth, its supreme loyalty is now to the Ruler of the world above (Rev. 12:1–17). Yet despite its many trials, the family rejoices, knowing by faith that this world is the Promised Land itself, and that they will reclaim it forever at the High King's return (Matt. 5:5; Rom. 4:13; 16:20).

If the Kingdom of God were an ideal Mosaic theocracy, we could not see it in the life and times of father Abraham. But according to Christ and the apostles it is not a Mosaic theocracy. It is a direct spiritual reign of the God who calls a chosen family out of the Domain of Darkness and brings them into the Kingdom of his beloved Son. It is the Teacher alone who enables us to see this. And when we do, we rejoice, even as our father Abraham rejoiced when he saw his day (John 8:56).

Pictured in the History of Israel

The next two stops on our journey through Salvation History are especially

important, since here we meet the family of Abraham as a nation and a kingdom. On our first stop we'll examine three of the ways in which the history of Israel *pictures* the Kingdom of God; in the second we'll examine some of the ways in which God explicitly *promised* it through his holy prophets.

1. Israel's Founding as a Nation

We begin with Israel's founding as a nation. Among the events in their long history, this one is of special significance since it so vividly pictures not only the redemptive rescue and restoration that is the essence of the Kingdom, but also the two distinct stages in which the Kingdom enters human history.

Israel's founding included three basic elements: their exodus from Egypt, their forty-year sojourn through the wilderness of Sinai, and their entrance by conquest into Canaan: the land of promise. All are rich in Kingdom significance.

Regarding the exodus, Egypt clearly typifies the Domain of Darkness: the fallen world system understood as a realm of bondage to sin. Accordingly, Pharaoh represents Satan, the spiritual "ruler of this world" and the oppressor of God's elect prior to their regeneration. Moses, in the initial stages of the exodus, represents Christ as Redeemer, sent by the Father into the alien world system to rescue a chosen people from imminent judgment, and to restore them to himself and the land where he will live with them.

As for Israel's sojourn in the wilderness of Sinai, this depicts the Church Militant during the first stage of the Kingdom: the days of Christ's heavenly reign. Like Israel at Sinai, the Church enters into a covenant with God through faith in a Mediator who meets them on the Mountain of God (i.e., Mount Calvary). Like Israel, she must then make her way through a wilderness: the wilderness of the present evil age and the fallen world system. Like Israel, she will be tested and refined through many hardships; but also like Israel, she will find that God is faithful. Through Christ—who is a fellow-sojourner like Moses and the Angel of the LORD (Ex. 14:9; 23:20–23)—God will grace the pilgrim Church with his divine presence, guidance, power, provision, and protection. Accordingly, a song of victory will be upon their lips. By God's grace they will indeed fulfill their holy calling to preach the Gospel to sinners, faithfully minister to the saints, and triumphantly reach their heavenly home.

Finally, we have Israel's entrance by conquest into Canaan. This represents

the advent of the second stage of the Kingdom, wherein the returning Christ (who is now typified by Joshua) leads his victorious host of warrior-saints through the Judgment and into the new heavens and the new earth: the eschatological Land of Promise that the Lord himself will create and bestow upon his people on the Last Day.

Many NT texts—some of which we will examine more closely in the pages ahead—support this deep, spiritual understanding of Israel's founding as a nation. They include Matthew 2:14–15 and 4:1–11; John 12:31; Acts 7; Romans 4:13; 1 Corinthians 10:1–11; Ephesians 6:12; Hebrews 3:7–4:10, 11:23–40, and 12:18–24; James 1:2–8; and Revelation 12:5–17 and 20:7–10.

2. Israel's Dwelling in the Land

Moving forward in Salvation History we next observe a discreet and lengthy season of Israel's dwelling in the land. Beginning in the days of the Judges (ca. 1400 BC), this season passes through the United and Divided Monarchies, and then concludes with the fall of Jerusalem and the deportation of the Southern Kingdom to Babylon (ca. 600 BC). Importantly, throughout this season the LORD himself sat as King over the Israelite theocracy, dwelling among his people—whether in the tabernacle or the temple—and ruling over the nation through human mediators: elders, judges, priests, prophets, and (as a result of national disobedience) kings (Deut. 33:5; 1 Sam. 8:7-9; 12:2) But even though God had given Israel the land, throughout this time much of their inheritance remained unconquered and unsettled, largely owing to the presence of sin among the twelve tribes. Moreover, because of that sin many enemies not only surrounded the Israelite kingdom, but also successfully warred against it. Thus, despite their promotion to nationhood, Israel, throughout this entire period, remained much like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: a pilgrim people dwelling in a land not yet fully theirs.

With important qualifications we may therefore say that this season pictures the first stage of the Kingdom of God: the lengthy era in which the Church Militant dwells in the earth, preaching the Gospel. The points of correspondence are many. Once again God is King, though here he dwells within his people, thereby ruling over a strictly spiritual nation: the Church. Here too he rules through mediators: preeminently through Christ—the High King of Heaven—but also through the Spirit of God, the Word of God, and the appointed leaders of the people of God (Acts 20:17–24). Like Israel of old,

the Church dwells in a world that belongs to her in principle, but which she has not yet fully possessed (1 Cor. 3:21–23). Like Israel of old, she lives under a divine mandate to take up the weapons of her warfare—prayer and the preaching of the Gospel—and conquer as much of the land as she possibly can for her King (Matt. 28:18–20; 2 Cor. 10:3–4; Rev. 11:1–3). And like Israel of old, she too is vexed by enemies within and without: enemies that she must engage with the mighty weapons of prayer, truth, purity, lovingkindness, perseverance, and church discipline (Matt. 5:43–48; Eph. 6:10–20; 1 Tim. 1:18; 6:12).

However, we must not fail to observe the "important qualifications" mentioned above. Among the most important is this: Because of the inherent weakness of the Old Covenant, Israel in the land was doomed to be cast out of the land (Deut. 32:1–33; Jer. 31:31–34; Heb. 7:18–19). The Church, on the other hand, because of the inherent strength of the Gospel (i.e., the Eternal Covenant), is destined to triumph over every foe and remain in the earth forever (Rom. 4:13; 8:31–39; Heb. 8:1–6; 1 John 5:4). It is also noteworthy that the writing prophets sometimes used scenes from Israel's dwelling in the land to picture the *second* stage of the Kingdom: the stage in which God's glorified Church dwells in the new heavens and the new earth (Isa. 60:1–22; Ezek. 40–48; Mic. 4:18; Zech. 8:1–8). We find, then, that the Holy Spirit used images from Israel's dwelling in the land to depict *both* stages of the Kingdom of God. And he did this, not only in the Old Testament, but also in the New (2 Cor. 6:14–18; Eph. 2:19–22; 1 Peter 2:9–10; Rev. 20–21). I will have more to say about this later on.

3. Israel's Exile and Return

This brings us to our third and final picture of the Kingdom: Israel's exile and return. Their season of exile began in 722 BC with the fall of the Northern Kingdom (then called Israel) to the Assyrians. It was aggravated by the subsequent fall of the Southern Kingdom (then called Judah) to the Babylonians. After enforcing three separate deportations, the Babylonians finally razed Jerusalem to the ground in 586 BC. This inaugurated seventy years of captivity in Babylon, after which, in fulfillment of biblical prophecy, a remnant of much-chastened and penitent Jews returned to their ancestral homeland in three waves, the final one occurring in 432 BC (2 Chron. 36:22–23; Isa. 44–45; Jer. 25:1–14; 29:1–14).

Again, these events are rich with typological significance. The OT prophets themselves hinted at this when they repeatedly referenced Israel's restoration from Babylon in order to speak of a *second and greater exodus*: an exodus that would not only return God's people to their homeland, but also to a New Covenant, a new King, a new Kingdom, and a new world order unlike any they had ever known (Isa. 10:26–27; 11:11–12; Ezek. 16:60; 20:37; 34:11–31; 36:1–38; 37:1–28; 40–48).

The NT enables us to fill in the blanks. There we learn that Israel's expulsion from Canaan pointed to a far greater expulsion: the expulsion of all mankind from the Garden of Eden through the sin of Adam (Luke 4:6; Rom. 5:12–14; 8:18–25). Similarly, their return from captivity prefigured the saints' ultimate return to the greater Eden, and to the God who will walk with them there because of the righteousness of Christ their King (Rom. 5:12–21; Rev. 2:7). Or, to slightly modify the metaphors, Israel's captivity in Babylon (again) pictures the saints' pre-conversion bondage to the Domain of Darkness, while their return pictures their liberating entrance into the Kingdom of God: first through the miracle of the new birth, and finally through the miracle of the new heavens and the new earth: the Promised Land to come (Luke 4:18; Rom. 8:18–25; Gal. 5:1; Col. 1:13).

We find, then, that with the help of the NCH we are well able to see the mysteries of the Covenant and the Kingdom in Israel's founding as a nation, their dwelling in the land, and their exile and return. May a great army of Gospel heralds lay hold of these rich images in order to preach Jesus Christ as Redeemer, Rescuer, Restorer, and Covenant-keeping King!

Explicitly Promised in the Law and the Prophets

It was during Israel's many years as a nation that God began *explicitly* to promise an eschatological King and Kingdom. This makes perfect sense. Henceforth, all the typological vehicles for such a revelation were in place: a divine King, a human kingdom (i.e., the family of Abraham, now become a nation), anointed leaders who mediated his reign (i.e., prophets, priests, human kings), a body of moral and ceremonial law, the presence of God among his people, and the blessings of God upon them on condition of their obedience. More than this, there was also the history of Israel, twice redeemed from physical captivity: first from Egypt through Moses, and then from Babylon through Cyrus and Persia. Yes, the history and institutions of ancient

Israel supplied the Holy Spirit with all he needed, not only to picture, but now to explicitly promise a coming spiritual reign of God, mediated by a Spirit-Anointed Prophet, Priest, and King, through whom he holds benevolent sway over a chosen spiritual family and nation redeemed by the Anointed One.

Very importantly, it was Moses himself who, under the influence of the prophetic Spirit, gave God's people their first explicit promises of an eschatological kingdom (Deut. 28; 30; 32). We see this in the words that he spoke shortly before his death and Israel's entry into the Promised Land. After fully enunciating the blessings and curses of the Law (Deut. 28), he declared:

Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you—the blessing and the curse which I have set before you—and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God drives you, and you return to the LORD your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today—you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul—that the LORD your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the LORD your God has scattered you. If any of you are driven out to the farthest parts under heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you. Then the LORD your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live. Also the LORD your God will put all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate you, who persecuted you. And you will again obey the voice of the LORD and do all His commandments which I command you today. The LORD your God will make you abound in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your land for good. For the LORD will again rejoice over you for good as He rejoiced over your fathers, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this Book of the Law, and if you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. (Deut.

30:1-10 NKJV)

These are prototypical words. Together with a few others like them (found in Deut. 28 and 32), they supply the framework for the entire corpus of OTKP. Whether we consult the pre-exilic prophets (i.e., Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk), the exilic prophets (i.e., Ezekiel, Daniel), or the post-exilic prophets (i.e., Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi), their predictions of the coming eschatological Kingdom—though more elaborate—essentially conform to the picture unveiled here: A stiff-necked and spiritually uncircumcised nation will fall into grievous sin; the covenant curses will therefore fall upon it, one of which is captivity; but God, in his mercy and grace, will redeem a holy remnant, granting them a new circumcised heart full of repentance and faith; and he will bring them once again into their homeland, where they will live with him forever, free from their (vanquished) enemies, and fully enjoying his manifold covenant blessings.

Again, the writing prophets adorn this simple framework with a fabulously rich tapestry of OTKP—a tapestry that was vital for the spiritual preservation of God's OT elect, and for the fulfillment of his redemptive plan. When the prophets' work was finally done (ca. 430 BC), latter-day ethnic Israel was in possession of a completed body of OTKP that effectively anchored the believing remnant to their God in hope and anticipation. We think of Joseph, Mary, Zacharias, Elizabeth, Simeon, Anna, Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, and their many faithful neighbors who were eagerly watching for the Consolation of Israel (Luke 2:25).

As we saw in chapter 2, these believers were likely united in a common expectation, an expectation shaped by the Representative Idea of the nature and coming of the Kingdom. Having returned from the exile, they looked eagerly for the coming of the Messiah, the Days of the Messiah, the Last Battle, the Day of the LORD, the Resurrection of the Dead, and the advent of the World to Come. Also, they looked eagerly for an eternal universal theocracy: a government of God mediated to the nations by ethnic Israel and her Messiah, administered in accordance with the Law of Moses, and set in a spiritually and physically renewed cosmos. In view of her long and difficult pregnancy, God's OT Bride desperately needed comfort. In OTKP he had given it to her abundantly (Rev. 12:1–2).

But was she viewing the tapestry properly? Did God's people understand

OTKP correctly? Surely they were justified in looking for an Israelite Messiah, a great king through whom God, by his Spirit, would reign over Israel and the nations, and by whom he would finally bring in a new world order following the Resurrection and the Day of the LORD. But in that world would God actually reign according to the Mosaic Law? Would his Kingdom really be centered in Canaan of old? Would the moral and ceremonial laws that had governed ancient Israel endure to all eternity? What about those mysterious prophecies that seemed to suggest otherwise? And what about the prophecies of a whole new covenant, beneath which God's people would live forever (Jer. 31:31–33; Ezek. 37:26)? Yes, the godly Jews of Jesus's day were certainly justified in looking for a coming king and kingdom. But thoughtful students of the Scriptures must often have puzzled over the apparent inconsistencies in OTKP. "Ah well," they would say with a sigh, "when the Messiah finally comes, he will tell us all things" (see John 4:25).

Conclusion

We have journeyed with the Teacher through four thousand years of Salvation History: through the entire Era of Promise and Preparation. Along the way we have sought to understand the OT promise of the Kingdom of God. What have we learned?

In preparation for our journey, we learned from the Lord's Prayer that we can best understand the Kingdom as a direct spiritual *reign* of the triune God over his redeemed children and their world; and also as the blessed *realm* that this reign creates.

As we began our journey, we learned that we can glimpse the Kingdom in seed form in the Garden of Eden, and in the very good world over which God reigned in the beginning, prior to the fall.

We learned that we can also see the Kingdom in the mystery of marriage. For when the LORD created a wife for Adam and brought her to him, he was giving us a picture of a still greater eschatological miracle: of God the Father casting his Son into the sleep of death, so that after raising him from the dead he might bring him a beautiful companion, helper, and Bride, over whom he would reign as a loving Husband and King.

We learned that the Kingdom was offered in fullness to man and nature at the Tree of Life, where Adam, had he partaken of its fruit, would have placed the entire world under the headship—the spiritual reign—of God the Son.

We learned that through the sin of Adam the proffered Kingdom was forfeited at the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and also supplanted by a counterfeit kingdom—the Domain of Darkness—from which, humanly speaking, there is no escape.

We learned that mankind's fall into the Domain of Darkness did not catch God by surprise, but that even before the founding of the world he had devised a plan to redeem—to rescue and restore—a believing people through the Person and Work of his incarnate Son.

We learned that at its heart, this plan was a covenant—an Eternal Covenant—according to which God's believing people might receive the promise of that Covenant: deliverance from the Domain of Darkness, and entrance into the eternal Kingdom of God's beloved Son.

We learned that the Kingdom was pictured and promised in the Protoevangelium—Genesis 3:15—where we hear God assuring the Woman that though the Serpent will bruise the heel of her Seed, her Seed will one day crush the Serpent's head, thereby undoing all his evil work and returning her to Paradise, where she will walk with God again.

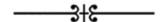
We learned that the Kingdom was pictured not only in the new world onto which Noah and his family descended, but also in the Ark that sheltered them from the roiling waters of divine judgment, and that carried them, throughout a brief season of divine testing, to their future home.

We learned that the Kingdom was pictured to father Abraham in God's many promises to him and his physical seed, and also in the overall arc of his life, which consisted of a divine call, a lengthy sojourn, and an eventual entering in.

We learned that the Kingdom was also pictured in the history of ethnic Israel, and in all three stages of its journey through Salvation History: its founding during the days of the Exodus, its sojourn in the land of Canaan, and its exile and return in the time of its captivity to Assyria and Babylon.

And finally, we learned that while a two-staged spiritual Kingdom was *implicitly* promised in the preceding times and ways, it was *explicitly* promised in the Law and the Prophets. In the last days, said the prophets, the Redeemer will come: a Spirit-Anointed Prophet, Priest, and King. He will rescue his people from captivity. Then they will dwell with him in the Promised Land, under a new and better covenant. And then, after safely passing through the Last Battle and the great and terrible Day of the LORD, they will dwell with

their covenant-keeping God forever in a glorious new world that he has promised to create.



In our journey through the Era of Promise and Preparation we have sought to walk with the Teacher. We have sought to remember that the New Covenant is in the Old concealed; the Old Covenant is in the New revealed. We have sought to employ the New Covenant Hermeneutic in order to discover the deep meaning of all the Old Covenant types and shadows. We have sought to let the Didactic New Testament control and inform our reading of all the OT scriptures.

Have we met with good success? Have we brought an accurate understanding of the DNT to these rich OT texts? Does the DNT really teach that the Kingdom of God is a direct spiritual reign of God the Father, through the Son, and by the Holy Spirit? Does it really teach that the Kingdom enters history in two simple stages, separated by a single Parousia of Christ and the Consummation of all things? Does it really teach that the Kingdom of God is nothing other than the promise of the Eternal Covenant: eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord?

It's time to enter the Era of Fulfillment and find out!

<u>1</u>. I first came across this striking idea in Watchman Nee's classic, *The Normal Christian Life* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1977).

CHAPTER 6

THE NEW TESTAMENT ON THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM

I have good news for eschatological sojourners: We have left behind the Era of Promise and Preparation and are entering the Era of Fulfillment. We have left behind veils, types, and shadows, and are now in the presence of anti-types, substance, and the full light of truth. Here the Lord speaks to us plainly, and not with figures of speech (John 16:29). Here he unveils the glorious mysteries of the Eternal Covenant and the Kingdom of God. Let us therefore seat ourselves at his feet, asking him to teach us about the nature and coming of the Kingdom.

Jesus Proclaimed the Kingdom

In the Gospel according to Mark the first words out of Jesus's mouth are these: "The appointed time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15). No doubt they fell sweetly upon the ears of all Israel. For centuries their prophets had promised a day when God would send his Messiah and launch a sequence of events that would culminate in the redemption and glorification of the world. For centuries Israel had waited for it. And now, said Jesus to his astonished countrymen, the day is "at hand"—very near, and drawing nearer by the moment. The people were to prepare themselves spiritually. The hope of the ages was upon them.

At first they received him gladly. Though his teachings—usually couched in parables—were enigmatic, his mighty miracles clearly identified him as a prophet (Luke 7:16). Moreover, he did little to discourage the Messianic speculation and fervor that the miracles aroused (Matt. 9:27; 12:23; John 4:29). And when, on Palm Sunday, he made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, he openly to declared to all—to the Jewish people, their leaders, and Rome itself—that he was exactly what his exultant disciples believed him to be: the eschatological Son of David, the blessed Messianic King who comes in the name of the LORD (Ps. 118:26; Luke 19:37–40).

In the end, however, the nation turned against him (John 1:11). Why? Because he was not the Son of David they expected or wanted. If he had been, he would not have fallen into Pilate's hands. If he had been, he would have roused the people to war. If he had been, he would have invoked the power of God once again, this time to lead Israel to victory over Rome, and to eventual supremacy over the nations. No, the Pharisees had gotten it right after all. Jesus of Nazareth was just another in a long line of false prophets and false Messiah's. Therefore, as Moses commanded, he must die, and the people must resume their long wait for the true King and the true Kingdom of God.

If only they had understood. Had not Jesus told Nicodemus that without a spiritual rebirth no one could see the Kingdom of God (John 3:3)? Had he not told the Pharisees that the Kingdom of God does not come with observation (Luke 17:20)? Had he not told Pilate that his Kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36)? And when the multitudes tried to make him a king by force, had he not withdrawn from them and later reproved them for a selfish materialism that blinded them to the true purpose of his Messianic mission (John 6)?

Yes, Jesus of Nazareth was the Messianic herald of the Kingdom of God. But as all four Gospels make painfully clear, his understanding of the Kingdom was different from that of the people to whom he proclaimed it. Radically different.

What then was his understanding? Let us turn to his teaching on the mysteries of the Kingdom to find out.

Jesus Revealed the Mysteries of the Kingdom

In regard to Christ's teaching on the Kingdom of God we have at our disposal no richer resource than his discourse on the mysteries of the Kingdom, found in Matthew 13, Mark 4, and Luke 8 and 10. The reasons for the richness are many. First, these are *didactic* passages, giving us explicit NT instruction on this subject. Secondly, they are *dominical* passages, giving us the words of the Lord himself. Thirdly, they are *extensive* passages, touching on a wide variety of subjects related to the Kingdom. And finally, they are *foundational* passages, illuminating everything else that Christ and the apostles said or would say about the Kingdom. Yes, this instruction was couched in parables; yes, when the parables were delivered the disciples could not fully understand them; and yes, we nearly always need further light from the DNT

to plumb their extraordinary depths. But despite all that, they clearly stand as the foundation for the NT doctrine of the Kingdom of God.

What exactly was the purpose of these parables? The Lord tells us plainly: They are meant to unveil the *mysteries* of the Kingdom to his disciples. Now at first glance this may seem strange: Why would he use parables to unveil mysteries, seeing that parables themselves communicate truth in veiled language, and can therefore be difficult to interpret? But once again the Lord himself gives us the answer: He used parables to hide Kingdom truth from the hardened and impenitent, but also to excite curiosity about that truth in the hearts and minds of his sincere followers. Accordingly, when the disciples earnestly inquired about such truth, they received it in full (Matt. 13:10–16).¹

Here, then, we do indeed have a true unveiling of the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. Here the Lord really does reveal certain fundamental truths about the Kingdom that were formerly hidden away under a cloak of typological language, but now are brought out into the open. And so we find Jesus saying to *all* of his disciples:

Blessed are your eyes, for they see; and blessed are your ears, for they hear. For I tell you the truth: Many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it. (Matthew 13:16)

We do well to let those words sink in. Unlike the prophets and righteous men of old, *all the disciples of Christ* are privileged to know *all the truth* about the nature and coming of the Kingdom of God.

Again, these truths are *mysteries*: They are open secrets, opened by Christ. In the pages ahead we will examine seven of them. The first two—found primarily in the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares, but also in the Parable of the Dragnet—deal with the *temporal structure* of the Kingdom, the stages in which it enters history (Matt. 13:24–30, 36–43, 47–50). The remaining five—all unveiled in the rest of the parables—deal with the first stage of the Kingdom, which I will refer to as the *Kingdom of the Son*. Here we find the Lord equipping his Church for ministry in the coming Era of Proclamation, preparing her for inevitable tribulation, but also assuring her of his presence and power, through which he himself will crown her labors with good success.

So, with Bibles in hand, let us consider the first mystery of the Kingdom of God.

Mystery #1: The one Kingdom of God enters history in two stages: a temporary Kingdom of the Son, which is spiritual only, followed by an eternal Kingdom of the Father, which is both spiritual and physical—the two being separated by a single Consummation at the end of the present evil age.

This is the first and most fundamental mystery of the Kingdom, since it supplies us with the infrastructure of all NT eschatology. It appears prominently in the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares, is echoed in the Parable of the Dragnet, and is presupposed in all the other parables. Focusing primarily on the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (Matt. 13:24–30) and its dominical interpretation (Matt. 13:36–43), let us briefly consider each element of this mystery.

Note first that the Lord speaks here of the mysteries of *the* Kingdom of God (vv. 11, 24). There is only one of them. And yet when we read this parable, and others as well, it soon becomes evident that the one Kingdom is not monolithic. Rather, it enters history in two separate stages, each with its own unique characteristics. Guided by the language of our parable, we may aptly refer to the first stage as the Kingdom of the Son, and the second as the Kingdom of Father. But again, the two kingdoms are really one. That's because they share a common essence. Both are the fruit of the redemptive work of Christ. Both are spheres of redemptive rescue and restoration. In the former, the (delegated) authority of the Son is at the forefront; in the latter, the (supreme) authority of the Father. But in both of them, *God the Father is directly ruling over his redeemed children through his Son and by His Spirit.* In the two-staged Era of Fulfillment—which is the great theme of the parables of the Kingdom—the one Kingdom of God has come at last.

It is true that our parable does not speak explicitly of *the Kingdom of the Son*. Nevertheless, the idea pervades not only this text, but also many others in the NT. For example, we see in verse 41 that Jesus identifies himself as a king, stating that at the end of the age he—the Son of Man—will send forth his angels to gather out of *his* Kingdom all things that offend. Moreover, he ascribes royal—and altogether divine—prerogatives to the Son of Man: The world belongs to him (v. 24); he himself sows the good seeds into it (i.e. true believers, the sons of the Kingdom, vv. 24, 37); he himself wisely permits the bad seed (i.e., the sons of the evil one) to grow in it for a season (vv. 29–30);

and he himself, at the end of that season, will separate the wheat from the tares for eternal reward and retribution (vv. 30, 41–42).

In all of this we see at once that the Kingdom of the Son is *temporary*. That is, the Son of Man will exercise his reign and grow his realm in the earth until the end of the present evil age, at which time he himself will send out his angels to accomplish the final harvest (vv. 30, 40–43). As we shall see in a moment, other NT texts teach us that the temporary reign of the Son is coextensive with the Era of Gospel Proclamation: the season of Salvation History begun on the Day of Pentecost and brought to conclusion at the Parousia of Christ.

Importantly, this parable gives us our first glimpse of another crucial characteristic of the Kingdom of the Son; namely, that his reign is purely *spiritual*, and therefore *invisible* to the naked eye. The parable breathes not a hint that the royal Son of Man is living upon the earth; and yet, mysteriously enough, he is clearly reigning over his sons and daughters, who are indeed present upon the earth! How can this be? Elsewhere, the Lord will answer our question. Here, however, he gives his people this blessed hope: The One who presently reigns in their hearts will one day extend his reign over their bodies and their world (v. 43).

This brings us to the second stage of the Kingdom, which the Lord explicitly refers to as the *Kingdom of the Father* (v. 43). Here, in seed form, we encounter two fascinating truths.

First, we learn that the Kingdom of the Son will one day *become* the Kingdom of the Father. When the Son of Man returns, something mysterious will happen. There will be, as it were, a changing of the guard. His authority to rule and reign will, at least in part, be transferred to the Father. Later on the apostle Paul will articulate this great mystery: When Christ comes again, he will "hand over" his perfected Kingdom to the Father, so that God may be all in all (1 Cor. 15:24).

Secondly, we learn that in the Kingdom of the Father the sons of the Kingdom will "shine like the sun" (Matt. 13:43). Though our text does not explain why, other NT passages fill in the blanks. At the return of the Son of Man there will be a general resurrection of the dead, followed by a general judgment, followed by the appearing of the eternal World to Come (John 5:25–29; Rom. 8:18–21). The temporary Kingdom of the Son is spiritual only; the eternal Kingdom of the Father will be both spiritual and physical, filled

with the glory of God (Col. 3:1–3).

Finally, our parable reveals that the two stages of the Kingdom are separated by a single Consummation at the coming of the Son of Man (vv. 30, 41–42). Jesus's disciples—saturated with the writings of the OT prophets—would have thrilled to hear him say so. Together with all godly Jews they looked forward to the Day of the LORD: the Day in which Yahweh, the God of Israel, would supernaturally break into history to raise the dead, judge the nations, and usher in the World to Come (Matt. 13:47–50). Here the Lord confirms their expectation, but also supplements it with fresh—and astounding—revelations about the promised consummation of all things.

Above all, he teaches that the Day of the LORD will be the Day of the Son of Man (v. 41)—and that he himself is that Man! Once again the disciples must have been thrilled. Most of the OT texts depicted Yahweh as the Agent of the Consummation (Isa. 2; 13; Joel 2; Zeph. 1; Mal. 4:1-5). However, a few hinted that in fact he would use his Messiah to administer the last things (Ps. 2:7–9; 110:4–7; Isa. 9:1–7; Dan. 2:34–35). Moreover, in one of these texts the prophet explicitly described the Messiah as "one like a son of man" (Dan. 7:13–14). Accordingly, in Christ's day there was likely some confusion as to how exactly God would effect the Consummation. But John the Baptizer was not confused. Indeed, he had openly declared that God would use the Messiah —the Coming One—to gather his wheat into the barn and burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire (Matt. 3:7-12). And now, with John's words still ringing in their ears, the disciples realize that their Master is that very One: the One who will consummate all Salvation History. Following Pentecost, when the disciples had fully digested this astounding revelation, they would proclaim to the world that the Day of the LORD will in fact be the Day of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 24:36-37; Luke 17:30-37; 1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 1:14; Phil. 1:10; 2:16; 2 Thess. 2:2).

Our text supplies other important truths about the Consummation. There is only one of them, set to occur at the coming of the Son of Man (vv. 41–43). In part, it will be accomplished through the agency of the holy angels (vv. 41, 49). It will involve a great separation: wheat from tares, good fish from bad (vv. 41, 48–50). It will involve divine retribution: The wicked will be cast into a furnace of fire (vv. 42, 50). It will involve divine reward: The righteous will be gathered in, and will shine like the sun in its strength in the eternal kingdom of their Father (vv. 43, 48). Later on in his teaching ministry the Lord will add

more details. The coming of the Son of Man will be in the sky above the earth (Matt. 24:30; cf. 1 Thess. 4:16). He will bring with him *all* the holy angels (Matt. 25:31). He himself will raise the dead and suddenly transform the living (John 5:28–29; cf. 1 Cor. 15:51–52). He himself will destroy the present earth and its works with fire (Matt. 24:35; John 5:22; 2 Peter 3:10). He himself will create new heavens and a new earth, the eternal home of the redeemed (Matt. 19:28; cf. Acts 3:21; Phil. 3:21; Rev. 21:5). And when all is accomplished, he himself will hand over the consummated Kingdom to his Father, so that God may be all in all (v. 43; cf. 1 Cor. 15:20–28).

Mystery #2: During the first stage of the Kingdom, the Messianic Son of God reigns from Heaven above, and not on the earth below.

Without a doubt this is the most mysterious of the mysteries of the Kingdom. Though the OT did contain a few hints of a heavenly Messianic reign (Dan. 7:9–14), the typological language of OTKP gave rise, naturally enough, to the expectation of an *earthly* reign centered in physical Jerusalem and Zion. Indeed, so strong was this expectation, and so impenetrable the mystery that Jesus here begins to reveal, that the disciples were still looking for an earthly Messianic reign even after their Lord's resurrection (Acts 1:6). It was not until the great outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost that the heavenly Prophet and Teacher fully opened their eyes to the truth: The risen and ascended Messiah, now seated at the right hand of God, has been given all authority in Heaven and on earth, and will rule the universe from Heaven above until the day he comes again for the Consummation of all things.

In our parable the Lord's revelation of his heavenly reign is given in seed form; however, with the benefit of NT hindsight, we can discern it easily enough. Our first glimpse comes in the fact that Jesus refers to himself as *the Son of Man* (Matt. 13:41). Again, this title would naturally remind his disciples of the Messianic figure described in Daniel 7:13–15. But as a close reading of that passage will show, the Personage celebrated there is manifestly a *heavenly* being, ushered upon clouds of glory into the *heavenly* presence of the Ancient of Days, after which, *in Heaven*, he receives from God dominion, glory, and a universal kingdom. Soon Jesus himself will fulfill all the words of that prophecy (Matt. 26:64; Acts 2:29–36). Thus, in what is admittedly opaque language, Jesus is beginning to prepare his disciples for his own forthcoming heavenly reign.

Observe also from verse 41 that at the end of the age the Son of Man will send forth his angels to effect the eschatological separation of the wheat and the tares (v. 30). Here too we glimpse the Messiah's heavenly reign. For is it likely that he would send forth his angels from the earth? Surely not. But if the disciples had doubts about this, the Lord himself swiftly dispelled them, declaring time and again that at the end of the age he will *descend from Heaven* with all the holy angels to raise the dead and judge the world (Matt. 24:29–31; 25:31; 26:64; Mark 8:38; 14:62). And with this solemn truth the Epistles and the Revelation abundantly agree (Acts 1:11; 1 Thess. 3:13; 4:16; 2 Thess. 1:7; Jude v. 14; Rev. 19:11–16).

It would be hard to overstate the importance of the mystery of the heavenly mediatorial reign of Christ. As we shall see, it enables us to understand God's eternal purpose for his Son; it opens up multitudes of OTKPs; it is the doctrinal key to a correct understanding of the Millennium; it fully illuminates the Consummation; and it is a constant comfort and joy to all the saints of God.

Crucial Confirming Texts

Before considering the remaining mysteries of the Kingdom, let us look briefly at five NT texts that confirm and enlarge upon the two foundational mysteries we have just discussed. These texts, which are but a sampling of *many* others, assure us that the one Kingdom of God really does enter history in two simple stages: a temporary, heavenly reign of the Son over the spirits of his redeemed people, followed by an eternal, earthly reign of the Father (and the Son) over their glorified spirits, bodies, and world.²

1. The Parable of the Minas

(Luke 19:11–27; cf. Matthew 25:14–30)

The Lord gave this parable to his disciples in anticipation of his imminent departure to Heaven. His goal was to ensure their faithfulness in Gospel ministry throughout the forthcoming season of his physical absence. Luke's version reads as follows:

Now as *the people* were listening to these things, Jesus went on to present *another* parable because he was near Jerusalem, and because they all were assuming that the kingdom of God would immediately

appear. So he said, "A certain man of noble birth went on a journey to a distant land in order to receive a kingdom for himself and *then* return. So summoning ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas, saying to *each of* them, 'Do business *with this* until I come *back*.' But his *own* citizens hated him; and they sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We do not want this man ruling over us as *our* king!'" (Luke 19:11–14)

These words presuppose the chronological framework that the Lord had previously unveiled in the mysteries of the Kingdom. Each word is significant. The *nobleman* is Christ. The *far country* is Heaven. When he arrives there, the nobleman will receive for himself a Kingdom. This is the Messianic reign that Israel mistakenly thought would appear on earth and emanate from Jerusalem. In fact, it is a *heavenly* reign, emanating from the Jerusalem above (Gal. 4:26). It is a reward that God the Father will give to the Messianic Son of Man; it is a core element of the exaltation that properly belongs to him as a result of his obedience to the point of death (Dan. 7:14; Matt. 28:18–20; Phil. 2:5–9; Rev. 5:1–5). Here, as elsewhere, Jesus tells his disciples that the High King will remain in Heaven for a considerable time. The Kingdom of God (in its fullness) will not appear immediately (Luke 19:11). The High King will indeed return (Luke 19:12), but only after many days (Matt. 25:19). Nevertheless, his coming is sure. Therefore the disciples must not lose heart or grow lazy. When he does return, he will handsomely reward his faithful servants, but slay the rebels who refused to submit to his rule (Luke 19:27). The former will enter into the joy of their Lord (Matt. 25:21, 23); the latter will experience weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 25:30). Once again, the two-staged Kingdom of God is in view.

2. Peter's Sermon on the Day of Pentecost

(Acts 2:14–40)

This is the first of two sermons in which, very early on, we encounter the full-fledged apostolic eschatology. Before the day of Pentecost both Peter and his comrades were wondering if the risen Christ would finally expel the Romans and restore the Davidic monarchy to Israel (Acts 1:6–8). Now Peter's thinking has changed. Now the Holy Spirit has filled him, opened his understanding, and illumined the OT Scriptures. Now he understands that the

Christ had first to suffer and then enter into his glory (Luke 24:26); that it was necessary for him to die, rise, ascend, and sit down at God's right hand in Heaven so that repentance and remission of sins could be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (Luke 24:45–49). In short, Peter now understands that the Messiah's kingdom—the very kingdom promised in all OTKP—is *heavenly* in origin, nature, provenance, and purpose. It is exceedingly abundantly unlike anything that Israel could ever have asked or thought (Eph. 3:20).

These great truths—the humiliation and exaltation of Christ, and God's redemptive purpose for them both—are in full view in Peter's sermon. Let us walk briskly through the sermon to see how.

It is the Day of Pentecost. Christ has poured out his Holy Spirit. Among the disciples there are extraordinary spiritual manifestations. Though some observers are mocking, many are eager to understand (Acts 2:1–13).

And Peter is eager to explain. The manifestations are in fulfillment of Joel's OTKP, according to which God, in the last days, would pour out his Spirit on all flesh. Why? So that men would call on the name of the Lord and be saved from wrath on the soon-coming Day of the LORD (Acts 2:14–21).

But Peter knows something they do not: To call savingly on the name of the LORD, they must call on the name of the Savior himself: the Lord Jesus Christ. So he explains: God bore witness to Jesus with signs and wonders (Acts 2:22). Wickedly, the leaders and the people rejected Jesus's call to faith, as well as God's attesting witness. Indeed, in fulfillment of God's predetermined plan, they put him to death (Acts 2:23). But just as the prophets had foretold, God raised him from the dead (Acts 2:24–32). Moreover, God also exalted him, taking him up into Heaven and seating him at his own right hand. This too was in fulfillment of OTKP. Jesus was the promised Seed of David (Acts 2:30). And now God has seated him on the throne of David, which is a heavenly throne, and not an earthly. In so doing, he has made him both Lord and Messiah (Christ): the God-Man, and the Spirit-Anointed Prophet, Priest, and High King of Heaven and earth (Acts 2:33–36).

Observe from Peter's concluding words, and from the people's reaction to them, the distinctly *redemptive* purpose of the High King's reign. When the conscience-stricken Jews cry out to him, "What shall we do?" Peter replies, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. . . . Be

saved from this perverse generation!" (Acts 2:37–40). And three thousand of them were. Those who believed were *rescued* from the Domain of Darkness, *transferred* into the (spiritual) kingdom of God's beloved Son, and *restored* to eternal life under the benevolent spiritual reign of the triune God (Col. 1:13).

Note also from Peter's words that these precious promises are not for Jews alone, but also for Gentiles. They are for all who are far off, as many as the Lord God of Israel shall call (Acts 2:39). Peter remembers his Master's words about the one Shepherd and the one new flock, comprised of both Jew and Gentile (John 10:16). In time, he himself will speak of the new "Israel of God" that the Lord began to create on the Day of Pentecost: the new spiritual nation over which David's greater son, seated upon his heavenly throne, will continue to reign until he comes again at the end of the age to restore all things (Acts 5:29–31; Gal. 6:16; 1 Peter 2:9–10).

Peter has fully grasped one of the greatest mysteries of the Kingdom: During its first stage the Messianic Son of God, for distinctly redemptive purposes, reigns from Heaven above, and not on the earth below.

3. Peter's Sermon in Solomon's Portico

(Acts 3:11–26)

In spirit, content, and purpose this sermon is much like the one delivered on the Day of Pentecost. By supernatural gifts of faith and power, Christ's apostles have healed a lame man (Acts 3:1–10). The amazed bystanders are inclined to look to Peter and John as the ones who performed it. Peter demurs, directing their attention to Jesus (Acts 3:11–12). Then he preaches the Christ. Even in the days of his flesh, God glorified him (Acts 3:13). Yet Israel denied him, delivering him up to Pilate and killing the very Prince of Life (Acts 3:14–15). But God raised him from the dead: He is the Living One, the One whose spiritual rule now gives life and perfect soundness even to the lame (Acts 3:16). Yes, this Jesus is the Christ, who, according to God's predetermined plan, suffered, died, and rose again, all in fulfillment of the OT Scriptures (Acts 3:17–18).

As the sermon reaches its climax, Peter gives his audience precious truth about the Messiah and the course of his heavenly reign:

So then: Repent and turn back to God, that your sins may be wiped away, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the

Lord, and that God may send the Messiah appointed for you—Jesus himself—who must remain in heaven till the times of the restoration of all things, times of which God has spoken through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old. (Acts 3:19–21)

Once again Peter is urging his Jewish brethren to look to Christ—penitently and believingly—for the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38–39). Note, however, that here, for the first time, Peter speaks about the course and consummation of the Messiah's heavenly reign. As long as God is calling Jews and Gentiles to faith (Acts 2:39; 3:25), Heaven must "receive" Christ: It must hold him there and keep him there. Happily, throughout this period of physical separation, the High King will faithfully refresh his pilgrim people on earth through continuing visitations of the Spirit. Soon, however, God will send the Messiah again. Soon the "times" of the restoration of all things will come. These will include the time of the restoration of the saints who sleep, the time of the restoration of the saints who are alive at the Lord's return, and the time of the restoration of the earth and sky, and of all that dwell within them (Isa. 65:17; 66:22; 1 Peter 4:7). As we shall see, all of these "times" happen roughly at the same time: the time of the Parousia of Christ and the Consummation of all things.

Here, then, is Peter's eschatology. Though in need of further fleshing out, it is already in line with his Master's. The one Kingdom of God enters history in two stages: a temporary spiritual reign of the Son emanating from Heaven, followed by an eternal spiritual and physical reign of the Father (and the Son) upon a renewed earth. The two reigns are separated by a single Consummation at Christ's return, when he himself will *finally* judge, rescue, and restore all things (1 Peter 1:3–9; 4:7; 2 Peter 3). Peter breathes not a word about a millennium or a global theocracy. God's purpose for the Kingdom is altogether redemptive. Throughout the season of his heavenly reign the High King is *applying* the redemption that he accomplished on earth; at his return in glory he will *consummate* it once and for all.

4. Paul's Teaching on the Two Stages of the Resurrection

(1 Corinthians 15:20-28)

For clarity, conciseness, and comprehensiveness this may be the single most important NT passage dealing with the structure of the Kingdom of God.

Before taking a close look at it, a few words about the context are in order.

Certain members of the Corinthian church have been denying the bodily Resurrection of the Dead (1 Cor. 15:33–34). Realizing that this heretical tendency strikes at the heart of the Gospel (1 Cor. 15:1–11), Paul mounts a vigorous defense, exploring the Resurrection from many different angles (1 Cor. 15:12–19). In so doing he provides a chronological framework that will enable the saints to think about it. He does so in our text (1 Cor. 15:20–28), after which he goes on to speak of the nature of the Resurrection body (1 Cor. 15:35–49), the transformation of the living saints at Christ's return (1 Cor. 15:50–53), and Christ's eternal victory over the last enemy, which is death (1 Cor. 15:54–58). On the theme of the Resurrection—and on the historical framework within which we are to contemplate it—there is no more important text of Scripture. Therefore, with the structure of the Kingdom in mind, let us work our way through verses 20–28.

In verse 20 Paul identifies the risen Christ as "the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep." Just as Israel under the Law was to offer two harvest sacrifices to God—one at the beginning of the harvest season, and one at the end—so here: Christ is the first of God's saints to rise from the dead, and the One whose own resurrection anticipates and guarantees the resurrection of the rest of the saints at the end of the age (Lev. 23:9–14; Col. 1:18).

In verses 21–22 we learn *why* the saints' resurrection is guaranteed: Just as surely as Adam's sin was imputed to his children, with the result that they all died, so surely shall Christ's righteousness (which includes the merits of his atoning death) be imputed to those who belong to him, with the result that they, like him, will certainly rise from the dead. Because he is the Last Adam, Christ is Head over a whole new humanity; and God will deal as faithfully with the body as he did with its Head (Rom. 5:12–21).

In verses 23–24 Paul elaborates, giving the precise sequence of events by which God will bring in the full harvest. There are three of them, after which all the saints will have been glorified, and all Salvation History will have reached its ultimate goal.

The first event is the resurrection of Christ himself: stage one of the harvest. The second is the resurrection of those who belong to Christ. This is stage two of the harvest—the stage that brings the harvest to completion. Importantly, this resurrection occurs at Christ's Parousia, when he will also change and glorify the living saints in the twinkling of an eye (vv. 50–52). Then, because Christ

has now gathered the full harvest of the redeemed to himself, the third and final event will occur. Paul calls this "the end" or "the consummation" (v. 24). In our text, it involves two elements. First, Christ abolishes all rule and all authority and power. This is the Judgment: the day when all human and satanic foes are fully stripped of their authority and power, and then banished to eternal punishment. Next, he delivers up the (completed) Kingdom to the Father. This is *Christ's* Kingdom: the Kingdom of the Son. As we shall see in a moment, it includes not only his *right to rule* (i.e., the sovereignty delegated to him by the Father), but also the *realm* that he created by exercising that right: his resurrected and glorified saints, along with the beautiful new glorified world he has created to be their inheritance (cf. Matt. 13:41–43).

Mindful that he is breaking new ground, and desiring that the Corinthians better understand the handing over of the Kingdom to the Father, Paul now backtracks in order to explain in greater detail. Observe from what follows how brightly the structure of NT eschatology shines forth from this passage.

In verse 25 Paul declares that Christ must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. As we learn from other NT texts citing Psalm 110, he has in mind Christ's heavenly reign, and not, as some assert, a future millennial reign that commences after his Parousia (Acts 2:34–35; Heb. 1:13; 10:13). Throughout this time the High King will send his Spirit and use his Church to gather a believing people to himself, thereby turning former enemies into eternal friends through the miracle of regeneration. At the same time, he will also judge his impenitent adversaries, placing them underfoot in Hades. And he will continue to do so until the Parousia, when he will finally destroy all remaining rule, authority, and power antithetical to his reign (v. 24; Luke 19:27). Notably, this includes the last enemy, which is death (v. 26). For God the Father will put all things—even death itself—beneath Christ's feet (v. 27; Ps. 8:6). Please consider carefully: If Christ destroys the *last* enemy at his Parousia, how shall other enemies arise throughout a millennium that comes *after* it, as premillennarians assert?

In passing, we should note that the reference to Psalm 8 is quite significant (v. 27; Psalm 8:6). The Psalm itself is a cry of wonder and praise that God has exalted man by giving him dominion over the work of his hands. However, lifting his eyes still higher, the apostle sees here an ultimate reference to the divine-human Messiah (Eph. 1:22; Heb. 2:8). Recall from our earlier discussion that in the beginning God purposed to make his Son the spiritual

Head over all creation (Eph. 1:10; Col. 1:15–20). When sin entered the equation, God then set out to implement a redemptive plan by which his original purpose would indeed be fulfilled. Thus, in verse 27 Paul is affirming that at Christ's return God will fulfill his eternal purpose for his Son by placing all his remaining enemies under his feet, and all his remaining friends under his headship, with the result that in Christ there is a new, perfect, and glorious creation.

There is, however, an exception: the Father himself. *He* cannot come under Christ's authority, since it was by the Father's supreme authority that Christ received the (heavenly) authority that he now has (v. 27). Accordingly, it is only fitting that in the end Christ should give back to the Father all that the Father so lovingly gave to him: not only his authority to rule, but also the people and world he has fully redeemed in the exercise of that rule. Thus shall it come to pass, at the handing over of the Kingdom, that God the Father (together with the Son) will once again be the supreme Sovereign over all (v. 28; Rev. 11:15).

Summing up, we have found that the apostle Paul—like Peter and Peter's Lord—represents the Kingdom as coming in two simple stages, separated by a single Parousia of Christ at the end of the age. Moreover, we have seen that this single Parousia is closely associated with a single resurrection and a single judgment that destroys death and consummates God's redemptive dealings with the universe, life, and man. Where in all of this is there room for a future millennium? Yes, in 1 Corinthians 15 the classical amillennial eschatology of the Reformers finds an excellent friend indeed.

5. Paul's Teaching on the Saints' Citizenship in Heaven (Philippians 3:20–21)

Short as it is, this passage packs an eschatological wallop. Paul is exhorting the Philippians to walk after the example of the godly, and not like those "whose minds are fixed on earthly things," whose end is destruction (Phil. 3:17–19). Eager to secure their obedience, he therefore concludes by supplying the spiritual rationale for a holy life—a rationale that is full of eschatological truth and encouragement:

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our present body—subject as it is to humiliation—and conform it to his glorious body, doing so in accordance with the exercise of that same power by which he is able to subject all things to himself.

Regarding the nature and coming of the Kingdom, we here observe three important points.

First, the saints are citizens of a heavenly Kingdom. As Paul wrote to the Ephesians, God, by the miracle of regeneration, has brought the saints to life with Christ, raised them up with Christ, and seated them in the heavenly places in Christ (Eph. 2:5–6; John 18:36). Physically, they may be citizens of Rome, but spiritually they are citizens of Heaven and the subjects of its High King. And they should live as such. So here again we encounter the Messiah's heavenly reign, the temporary spiritual Kingdom of the Son.

Secondly, the saints are eagerly awaiting the return of the Savior. That is, they are looking forward to the Parousia—the arrival of the High King in glory—when the spiritual salvation they now enjoy will overflow into the physical side of creation, including their very bodies.

This brings us to our final point; namely, that at his coming Christ himself will transform and glorify the cosmos, thereby introducing the Kingdom of God in its full and final form. We see this in verse 21, where we learn that Christ, at his Parousia, will perform two eschatological actions of cosmic significance. First, he will conform the natural bodies of the saints—so painfully subject to humiliation—to his own glorious body. In other words, he will resurrect and glorify the bodies of the saints who previously died, after which he will transform and glorify the bodies of those who are alive at that time. But secondly, he will also exercise that same power to subject all things to himself. That is, he will banish every spiritual and physical enemy from the creation and introduce a glorious new cosmos (Matt. 19:28; 1 Cor. 15:20–28, 50–58).

This text reminds us of the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares, wherein Jesus taught that at his return he would cast out of his Kingdom *all* things that offend: not only the wicked themselves, but also all the physical pain, deformity, and brokenness that so dreadfully mar and burden the natural world (Matt. 13:41–42; Rev. 21:4). It reminds us of the words of Peter, who spoke about the restoration of all things at Christ's return (Acts 3:21). And it reminds us of Paul's further words to the Roman Christians, that at the Resurrection the entire creation will be delivered from its slavery to corruption

into the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Rom. 8:18–25).

We find, then, that Paul, like Jesus and Peter, envisioned the Kingdom as coming in two simple stages, separated by a single Consummation at the Parousia of Christ.

Mystery #3: During the days of the Messiah's heavenly reign the world will be a field of battle upon which two opposing kings and two opposing kingdoms vie for the souls of men.

Our third mystery, which again is drawn from the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares, pertains to the Kingdom of the Son. With the benefit of 20/20 hindsight, and with the help of later apostolic writings, we can well understand what the Lord had in mind.

Jesus knows that the Son of Man will soon offer himself in death as a sacrifice for the sins of his people, after which he will be exalted as High King of Heaven, receive the Holy Spirit, and pour him out upon the nascent Church. From then on, until the end of the age, he will send his Spirit-filled disciples out into the world to preach the Gospel. Through their preaching he will test the spiritual integrity of all men and bring his elect to faith, thereby planting them in the field of the world as an ever-growing crop of wheat (Matt. 13:24, 37–38).

Meanwhile, the ancient serpent, Satan, will continue to use false religions, philosophies, and ideologies to gain a following of his own, thereby planting them in the field of the world as a crop of tares (Matt. 13:39). Though barely distinguishable outwardly, these two plantings have altogether different and antithetical natures. Conflict and persecution are inevitable. The saints must prepare themselves (John 16:1–4).

Yet Christ will forbear to judge the tares. Indeed, for a season he very much wants the two realms to interact. Why? Because he wants the continually growing crop of wheat to bring the good news of the Kingdom to the tares, so that he himself—from Heaven above, and by his Spirit working below—may enter the strong man's house, turn the tares into wheat, and transfer them from the Domain of Darkness into his own Kingdom of light and love. So shall the Strongest Man plunder the strong man's goods; so shall the High King of Heaven destroy the kingdom of the ruler of this world (Matt. 7:15–20; 12:29; John 12:31; 16:11;

2 Cor. 5:17; Col. 1:13; Rev. 12:9).

The saints must understand all this, and therefore reckon the longsuffering of the Lord to be salvation for the world (2 Peter 3:15). The High King desires a large crop; accordingly, he has ordained a long Era of Gospel Proclamation, during which the two plantings will coexist, grow, and interact. But the saints may take courage: At the end of the age there will indeed be a harvest. The Son of Man will return to separate the wheat from the tares, thereafter transforming *the whole world* into the glorious Kingdom of God. Then the eternal Era of Reward and Retribution will begin. Then the righteous will forever shine forth like the sun in the Kingdom of the Father.

Mystery #4: In the Kingdom of the Son the Messiah reigns inwardly and invisibly over the spirits of his subjects, not outwardly and visibly over their bodies and their world.

This mystery is taught or implied by nearly all the parables. We see it very prominently in the Parable of the Leaven, in which the Kingdom is likened to a dollop of yeast that a woman hid in a lump of dough, and that eventually works its way through the entire lump. Here the leaven is not simply the Gospel, but the spiritual reign of the High King of Heaven, beneath which the Gospel places the souls of all who hear and believe. Presently this reign is hidden, yet also powerfully and infallibly growing. In due season it will reach every tribe, tongue, family, and nation, thereby permeating the whole lump of the world. Then the end will come, and the invisible will become visible at last (Matt. 13:33; Col. 3:1–4).

The parables of the Hidden Treasure (Matt. 13:44) and the Pearl of Great Price (Matt. 13:45–46) are both designed to communicate the exceedingly great *value* of the Kingdom for those who find it. But observe as well, especially from the Parable of the Hidden Treasure, how Christ again depicts his Messianic reign as *invisible*. It is *hidden* in the earth, tucked away like a rare book in the stalls of the world's vast marketplace of ideas. Because it is hidden, it can accidentally be stumbled upon. Because it is hidden, it can be sought and found. Clearly this Kingdom has nothing to do with visible mountains, cities, temples, priests, sacrifices, or any other institution of the Mosaic Law. Rather, it is *an invisible realm of spiritual rescue and restoration*, a realm that barely appears on the radar of the world system, but that is deeply cherished by all who are graced to see, hear, find, and enter in.

Other NT texts flesh out this idea. For example, when the Pharisees

questioned Jesus as to when the Kingdom of God would appear, he replied, "The kingdom of God does not appear with signs that can be observed; nor will people say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'See, there it is!' For behold, the kingdom of God is in your very midst" (Luke 17:21). Here the Lord has in view not only the redemptive dynamics of his earthly ministry, but also the coming days of the Kingdom of the Son. In those days his spiritual reign will be experienced in the secret places of the soul. But until the King comes again, it will remain completely invisible to the naked eye (Heb. 11:1–3).

In his letter to the saints in Colossae the apostle Paul affirms this very thing:

If, then, you were raised together with Christ, keep on seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, *and* not on the things of this earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God; *and* when Christ, *who is* our life, appears, you too will appear with him in glory. (Col. 3:1–4)

One day soon the High King of Heaven will descend to the earth and be revealed to all in power and great glory. What's more, in that day—whether by a resurrection of the dead or a transformation of the living—his saints will be revealed in glory with him. But until then the Messiah will reign inwardly and invisibly over the spirits of his subjects, not outwardly and visibly over their bodies and their world.

Mystery #5: The Kingdom of the Son is entered by hearing and believing the message of the truth: the Gospel.

This mystery is primarily communicated through the Parable of the Sower (Matt. 13:1–9, 18–23; Mark 4:1–9, 13–20; Luke 8:4–15). Importantly, Jesus states that this parable is the key to understanding all the others (Mark 4:13). Here we learn *how* sinners enter the Kingdom; in the others we learn *what happens* when they do.

With the benefit of NT hindsight, we can easily discern the Lord's meaning. The sower is the exalted Christ: the High King of Heaven. The seed is the message of the truth: the Gospel. Through the evangelistic ministry of the Church, Christ will scatter the seed of the Gospel into the earth. But the saints must understand: This scattering will not produce uniform results. The seed will land on different kinds of soils: different kinds of human hearts. In many

cases it will not germinate or grow to maturity. In others it will. Those who hear the message with a good and honest heart will constantly cling to it and bring forth spiritual fruit with perseverance. Having entered the Kingdom of the Son by faith, they will have entered the Kingdom of God.

Here the Lord is unveiling the great NT mystery of the primacy of preaching: It is through the Church's proclamation of the Gospel that believers in Christ will enter the invisible spiritual Kingdom. As a result, the invisible spiritual Kingdom will enter the world.

We see this truth with special clarity in the Lord's midnight conversation with master Nicodemus (John 3:1–2). Nicodemus and a handful of fellow Pharisees know that Jesus is a teacher sent from God, for no man can do the miracles he is doing unless God is with him. So Nicodemus goes to Jesus by night, thinking to ask him about the Kingdom of God, secretly wondering if Jesus is its Messianic King. Aware of his curiosity, the Lord goes straight to the heart of the matter: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a person is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God . . . unless a person is born of water and spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:3, 5). These words unveil the true nature of the coming Kingdom of the Son: It is spiritual and invisible. It can only be entered when the invisible Holy Spirit, blowing where he pleases, grants a person spiritual birth, thereby ushering him into the Kingdom of God (John 3:8).

But how exactly does this birth occur? What instruments is God pleased to use to bring it about? Jesus's answer is clear and exceedingly memorable: "And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life" (John 3:14–15). This lifting up is twofold. First, Christ himself must be lifted up bodily upon the cross, thereby suffering the penalty for his people's sins. But secondly, he also must be lifted up verbally, in the Church's public proclamation of the divine Person and redemptive Work of the Lord. It is through "the foolishness of the message preached" that the sovereign Spirit will grant new birth to the people of God. The result will be that they look to Christ for salvation, and so are rescued from the Domain of Darkness and transferred into the Kingdom of God's beloved Son (1 Cor. 1:18–25; Col. 1:13). The Church must never forget: The Kingdom of the Son is entered by hearing and believing the message of the truth: the Good News of the Eternal Covenant in Christ (Rom. 10:14–15; Col. 1:5).

Mystery #6: The Kingdom of God, like a living organism, will grow in the earth: infallibly, invisibly, and mysteriously.

It is remarkable how many of the Lord's parables emphasized this point. Clearly, he desires his Bride to understand that as difficult as her labors may be, they are not in vain. Indeed, by Heaven's own decree they are assured of good success. Like the living beings around the throne of God, the Church is a spiritual organism, alive with the life of the living God (Rev. 4:6–8). Divine omnipotence is at work in her work. Accordingly, nothing can stop the growth of the Kingdom of God.

Concerning this growth, the Parable of the Mustard Seed assures us that it is *infallible* (Matt. 13:31–32). Yes, the Kingdom will start out very small, with the body of a single carpenter from Nazareth being planted, seedlike, into the depths of the earth. But in the end it will sprout and grow to enormous size, extending its branches upward and outward to all nations, providing spiritual shelter and rest for untold multitudes all over the world (Rev. 5:9). Here, in striking imagery drawn from OTKP, the Lord again affirms, "I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will by no means prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18; cf. Ezek. 17:22–24; John 10:16).

Much the same message is conveyed in the Parable of the Leaven (Matt. 13:33). Here, however, we meet a further nuance: Not only does the reign of Christ spread infallibly throughout the great lump of the world, but also, like the working of leaven, *invisibly*. We can hear the Gospel preached, and we can see its fruits growing in the lives and assemblies of those who believe it. But for the moment we cannot see the King himself, or the hand by which he exercises his rule. Yeast-like, the ever-growing Kingdom of the Son is invisible to all but the eye of faith (Heb. 11:1–3).

This parable, together with the Parable of the Growing Seed, also teaches us that the growth of the Kingdom of the Son is *mysterious* (Mark 4:26–29). Though it involves human labors, it is not, in the end, the *fruit* of human labors (Ps. 127). Indeed, the human laborers themselves cannot fathom it. They are like a farmer who rises early in the morning, goes out, sows his seed, and then goes home. Though he has no idea *how* his seeds grow, he is fully confident that they will. He knows with certainty that a power greater than himself is at work. Here again the saints can take heart. Theirs is faithfully to scatter the seed of the Word; the Holy Spirit's is to use that Word to perform

his mysterious work in human hearts, thereby growing the Kingdom of the Son until the appointed day of harvest (Mark 4:29).

Mystery # 7: For those who find it, the Kingdom of God is more precious than anything in this world, and is self-evidently worthy of any sacrifice in order to retain it and receive its promise of eternal life.

This mystery appears in the parables of the Hidden Treasure (Matt. 13:44) and the Pearl of Great Price (Matt. 13:45–46). Both are designed to communicate the exceedingly great *value* of the Kingdom. In the first, the Kingdom is likened to a treasure that a laborer happens to find while digging in a field. He is not seeking treasure, but accidentally finds it. This nuance highlights the sovereign grace by which *all* sinners find the Kingdom. For truth to tell, it is actually the laborer who is lost, yet treasured by the King; and it is the King who graciously seeks him out and finds him. On this score one thinks of the conversion of the crazed Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus: a man who definitely was *not* seeking, but who was most decidedly found (Acts 9; Gal. 1:15)!

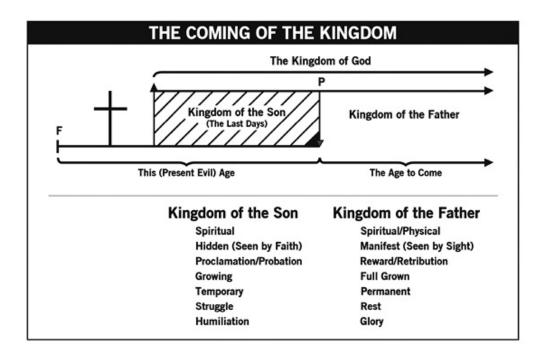
Note also from this parable that the Lord does not depict the actions of the laborer—hiding, going, selling, and buying—as a duty. Rather, he depicts them as a supernaturally natural *reaction* to finding the Kingdom. Born from above, the sinner now beholds the eternal King and his Kingdom. Beholding them both, he naturally prizes them above all else. Prizing them above all else, he naturally goes and sells all that he has in order to have them forever. Yes, a saint *should* be willing to sacrifice anything and everything in order to have the treasure of the Kingdom; but here Jesus is saying that if a sinner has truly found it, he naturally and spontaneously will.

The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price teaches the same basic lesson: Because of the infinite value of the Kingdom—and out of boundless gratitude and joy at having found it—it is only natural for a reborn saint to "sell all" in order to retain it forever. The nuance here is that the sinner who found it was like a merchant seeking fine pearls. As in the case of Jacob and Rebekah of old, he valued and sought spiritual things, even if he could not see them clearly or pursue them without missteps. Think, for example, of our earnest Buddhist, Hindu, or Muslim neighbors, folks who are "feeling after God" in the thick darkness of the world system, trying to find the source of the flashes of heavenly light that graciously make their way into their souls through the creation (John 1:4, 9; Acts 17:27–28 kJV). Here the Lord implicitly endorses

the seeking that he explicitly enjoins upon all people in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 7:7–8). But again, it is only a matter of time before the newborn saint realizes that he was seeking the Lord because the Lord was seeking him (Luke 15:3–7; John 15:16). When that particular light goes on, he will find himself still more eager to "sell all" in order to have the King and his Kingdom forever.

The Stages of the Kingdom Compared and Contrasted

The diagram below is meant to distill and depict all that we have learned so far about the nature, structure, and mysteries of the Kingdom of God.



Observe first that the quadrant representing the Kingdom of the Son is shaded. This reminds us that the first stage of the Kingdom is characterized by *mixture*. The powers of the holy Age to Come have invaded this present evil age (Heb. 6:5). Mixture, tension, and conflict are inevitable. By God's own design the wheat must mingle with the tares. Accordingly, there will always be love, ministry, and spiritual fruitfulness; but there will also be holy war (Eph. 6:10–13). Again, the saints must prepare themselves.

Happily, there is always hope. The P on the timeline stands for the Parousia:

the Second Coming of Christ, which is the Blessed Hope of the saints. Why? Because at his Parousia the Lord will cast all stumbling blocks out of his Kingdom, after which the righteous will forever shine like the sun in the Kingdom of the Father.

Finally, observe from the diagram the striking differences between the two stages of the Kingdom. We do well to meditate upon the characteristics of the Kingdom of the Son, for they will shape our thinking and expectations concerning the world in which we presently live; they will equip us to serve wisely, intentionally, and effectively. Likewise, we do well to meditate upon the characteristics of the Kingdom of the Father, for they will fill us with hope and strengthen us for our difficult pilgrimage through the howling wilderness of the present evil age.

Mystery and Blessedness

As we bring the present discussion to a close, it is fitting that we take careful note of the great value the Lord attaches to our understanding the mysteries of the Kingdom of God:

But blessed are your eyes, for they see; and blessed are your ears, for they hear. For I tell you the truth: Many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it. . . . For this reason I say to you: Every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like the head of a household who brings out from his storeroom of valuables things both new and old. (Matt. 13:16, 52)

Why are the disciples blessed? Because, having understood the mysteries of the Kingdom, they are now NT scribes, well able to bring out of their Godgiven storehouse of knowledge precious truths about the Kingdom of God, whether from the Old Testament larders or the New. They are blessed to know the King of the Kingdom, the nature of the Kingdom, the stages of the Kingdom, the way of life proper to the Kingdom, the future of the Kingdom, the glory of the Kingdom, and the joy of the Kingdom.

And in the case of today's NT scribes, they are especially blessed. Why? Because now they hold in their hands a very special key: the key to understanding OTKP, the meaning of the Millennium, the nature of the Consummation, and the victor in the GETD!

Jesus Gave Sneak Previews of the Kingdom

In the days of his flesh the Lord Jesus gave Israel sneak previews of the blessedness of life in the Kingdom of God. Here I especially have in mind the various works of power that God granted him to accomplish. In some cases, he touched the human heart; in others the human body; and in still others, the realm of nature. In all cases, the result was *redemptive*: His touch brought *rescue* from some effect of the fall, and (in a measure) *restoration* to the spiritual and physical wholeness that God intended in the beginning. In all cases the people caught a glimpse of the direct spiritual reign of God over his creation, with the fulsome wholeness and blessing that such a reign entails. In all cases they caught a glimpse of the soon-coming Kingdom of God.

The NT is explicit in showing us the connection between the Kingdom of God and Christ's works of power. Consider, for example, these words from Matthew's Gospel: "Then Jesus began circulating through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and infirmity" (Matt. 9:35; cf. 10:7–8; 12:28). The juxtaposition of the Lord's saying and doing is not accidental. On the one hand, he is proclaiming that the Kingdom is near; on the other, he is healing all manner of disease and sickness. Both Christ and Matthew would have us understand that wherever the Kingdom is present, God himself is present to do two things: to *rescue* from the manifold effects of sin, and to *restore* to God and wholeness.

Let us take a moment to illustrate these great truths from our Lord's earthly ministry.

Through Christ God placed his redemptive hand upon the sick and infirm: He rescued the blind (Matt. 9:27–30; John 9:1–7), the lame (John 5:1–9), the leprous (Luke 17:11–14), the paralyzed (Matt. 8:5–13), the sick (Matt. 8:14–15; 9:20–22), the mute (Matt. 9:32–33), and the deformed (Matt. 12:9–13). And in doing so, he restored them all—if only temporarily—to perfect health. Here was a sneak preview of the Kingdom when it comes upon sinful and broken human flesh.

On more than one occasion God also worked through Christ to rescue the dead from death itself, restoring them not only to life, but also to the joys of family and friends, traditional earmarks of the Kingdom of God (Jer. 33:10–11; Zech. 8:2–5; Matt. 8:11; 9:18–25; 22:1–14; Luke 7:11–15; John 11:1–

44). Here was a sneak preview of the Kingdom when it triumphs over the last enemy, which is death.

Amazingly, God also worked through Christ to put his healing touch on inanimate nature, "rescuing" the raging waters of the Sea of Galilee from a deadly windstorm, thereby restoring them to peace (Matt. 8:23–27); or again, rescuing a multitude of his followers from a dangerous lack of food in the wilderness, thereby restoring them to abundant provision and the satisfaction of a full stomach (Matt. 14:15–21; 15:32–38). Here were sneak previews of the Kingdom rolling back the curse that fell on nature when Adam sinned and our Garden Paradise was lost.

Through Christ God rescued many poor souls who were tormented by evil spirits, restoring them to soundness of mind and body (Matt. 8:28–32; 12:22; 15:21–28; 17:14–18; Mark 1:23–26; Luke 13:11–13). Notably, when the Pharisees accused him of casting out demons by the power of Satan, Jesus vigorously contested their flawed logic. Then, in a direct challenge of his own, he concluded by saying, "If, however, I am driving out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matt. 12:28; cf. Luke 11:20). Here was a sneak preview of the Kingdom of God completely overthrowing the rule and realm of Satan.

Finally, and most importantly, through Christ God rescued sinners from their heavy burdens of guilt, fear, and shame, forgiving those who turned to Jesus and thereby restoring them to the peace, gratitude, love, joy, and hope that mark the community of the redeemed (Luke 7:36–50; 15:1–7; 18:9–14; 19:1–10). Here is a picture of the Kingdom of God coming upon the guilty conscience of all who know they have fallen short of the glory of God, and who therefore turn to Christ for forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life (Rom. 3:23; Col. 2:14).

These amazing miracles did not mean that the Kingdom of God had entered the world. Rather, as the Lord himself repeatedly said, they meant that it was *near*—that it was *close by* and *soon to enter* the world (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7). As we shall see in a moment, the Kingdom could not come until the proper foundation had been laid for it: the righteous life and atoning death of the Last Adam.

We conclude, then, that in our Lord's miraculous ministry God was doing many things. He was confirming his status as a prophet. He was identifying him as Israel's Messiah. And he was declaring to the entire world, "This is my beloved Son!" But beyond all these, he was also giving mankind a glimpse and a foretaste of the redemptive rescue and restoration that he is eager to bestow on all who will come to him through the High King of Heaven. As upon the Mount of Transfiguration, so here: He was giving the whole world a sneak preview of the glories of the coming Kingdom of God (Matt. 17:1–13).

Jesus Offered the Kingdom

During the days of his earthly ministry the Lord Jesus offered the Kingdom of God, first to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. 10:6), but also, in anticipation of the Church's later mission to the nations, to various Gentiles (John 10:16). He offered it to the men who shared in his work (Mark 3:14–19; Luke 10:1–2), to individual Jews (Matt. 8:18–22; 19:16–26), to Jewish towns and cities (Matt. 11:20–24), and, during Holy Week, to the entire Jewish nation and its leaders (Matt. 21–25). He offered it to Gentiles in Galilee (Matt. 4:12–17), Syro-Phoenicia (Matt. 15:21–28), Samaria (John 4:1–42), and Jerusalem (John 18:36). His message to them all, though opaque as to its deep meaning, was nevertheless clear enough. The Kingdom of God is near. The Messianic King of the Kingdom, heralded by John the Baptist, has arrived. He is Jesus of Nazareth, the miracle-working prophet from Galilee. People must turn from their sins, believe in him, and watch the Kingdom come.

But again, in the mystery of providence, Jesus had one idea of the Kingdom, while Israel had quite another. In the end, this difference would cost him his life. And in the end, this difference would bring in the Kingdom of God.

To get a feel for this mystery we must try to look at things from the Lord's point of view. On the one hand, he knew what the Kingdom was not. Therefore, he actively discouraged people from thinking that it was a theocracy: a Davidic monarchy writ large and spread over the face of the whole earth (Matt. 12:15–21; Luke 17:20; John 6:15, 26–40). On the other hand, he knew what the Kingdom was. Therefore, he faithfully disclosed it as a two-staged reign of the triune God, to be entered through Spirit-wrought faith in God's uniquely begotten Son (Matt. 5–7; 13:1–52; John 3:1–8). Accordingly, his proclamation of the Kingdom repeatedly stressed conversion: repentance from sin, childlike trust in the Messiah, and a life of costly discipleship devoted to the advance of his rule and the growth of his realm (Matt. 8:18–22; 11:25–30; 16:24–28; 19:16–26; 25:1–30). In so speaking he was looking ahead to

the Era of Proclamation, when the good news of the finished work of Christ would fall like seed upon the nations of the world.

All too well did Jesus understand the great gulf between his view of the Kingdom and that of the people. Even as he offered it to them, he knew they would not understand. He knew that his message and ministry would disappoint their traditional expectations. He knew that they would reckon him a false prophet. He knew that they would turn against him in anger and cry out for his death. He knew that in the end they would get what they wanted. But he also knew that after they did, he would ascend to the Father's right hand, receive the Holy Spirit, and pour him out upon the nascent Church. In short, he knew that through the great clash of Kingdom expectations the Kingdom of God would come.

Here we stand on holy ground. Scripture assures us that the Lord knew the end from the beginning (Matt. 17:23). Yet who can doubt that he was completely sincere in offering the true spiritual Kingdom to Israel? This was the day of their visitation. God was offering them great things, things that were *meant* for their peace (Luke 19:41–42). Did Jesus, subject to the temporary limitations of his humanity, cherish a living hope that his nation might receive those things by receiving him? Did he wonder if God, through a secret alternative plan, might provide the atonement necessary for the coming of the Kingdom (Matt. 26:39)? Here all is mystery. Surely Jesus sincerely offered the Kingdom to Israel; surely he hoped they would receive it; surely he bitterly wept when they did not; and surely he knew that—for the moment—it was not meant to be (Matt. 23:37–39; Acts 2:23).

Yes, Jesus Christ sincerely offered the true Kingdom of God to a people whom he knew would not understand it, who were hostile to it, and who would kill him because of it (Luke 12:50; John 16:32). Yet for the joy set before him he pressed on, also knowing that because of his death the Kingdom of God would come, and that multitudes of his bitter enemies would soon become devoted subjects of the High King of Heaven, and beloved children of God.

Jesus Laid the Foundation for the Kingdom

We have seen that the Kingdom of God is the direct spiritual reign of the triune God over his people and their world. In the Kingdom, God is *in contact* with them both. But how can God, who is light, have fellowship with

darkness: with sinful men who are willing subjects in the Domain of Darkness (2 Cor. 6:14; 1 John 1:5)? The answer is: He cannot—not until sinful men are forgiven their sins and declared to be righteous in his sight. As we saw earlier, this is why God planned to send a Redeemer into the world. The ministry of Jesus Christ in the days of his humiliation was specifically designed to lay a proper legal foundation for the Kingdom of God, so that like a holy temple it could be built from the ground up, and could serve as an eternal dwelling place for the Holy One of Israel (Ps. 89:2; Isa. 57:14–15; Eph. 2:19–22).

This foundation has three great stones: the incarnation of the Son of God, his righteous life, and his atoning death. Let us briefly look again at each one, keeping in view their relation to the Kingdom of God.

The first stone is the incarnation of the Son of God as the man Jesus of Nazareth. Here was God's Provision for the Eternal Covenant, the One who would make the covenant relationship and blessings possible. In particular, here was the Last Adam, the Head and Representative of a whole new humanity. His mission was to do for his future family what the first Adam failed to do, and to undo for that family what they and the first Adam had done. The Lord's incarnation was the first foundation stone of redemption, the indispensable condition for hewing out the other two and laying them in place.

The second stone is the Lord's righteous life upon the earth. This began with his incarnation and ended with his sacrificial death: with the moment when he cried, "It is finished!" (John 19:30). Throughout his perfect life he did all that the first Adam failed to do: He obeyed his Father's every command, passed his every test, and complied with his every precept in the Mosaic Law. In every attitude, thought, word, and deed the Redeemer did only those things that pleased the Father (John 8:29). Thus did he win the prize of eternal life for his future family; thus did he make it possible for the Father to grant that prize to them; thus did he make it possible for the Father to introduce and build up the Kingdom of God.

The third stone was the Lord's sacrificial death. Here the Last Adam undid all that the first Adam had done. Here, in behalf of his future family, he paid the penalty for sins: the one sin of the first Adam, which was imputed to all his children, and the many sins of the future family itself (Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:3; 1 Peter 3:18). Here he fulfilled the righteous requirement of God's law (i.e., that sin must be visited with death), satisfied his justice, and propitiated

his wrath. Here he made the imputation of his own righteousness possible; here he made the regeneration, repentance, faith, justification, reconciliation, adoption, sanctification, preservation, and glorification of his future family certain and sure (Rom. 3:21–26; 4:1–8; 5:1–2; 8:29–30; 2 Cor. 5:21); here he secured the coming of the Kingdom of God.

In sum, by his active and passive obedience during the days of his humiliation, the Last Adam fulfilled and antiquated the Mosaic Law, introduced the New and Eternal Covenant, and secured its great promise to all who would believe: the gift of eternal life under God's direct, benevolent rule. By all that he did in the days of his flesh, Jesus Christ laid a perfect and eternally abiding foundation for the Kingdom of God.

Jesus Inaugurated the Kingdom on the Day of Pentecost and is Presently Extending it and Building it up

In our survey of the historical career of the Son of God we come now to his *exaltation*. This is God's reward to him for his faithfulness during the days of his humiliation. Having humbled himself to the point of death on a cross, God the Father, in fulfillment of his eternal plan, highly exalted him, bestowing on him a name above every other name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow—of those in Heaven, of those on earth, and of those beneath the earth—and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:5–11).

Christ's exaltation includes five main elements: his resurrection, ascension, session (i.e., his sitting down at the right hand of the Father), heavenly reign (with all authority in Heaven and on earth), and Parousia, when he comes again to consummate the judicial and redemptive purposes of God. It is through Christ's exaltation that God the Father fulfills his original purpose for his Son: that all creation should be headed up under him (Eph. 1:10; Col. 1:16–18; 2:19). It is through his exaltation that the saints personally receive and experience the Promise of the Eternal Covenant, which is eternal life. Accordingly, it is through his exaltation that the Kingdom of God enters the world.

In the remainder of this section, I want to focus on two aspects of the Lord's exaltation: the *inauguration* of the Kingdom of God on the Day of Pentecost, and the *extension* of that Kingdom throughout the lengthy season of his heavenly reign, which we have called the Era of Proclamation.

The NT is quite clear that the enthroned Lord Jesus Christ inaugurated the Kingdom of God on the Day of Pentecost. As Jesus himself told Nicodemus, no one can see or enter the Kingdom unless he is born again (or, from above) by the Holy Spirit (John 3:3, 5). But no one could receive the Spirit until Christ had been glorified (John 7:39; 17:1, 5): that is, until he had completed his redemptive work on earth (John 19:30), risen from the dead (Rom. 4:24), entered Heaven as the High Priest and Advocate of his people (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 9:24; 1 John 2:1), removed the legal barrier separating God the Judge from man the sinner (Matt. 27:51; Col. 2:14; Heb. 6:19–20; 10:19–22), received the promised Holy Spirit from the Father (Acts 2:33), and poured him out on his disciples on the Day of Pentecost (Luke 24:49; Acts 2:33). Therefore, as Peter himself affirmed, Pentecost was indeed *the beginning*: the beginning of the Church, the beginning of the Era of Gospel Proclamation (Acts 2:14–39), the beginning of Christ's heavenly reign (Acts 2:36), and the beginning of the coming of the Kingdom of God (Acts 11:15).

We receive a dramatic and picturesque confirmation of these great truths in Revelation 12. In a vision John beholds a Woman giving birth to a Male Child who will one day be like a shepherd with a rod of iron toward all (disobedient) nations. For now, however, he is caught up to God and his throne (Rev. 12:5). As soon as he is, war breaks out in Heaven between Michael (and his angels) and the Dragon (and his angels). But the Dragon—who has hitherto successfully deceived the whole world—cannot prevail, and is cast down to the earth, along with all his angels. At this point John hears a loud voice in Heaven, saying:

Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brotherhood has been thrown down—he who accuses them day and night before our God. (Rev. 12:10)

What a powerful picture this is! Christ has entered Heaven. Henceforth he appears before God as High Priest and Sacrifice on behalf of his people. Henceforth there is no legal barrier to the redemptive rescue and restoration that is the essence of the Kingdom. Henceforth Satan has no legal grounds upon which to accuse God's people or hold them captive by means of his various deceptions. Henceforth Christ is free to send the Holy Spirit down to the earth, into his believing disciples. And so he does that very thing, with the

result that the Church is born from above, the Bride of Christ is begotten, the temple of God is indwelt, and the Kingdom of God has come (John 12:31–32; Rev. 20:1–3).

But that is not the end of the story. In fact, it's only the beginning. The Woman who gave birth to the Man Child is still in the world. Moreover, she is not done giving birth. God has purposed to give her more offspring (Rev. 12:17). The NT explains. She is the Church Militant: the eschatological Eve, the Bride of Christ (Eph. 5:22-33). Because of her intimate union with her heavenly husband, she is also the mother of all the living: of all God's children who, down through the centuries, will hold fast to the testimony of Jesus (Gen. 3:20; Rom. 7:1-6; Rev. 12:17). As her husband's helper, her ministry is to bring the Gospel to all nations throughout the entire Era of Proclamation, here symbolized as 1,260 days. Just as God did for Elijah, who lived in the wilderness of Israel for three and a half years, so too will Christ do for his beloved Bride: He will nourish and sustain her all throughout the Era of Proclamation as she journeys through the wilderness of this present evil world (1 Kings 17:1-7; Rev. 12:6, 14). In a place specially prepared for her, he will give her strength to fight the good fight of faith. By abiding there, she will be empowered to fulfill the Great Commission.

And the result? The kingdom of Satan will be *continually thrown down* (Rev. 12:9). Throughout the Era of Proclamation tares will be turned into wheat. The sons of the devil will become the sons of God. The Strongest Man will invade the strong man's house, despoil his goods, and make them his own. Therefore, the Kingdom of God will be *extended* and *built up*. Like a tree, it will become a home for the birds of the air. Like leaven, it will spread through the whole lump of the earth. The Lord will build up and preserve his Church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against her (Matt. 16:18; John 10:16, 28–30; Rev. 1:18). Through his great host of Gospel warriors, the salvation and the power and the Kingdom of God will *continually* come until that happy Day when they arrive in glorious fullness at the High King's return (Rev. 12:10).

Jesus Will Come Again to Consummate the Kingdom and Hand it Over to God the Father

History is His Story. One of the great themes of His Story is the honor and glory of his Son (John 5:23). At the beginning of the story the Father honored

the Son by creating the universe through him, and by purposing to make him Head over all, so that—on condition of Adam's obedience in Eden—he might shepherd the family of man down the corridor of time. *In the middle* of the story the Father honored the Son by sending him into the world to become its one and only Redeemer, through whose humiliation he laid a foundation for his Kingdom, and through whose exaltation he is now extending that Kingdom and building it up. *At the end* of the story the Father will honor his Son once again, this time by sending him back to the earth to fulfill all his judicial and redemptive purposes for the world.

In Part V of our journey we will examine this consummation very closely, highlighting the many ways in which God the Father, in the final chapter of His Story, grants consummate honor and glory to his beloved Son.

Jesus Enables us to Formulate a Complete Definition of the Kingdom

Here in Part II of our journey we have been thinking deeply about the nature and coming of the Kingdom of God. My goal has been to do the spadework necessary for us to arrive at an extended definition of the Kingdom. Having turned up a great many NT truths on this theme, here is my best attempt at providing a definition that incorporates them all:

The Kingdom of God is the direct spiritual reign of the triune God over his redeemed children and their world. It is identical with the promise of the Eternal Covenant, whose several elements were planned in eternity past, pictured and promised throughout OT times, and manifested in NT times as the New and Eternal Covenant. The one Kingdom enters history in two simple stages: The Kingdom of the Son, followed by the Kingdom of the Father, the two being separated by a single Consummation at the end of the present evil age. Both stages of the Kingdom are redemptive in nature, and therefore involve *rescue* from every spiritual and physical enemy introduced at the fall, and *restoration* to every spiritual and physical friend enjoyed in Eden and offered in fullness at the Tree of Life. The Kingdom of the Son is temporary and spiritual only, while the Kingdom of the Father is spiritual, physical, and eternal. The Kingdom must be entered in the Era of Gospel Proclamation and

Probation through the preaching ministry of the Church, spiritual rebirth by the Holy Spirit, and simple faith in the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Kingdom of God is a creation of the New Covenant, whose spiritual institutions fulfill and permanently replace those of the Old Covenant. Also, the Kingdom is the blessed *realm* that God's redemptive rule creates, and over which he will reign forever, both in this age and in the eternal Age (or World) to Come.

If this definition is correct, it has major implications for the GETD. In fact, if it is correct, it actually *resolves* the GETD. That's because it shuts us up to a very specific way of understanding OTKP, the Millennium, and the Consummation. And this in turn enables us to see the truth, beauty, power, and sweet simplicity of amillennial eschatology.

Nevertheless, our journey is not yet complete, for now we must see if NT teaching on these three remaining issues really does conform to our expectations.

Let us therefore embark on Part III of our journey. Let us now take a closer look at OTKP. And let us see if our Lord's teaching on the Kingdom of God really has turned us into NT scribes: skilled Bereans who can draw out of the vast storeroom of Scripture precious treasures both old and new.

^{1.} It is true, of course, that the disciples did not fully understand the mysteries of the Kingdom until after Pentecost, when the Spirit of Truth—who would lead them into all truth—was given (John 16:13). Nevertheless, with the benefit of biblical hindsight we can see that this discourse does indeed give us a full unveiling of the basic mysteries of the Kingdom.

<u>2</u>. For a discussion of other NT texts displaying the nature and twofold structure of the Kingdom of God, see Dean Davis, *The High King of Heaven* (Enumclaw, WA: Redemption Press, 2014), 139–157. Hereafter cited as *HKOH*.

PART III

Understanding Old Testament Kingdom Prophecy

CHAPTER 7

NEW TESTAMENT PRINCIPLES FOR INTERPRETING OLD TESTAMENT KINGDOM PROPHECY

elcome to Part III of our study, the part in which we sit at the feet of the Teacher and learn how to interpret OTKP. In other words, welcome to the Great Divide!

Why do I call it that? Recall from chapter 3 that in the end there are two basic approaches to biblical eschatology: future-millennial and present-millennial. And what is it that divides the two camps? Answer: The interpretation of OTKP. As we have seen, future-millennarians believe we must interpret OTKPs more or less literally; therefore, they conclude that these prophecies will be fulfilled in a future millennial stage of the Kingdom. Present-millennarians believe we must interpret OTKPs typologically (and therefore figuratively), since they are fulfilled in the two-staged spiritual reign introduced by the New Covenant. They also argue that the NT itself instructs us to take this approach, supplies us with principles for doing so, and gives us concrete examples of how it should be done. Are the present-millennarians right? Our goal in this part of our journey is to find out.

The Road Ahead

Here in chapter 7 we'll begin by carefully defining OTKP. Next, we'll look at several reasons why it is impossible to interpret OTKP literally. After that we'll isolate and discuss three basic NT principles for the proper interpretation of OTKP. In other words, we'll be examining what I have called the New Covenant Hermeneutic (NCH): the NT method for interpreting the OT in general, and OTKP in particular. Having done so, we'll pause briefly to answer a question that has greatly troubled our premillennarian brethren: If God used typological and figurative language to describe his coming Kingdom, was he not, in effect, lying to his OT people? (Spoiler Alert: The answer is No!)

Finally, we'll examine several NT texts in which the apostles cite one or more OTKPs. As we do, we'll see that they *never* interpret them literally, but *always* use the NCH to arrive at their true meaning and to edify God's New Covenant people, the Church.

Having laid these foundations, we'll then go on to enjoy the fruit of our labors in chapters 8 and 9. Our purpose there will be to examine several OTKPs that are dear to the hearts of our premillennarian brothers. In doing so, we'll see that while these prophecies stubbornly resist a literalist hermeneutic, they open up like flowers at the touch of the NCH. Accordingly, by the time we complete this part of our journey I hope to find that many of my premillennarian brothers have joined me in the amillennial garden of the Lord, where at long last we can rest and take in the beauty of our surroundings together.

What Is OTKP?

Though we have already touched on this subject, it is now time to consider a more nuanced definition of OTKP. But in order to do so, we must first realize that the OT actually gives us three different kinds of prophecy.

First, there is *simple OT prophecy*. This is defined as any prediction that was fulfilled in OT times: that is, in times prior to the coming of Christ. God told Abraham that his family would live in Egypt for four hundred years (Gen. 15:13). A man of God from Judah told Jeroboam that in days to come, a king named Josiah would burn dead men's bones on his (Jeroboam's) illicit altar (1 Kings 13:1–2). Isaiah predicted that a Persian king named Cyrus would give an order to rebuild Jerusalem (Isa. 44:28). All such prophecies were *literally* fulfilled. When the OT saints saw them fulfilled, they learned afresh that the LORD, he is God: the omniscient and omnipotent sovereign over man, nature, and history. And seeing this, they were comforted and strengthened for the journey ahead.

Secondly, there is *simple OT Messianic prophecy*. This is defined as any prediction about the Messiah that was fulfilled prior to the Day of Pentecost, when believers in Jesus entered the New Covenant, and when the Kingdom of God entered the world. God's purpose for this kind of simple OT prophecy was—and is—complex. On the one hand, such prophecies were designed to help the Jewish nation recognize their promised Messiah. Beyond that, they were also meant to strengthen the faith of Christians, and to equip evangelists

with an impressive body of evidence demonstrating the truth of the Gospel and the divine inspiration of the Bible.

Simple OT Messianic prophecies are quite impressive, both for their number and specificity. For example, the prophets spoke of Christ's divine nature (Ps. 45:6; 110:1:6; Isa. 7:14; Jer. 23:5-6; Matt. 22:41-46), virgin birth (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23), and nativity in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; Matt. 2:5-6); of his predilection for ministry to the mixed multitudes of Galilee (Isa. 9:1–7; Matt. 4:12–15); of his signs, wonders, and prophetic works of power on behalf of the poor (Isa. 61:1-3; Matt. 11:1-6; Luke 4:18); of his rejection by hostile rulers, both Jew and Gentile (Ps. 2:1-2; 22:1-18; 69:1-36; Luke 18:31–33; Acts 4:23– 31); of his death as an apparent criminal, by which, according to God's predetermined purpose and plan, he atoned for the crimes of his people (Isa. 53:1–12; Mark 10:45; 1 Peter 2:21–25); and of his resurrection, ascension, and session at God's right hand (Ps. 16; 110; Acts 2:22-36). Again, God designed simple OT Messianic prophecies to be like arrows in the hand of a mighty warrior. They are crucial apologetic equipment for the proclamation, defense, and confirmation of the Gospel (Phil. 1:7). They are meant to create and strengthen the faith of Jewish and Gentile believers of all times and places.

Finally, we have *OT Kingdom Prophecies* (OTKPs). These I define as OT predictions of God's coming redemptive reign, a reign that began on the Day of Pentecost, when the New Covenant was instituted among men. Unlike the two kinds of simple OT prophecy, these predictions are *not* literally fulfilled. Rather, in this case God used ideas and images drawn from Old Covenant times to give his OT people *veiled revelations* of the blessings that he planned to introduce through Christ and the New Covenant. Accordingly, we must "decode" these prophecies. We must interpret them typologically and figuratively, in terms of the various elements of the New and Eternal Covenant. In short, we must use the NCH.

Why did God do this? Why did he decide to veil NT truth in OT language? The reasons are numerous, complex, and well worth pondering.

First and foremost, prophetic veiling served God's purpose *in the exaltation of his Son*. As we have seen, it pleased God to make the New Covenant—and the new spiritual Kingdom it would create—a *mystery*, so that in the fullness of time his uniquely begotten Son might enjoy the privilege of *unveiling* this mystery to the world. It pleased God to hide all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge in Christ, so that Christ himself could open them up and bestow

them upon his own (Matt. 13:10–17; John 1:17; Rom. 16:25–27; 1 Cor. 2:1–2; Eph. 1:9; 3:1–5; Col. 1:26; 2:2–3; Heb. 1:1–2).

Secondly, prophetic veiling served God's purpose *in the progressive revelation* of his redemptive truth. In particular, it pleased him temporarily to veil his spiritual truth so that he could build up a rich body of physical imagery by which he might speak that truth to the world. We humans cannot think of the spiritual apart from the physical; we cannot speak of the internal without the help of the external. Old Covenant history and institutions, developed over the centuries, supplied a vehicle by which God could talk to us about New Covenant realities and blessings. Rightly understood, OTKP is poetry of the highest order. Drawing upon a fabulously rich reservoir of OT history, its picturesque language pierces and thrills the human heart in ways that bare philosophy and theology never could.

Thirdly, prophetic veiling served God's purpose *in probation*. God is a god who tests his people (Prov. 17:3). In accordance with his wisdom, he has decreed that the deep places of his truth are not easily reached; prayer, humility, integrity, hard work, patience, and more prayer are all required. As in the case of the Parables of the Kingdom, so in the case of OTKP: the veiling of spiritual truth tests the human heart. At first this truth seems impenetrable. Therefore, we face a choice: Will we press in, or will we walk away (John 6:66–67)? All who encounter OTKP sense that here is high mystery and deep truth. All realize that they must prayerfully press into the mystery until God is pleased to illumine the truth (Matt. 7:7). All understand that this is a test.

Finally, prophetic veiling served God's purpose *in redemption*. That is, it contributed to Israel's rejection of their Messiah, which resulted in his death, which resulted in the redemption of the true Israel of God (Gal. 6:16). As we have seen, when OTKP is simplistically and superficially interpreted, it creates an expectation of an earthly Messiah ruling over a theocratic Kingdom. Such was the prevailing view in the days of Jesus's flesh. Accordingly, as long as the people thought that Jesus was going to fulfill their expectation, they welcomed him (John 6:1–40). When, however, he failed to do so, they turned against him and wound up calling for his death (Mark 15:11–13; John 19:15).

The Lord himself tells us why this happened (John 3:16–21). Jesus Christ was (and is) the light of the world. As such, his presence confronted Israel with a spiritual test. Would the people come to the light by coming to Christ, and so discover the true nature of the Kingdom? Or would they reject the light,

proving that they loved the darkness because their deeds were evil?

The NT supplies the answer. The majority loved the darkness, rejected the light, and therefore fell into deeper darkness. And in that darkness, they seized upon a false understanding of OTKP in order to justify both their hatred of the light and their desire to extinguish it (Matt. 27:15–26).

But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more. For the blessed result of Israel's rejection of Christ was that he died and rose again. And having thus made atonement for sin, he has been free ever since to create and extend his spiritual kingdom, filling the hearts of Jews and Gentiles the world over with his light and life (John 1:5; Col. 1:11–14). The veiling of OTKP was part and parcel of God's predetermined plan for the redemption of the world (Acts 2:22–23).

How Do We Recognize OTKP?

How do we recognize an OTKP when we come upon it? The answer is twofold.

In part, we look for certain literary cues, cues that are clearly designed to catch our attention and send us a message: "This prophecy is telling you about the last days, the eschatological era, the season in Salvation History when Christ and the New Covenant will appear. So listen up!"

The cues are diverse. They include such expressions as "on that day" (Isa. 2:11; 4:1–2; Jer. 30:8–9), "at that time" (Isa. 18:7; Jer. 3:17), "days are coming" (Jer. 30:3; Amos 9:13), "the time is coming" (Isa. 66:18), "in the latter days" (Jer. 30:24; Dan. 10:14; Mic. 4:1), "in the latter years" (Ezek. 38:8), and "afterward, however, it will come to pass" (Jer. 46:26; 49:6; Joel 2:28). Usually, though not always, these phrases signal an OTKP.

More important than cues, however, is content. Does the prophecy speak of Israel's eschatological rescue from captivity, and/or of their eschatological restoration to the Promised Land? Does it speak of the Person and Work of the Messiah *after* his exaltation as High King? Does it speak of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, new circumcised hearts of flesh, and the forgiveness of sins? Does it speak of the progress, peace, justice, holiness, and joy of the Messiah's universal Kingdom? Does it speak of the Last Battle, the Resurrection of the Dead, the Day of the LORD, or the glories of the World to Come? If so, we are dealing with an OTKP.

There is, however, an important caveat. When we encounter such

prophecies, we must keep in mind that they sometimes display a biblical phenomenon that theologians refer to as *prophetic perspective* or *prophetic blending*. NT theologian George Ladd explains its nature and purpose as follows:

The OT hope [of the Kingdom] is always ethical, and not speculative. It lets the light of the future shine on the present so that Israel may be confronted by history in the here and now. For this reason there is a coalescing of the near and the distant future. God will act in the near future to save or judge Israel, but he will also act in the indeterminate future to bring about the fulfillment of the eschatological hope. The prophets do not sharply distinguish between the near and the distant future, for both will see the act of God for his people.¹

Does Jeremiah foresee that after seventy years of captivity a remnant of chastened and penitent Jews will return from Babylon to the Promised Land (Jer. 3:11–18; 29:10–14)? To be sure. But as we read his prophecies, we realize that he is also foreseeing something greater and more enduring: converted Jews and Gentiles with new hearts of love for God, rescued from the Domain of Darkness and dwelling together forever as the new Jerusalem of God: as the very throne upon which the LORD is pleased to rest (Jer. 3:17). In short, he is seeing the Church in the days of the New Covenant (Gal. 4:26; 6:16). Equipped with the NCH the biblical interpreter will be able to discern both layers of meaning. He will be able to read Jeremiah's pregnant words not only as a simple OT prophecy with an historical fulfillment among the godly Jews of OT times, but also as an OTKP with an eschatological fulfillment in the Church.

Why it is Impossible to Interpret OTKP Literally

Our premillenarian brothers believe that OTKPs will be literally fulfilled in a future millennium. Standing squarely with evangelicals of all stripes, they correctly assert that the Bible should be interpreted straightforwardly unless contextual or theological reasons require otherwise. In addressing OTKP, they point to OT Messianic prophecies of the birth, person, life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ. If these OT prophecies were literally fulfilled, should we not also interpret OTKPs of Christ's Kingdom literally?

Manifestly operating according to this premise, historic premillenarian

Wayne Grudem writes:

Several OT passages [Psalm 72, Isaiah 11, 65, etc.] seem to fit neither in the present age, nor in the eternal state. These passages indicate some future stage in the history of redemption which is far greater than the present Church Age, but which still does not see the removal of all sin and rebellion and death from the earth . . . Do they not indicate a future millennial kingdom?²

Here, then, is the premillenarian mindset: OTKP must be interpreted more or less literally, and its sphere of fulfillment must therefore be in a future millennium.

But this solution is easier to postulate than to perform. Indeed, many good Bereans, after valiant attempts at a literal interpretation, finally realize that contextual and theological reasons really do force them to interpret OTKP typologically and figuratively, in terms of the New Covenant. Here, very briefly, are eight such reasons.³

1. OTKP says nothing about a thousand-year stage of the Kingdom of God.

Premillenarians are guilty of what is called eisegesis: They read their preferred (i.e., futuristic) interpretation of Revelation 20 into OTKP. But OTKP refuses to comply. When the prophets describe the coming Kingdom, they say nothing at all about a temporary one-thousand-year reign of Christ. Rather, they say (or imply) that the Kingdom they are foreseeing will last forever. For example, God will replant his people in the land, never again to be pulled up from it (Amos 9:11-15). Israel will never again be put to shame, and Jerusalem will be inhabited *forever* (Joel 2:18–27; 3:20). Of the increase of the Messiah's government and peace there will be no end (Isa. 9:6-7). When the ransomed of the Lord shall return, everlasting joy will be upon their heads (Isa. 35:10; 61:7). When God renews the heavens and the earth, Israel will be glad and rejoice forever in what he creates (Isa. 65:17). In the latter days, the mountains of Israel will no longer devour men or bereave God's nation of her children (Ezek. 36:13-15). Instead, Israel will dwell in her homeland forever, God's servant David will be their Prince *forever*, and God will set his sanctuary in their midst forever (Ezek. 37:15–28; 43:7, 9). What premillenarians call millennial conditions, the OT prophets call eternal conditions. But since these

conditions—understood literally—cannot possibly last forever, we must interpret the prophecies that speak of them typologically and figuratively, rather than literally.

2. OTKP, literally interpreted, results in many apparent contradictions.

We have seen that an inductive reading of the Law and the Prophets gives us the Representative Idea of the nature of Kingdom of God. This idea pictures the Kingdom as an eternal, universal theocracy, mediated to the nations by ethnic Israel and her Messiah, administered in accordance with the Law of Moses, and set in a spiritually and physically renewed cosmos. However, as we also saw, a close study of OTKP turns up many "uncooperative" predictions that (apparently) contradict one or more of the elements of the Representative Idea. These contradictions, which can be maddening, have caused many a poor literalist to shelter his aching mind in the sanctuary of the NCH.

To illustrate this problem, let's consider some of the OTKPs that picture the eternal World to Come.

The prophets repeatedly tell us that in the days of the Kingdom *all* men and *all* nations will worship the LORD (Deut. 32:43; Ps. 22:27; 66:4; 72; 89; Isa. 11:10; 42:1–4; 49:1–7; Jer. 3:16–17; 12:14–17; Dan. 7:26–27; Zeph. 2:7). However, Amos and Hosea make no mention of the Gentiles at all, picturing redeemed Israel as dwelling alone in the Promised Land (Hos. 1:10–11; 2:14–23; Amos 9:11–15). Obadiah and Joel are more explicit, predicting the final destruction of Israel's surrounding enemies (Joel 3:9–21; Obad. 1:15–21). Zechariah, on the other hand, has eschatological Egypt and other nations surviving, yet (sometimes) refusing to go up to Jerusalem to worship the LORD of hosts at the Feast of Tabernacles, and being judged accordingly (Zech. 14:16–19). None of these prophets speak a word about a millennium. All are speaking of the eternal state. How then shall we understand these apparent contradictions, and, in Zechariah's case, this apparent blot on the glories of the World to Come?

Again, the prophets tell us that in the days of the Kingdom, nation will not lift up sword against nation (Isa. 2:4), that men will beat their swords into plowshares (Micah 4:3), that the peace of the Messiah's government will never end (Isa. 9:6–7), and that no foreign enemy will ever again invade Israel's homeland (Ezek. 34:28; Joel 3:17). Yet Micah, fully expecting eschatological

Assyria to attack Israel and tread in her palaces, promises that the Messiah and his armies will repulse the enemy and carry the battle to the very entrances of the land of Nimrod (Mic. 5:5–6). In that day the remnant of Jacob will be among the nations like a lion among the flocks: It will be "at peace" because it will wage war and always win (see Mic. 5:7–8)! So then: In the completed Kingdom will there be perfect peace or continual victory in war?

Again, Isaiah says that in the days of the Kingdom no youth will die before his hundredth birthday, and that the man who fails to reach one hundred will be thought accursed (Isa. 65:17–20). Similarly, Zechariah envisions old men and old women sitting in the streets of Jerusalem, their staffs in hand, watching children at play (Zech. 8:4–5). These prophets seem to be saying that in the Kingdom of God old age and death will remain. However, elsewhere God tells us that in the last days he will swallow up death forever, and that he himself will be the destruction of the grave (Isa. 25:8; 26:19; Hos. 13:14).

And what of the luminaries: the sun, the moon, and the stars? Isaiah predicts that they will completely disappear: The sky will be rolled up like a scroll, and its whole host will fall like leaves from a grape vine, or like ripe fruit from a fig tree (Isa. 34:4). Yet he himself also tells us that in the days of the new heavens and the new earth all flesh will come to worship before the LORD from one New Moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another (Isa. 66:22–23). Which passage gives us the true astronomical realities of the Kingdom?

Here it is appropriate also to note the apparent contradictions between OT and NT representations of life in the Kingdom. For example, Jeremiah promises that in eschatological Jerusalem there will again be heard the joyful voice of the bride and the bridegroom (Jer. 33:10–11). Yet the Lord Jesus taught us that those who are accounted worthy to attain the Resurrection and the Age to Come will neither marry nor be given in marriage (Matt. 22:30). And again, Isaiah and Zechariah speak of procreation and the presence of children in the eternal Kingdom (Isa. 11:6–9; Zech. 8:5), whereas Jesus taught that in the Age to Come human beings will be like the angels, who appear to be without gender, and who certainly do not marry or have children (Mark 12:25).

How then shall we resolve all these apparent contradictions? Again, a future millennium is no solution at all, since the prophets never speak of a millennium, but instead clearly speak of the *eternal* Kingdom of God. No, there is only one possible solution: All OTKP is "covenantally conditioned."

That is, in all these prophecies the Holy Spirit was using OT language and imagery to speak "mysteriously" about New Covenant realities. In particular, he was using distinctly Mosaic images of divine blessing (Lev. 26:3–13; Deut. 28:1–14) and cursing (Lev. 26:14–39; Deut. 28:15–68) to depict, in a more or less figurative manner, the redemptive and judicial acts of God in the days of his two-staged Kingdom. Yes, with the help of the DNT and the NCH we can discern the true meaning of these prophecies; and when we do, the apparent contradictions immediately disappear.

3. OTKP, literally interpreted, entangles us in historical anachronisms.

Prophetic literalism forces us to imagine a (millennial) return to conditions that long ago exited the stage of world history. Will believing Jews really bring their brethren from all nations as a grain offering to the Lord on horses, in chariots, in litters, and on mules and camels (Isa. 66:20)? Will ethnic Israelites literally swoop down on the slopes of the Philistines on the west? Will they plunder the sons of the east, and possess Edom and Moab? Will the sons of Ammon be subject to Israel forevermore (Isa. 11:14)? Will Magog, Meshach, Tubal, Gomer, Sheba, Dedan, and Tarshish reappear on our maps of the Middle East? Will their armies ride to war against Israel on horses, brandishing shields and bucklers, bows and arrows, javelins and spears (Ezek. 38:4; 39:3, 9; cf. Zech. 12:4; 14:15)? A literal interpretation of these texts seems impossible. However, a typological New Covenant interpretation will speak directly to the hearts of God's people today, girding them for life, ministry, spiritual battle, and eschatological judgment in the two-staged Kingdom of God.

4. Many OTKPs are clearly symbolic.

This characteristic of OTKP was clearly meant to give the prophetic literalist pause, and to hint at a truer path to understanding. Mysteriously, Joel says that in the days of the Kingdom a spring will flow out from the house of the Lord and water the valley of Shittim (Joel 3:18). Similarly, Zechariah says that in summer and winter living waters will flow out of Jerusalem: half of them toward the eastern sea, and the other half toward the western sea (Zech. 14:8). Ezekiel is more mysterious still, predicting that a river will flow out from beneath the temple threshold, south of the altar; a river that not only grows without the help of tributaries, but also brings healing to whatever it touches,

as do the mystical trees that stand on its banks (Ezek. 47:1–12). Are not these texts, so reminiscent of Paradise Lost, clearly designed to symbolize Paradise Regained (Gen. 2:10–14; Rev. 22:1–2)? Again, when speaking of eschatological Jerusalem, Isaiah says that God will make peace her administrators, and righteousness her overseers (Isa. 60:17). He also says that her inhabitants will call her walls salvation, and her gates praise (Isa. 60:18). Such predictions certainly *seem* to be symbolic, and the NT affirms that in fact they are (Rev. 21:10–22). But if *some* OTKPs are symbolic, could others be as well? And could it be that through them God himself is warning us against a literal interpretation of OTKP?

5. The literal interpretation of OTKPs is ruled out by Jeremiah's prediction of a New Covenant (Jer. 31:31–34; Heb. 8:7–13).

Here we have a major theological problem that should indeed loosen the literalist's grip on OTKP. We have spoken of it before. Yes, most (but not all) OTKPs envision God ruling his universal Kingdom through ethnic Israel in accordance with the Law of Moses. Micah, for example, says that in the days of the Kingdom God's law (or instruction) will come forth from Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem (Mic. 4:2). Isaiah says that the coastlands will wait for the Messiah's law (Isa. 42:4). Many OTKPs envision eschatological Israel (and the Gentiles) engaging in temple worship and observing traditional feast days (Isa. 2:1-5; 33:16-24; Ezek. 45:17; Nah. 1:15; Hag. 2:7–9; Zech. 14:16–18). Yet speaking to us in Jeremiah's famous prophecy, God explicitly states that in the days of the Kingdom he will do away with the old Mosaic covenant, institute a New Covenant, and write his laws upon his people's hearts (Jer. 31:31-34). Ezekiel hints at the same thing (Ezek. 11:18–20; 20:37; 36:25–27). How, then, do we reconcile these two conflicting streams of OTKP? Surely there is only one possible answer: We must see the former stream as speaking figuratively about the latter, and the latter as speaking explicitly about (life under) the New Covenant. Happily, this is exactly what the NT affirms (2 Cor. 3:4ff; Heb. 8:7–13).

6. The literal interpretation of OTKPs is ruled out by NT teaching on the nature of the Kingdom.

This was our theme in Part II of our journey. There we learned that from all eternity the Kingdom was meant to be a direct spiritual reign of God—

through his Son, and by his Spirit—over his people and their world. We saw that the kingdom of Israel, governed in accordance with the Law of Moses, pictured this reign, and that OTKP, using language and imagery drawn from the (days of the) Law, promised and predicted it. Now that it has entered history, we can understand what the pictures and predictions mean. We can see that OTKP must not be interpreted literally, but typologically and figuratively. We can see that the prophets were using Old Covenant language and imagery to speak of the New Covenant powers and institutions through which God would spiritually reign over his people.

7. The literal interpretation of OTKPs is ruled out by NT teaching on the structure of the Kingdom.

All who believe that God has spoken to us definitively through Christ and the apostles understand that a literal interpretation of OTKP is impossible unless the DNT teaches a future millennial stage of the Kingdom in which OTKP can be literally fulfilled. We have seen, however, that it does not. Rather, it repeatedly pictures the Kingdom as entering history in two simple stages: a temporary spiritual Kingdom of the Son, followed by an eternal spiritual and physical Kingdom of the Father (and the Son). Moreover, in Part IV of our study we will see that both the Revelation as a whole, and chapter 20 in particular, rule out the notion of a future millennium. In other words, explicit NT teaching about the twofold structure of the Kingdom of God renders the literal fulfillment of OTKP impossible. Unless we are prepared to abandon the divine inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible, we *must* interpret OTKP typologically and figuratively, in terms of the New Covenant.

8. The literal interpretation of OTKPs is ruled out by the way in which the apostles actually interpreted them.

This is our theme in the section ahead. Whether by precept or example, the apostles of Christ consistently taught us to interpret OTKP typologically and figuratively. They taught us that in OTKP God spoke—and still speaks—"in a mystery" about the elements, institutions, and blessings of the Eternal Covenant in Christ.

NT Principles for Interpreting OTKP

Having just seen what we cannot do, let us now see what we must do. Let us

seat ourselves at the feet of the apostles and allow them to teach us three basic NT principles by which we may properly interpret OTKP. Along the way we'll discuss several subordinate principles that properly fall under each heading. Also, we'll consider a few NT caveats that should further increase our appreciation for the nuance, richness, and beauty of OTKP.

1. All OTKPs are fulfilled in the twofold spiritual reign (Kingdom) of God instituted by Christ under the New Covenant, and must be interpreted accordingly.

This principle is based upon explicit NT teaching—both dominical and apostolic—about the nature and stages of the Kingdom of God. It identifies the nature of the Kingdom as a direct spiritual reign of the triune God over his people and their world. It identifies the stages of the Kingdom as twofold: the Kingdom of the Son (which is temporary and spiritual), followed by the Kingdom of the Father (which is eternal, spiritual, and physical). It tells us that we must interpret OTKP *eschatologically* (i.e., in terms of the two-staged spiritual Kingdom that God promised to bring into the world in the last days) and *covenantally* (i.e., in terms of the New Covenant introduced by Christ).

This principle enables us to understand the various elements of the Representative OT Idea of the coming of the Kingdom. Let us briefly look at the four main stages of that coming, and consider once again their NT fulfillment.

First, OTKPs that speak of *The Days of the Messiah* are primarily fulfilled in stage one the Kingdom: the Kingdom of the Son. As to their duration, they are the days between Christ's first and second advents. As to their purpose on the earth, they are the days of Gospel proclamation and probation, during which God, through the preaching of the Church, tests the nations concerning their love of the truth, and calls them to repentance and faith in Christ. As to their effect, they are the days in which the exalted Lord applies to his people the redemption that he purchased for them during the days of his humiliation. And as to their connection with OTKP, they are the days in which the exalted Christ rules the universe from Heaven above (and not upon the earth below), with a view to creating and extending his spiritual kingdom through the spiritual warfare of the Church Militant. These great NT truths enable the Christian interpreter to understand all of the OTKPs depicting the inauguration, growth, warfare, universality, and blessedness of the Messiah's

reign. They also enable the Christian interpreter to see himself and his ministry in these prophecies, and to rejoice.

Secondly, OTKPs that speak of *The Last Battle* between Israel and the nations are fulfilled in the final clash between God and Satan, Christ and the Antichrist, the Church and the World. This conclusion flows naturally from the explicit teaching of Christ's apostles, who clearly regarded the Last Battle between the Church and the World as the climax of the perennial clash between the Woman and the Serpent, and between her seed and his seed (Rom. 16:20). It is the great eschatological antitype, of which Israel's lesser conflicts with Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, and Rome were but historical precursors and types (2 Thess. 2:1–4; Rev. 11; 13; 16; 19; 20).

Thirdly, OTKPs speaking of *The Day of the LORD*, in which the God of Israel arises to execute final judgment upon the rebellious nations, and also to bestow final redemption upon his people, will be fulfilled on the Day of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:8; Phil. 1:6, 10; 2:16). That is, they will be fulfilled at the Parousia of the High King of Heaven, when Christ returns to the earth to consummate his Messianic reign by raising the dead, transforming the living saints, judging the world in righteousness, and creating new heavens and a new earth, the eternal home of the redeemed (John 5:25–29; 13:3; Acts 17:31; Phil. 2:5–11).

And fourthly, OTKPs speaking of the World to Come will be fulfilled in the second stage of the Kingdom: the eternal Kingdom of the Father (and the Son), set in the new heavens and the new earth. As we shall see, in these prophecies the Holy Spirit used many different OT images of divine blessing in order to speak to us of a world that is fully released from its bondage to futility into the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Matt. 13:41–43; Rom. 8:18–21; 2 Peter 3:13).

In passing, it is important to note that some OTKPs—and perhaps quite a few—are fulfilled in *both* phases of the Kingdom. For those schooled in NT teaching about the Kingdom, this is not surprising. As we saw earlier, the two phases of the Kingdom share a common essence: Both are spheres of rescue and restoration in which God, through Christ, by the Holy Spirit, rules directly over his blessed people and their world. The only fundamental difference between them is that in the Kingdom of the Son the blessings are largely spiritual and experienced "in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 1:3; 2:6), whereas in the Kingdom of the Father they are both spiritual and

physical, and are experienced on a spiritually renewed earth. Laden as they are with typological and poetic imagery, many OTKPs are well able to speak of both at the same time.

By way of illustration, consider again Micah's prophecy of the LORD's future reign in Zion (Mic. 4:1–4). These things, says the prophet, will come to pass "in the latter days." But the NT teaches us that the latter days include both stages of the Kingdom. Therefore, on a first reading of this prophecy we can readily see how Micah's words are fulfilled in the Kingdom of the Son: that is, in the Era of Proclamation, and in the hearts of all who are seated in the heavenly places in Christ (Eph. 1:3, 2:6). On this view, the LORD's house is Christ's Church. The Mountain of the LORD's house is the Zion above, to which spiritually reborn believers in Jesus have come (Heb. 12:22). Even now, through the faithful preaching of the Gospel, many nations of new believers are ascending this Mountain to worship the God of Jacob. Even now, through the High Prophet of Heaven, God is teaching his people his ways (John 16:13). Even now Gospel instruction is going forth from Zion, and the Word of the LORD from the Jerusalem above, of which the Church on earth is a member in good standing (Gal. 4:26; Heb. 12:22). And even now believers in Christ sit under the vine of their justification and under the fig tree of their reconciliation, with none to make them afraid, seeing that God has rescued them from all their spiritual enemies (Luke 1:73–75).

However, on a second reading of this prophecy we can just as easily see that all these promises will be fulfilled in the Kingdom of the Father (and the Son). Far from being withdrawn or fundamentally transformed, they will only be enriched and extended (into the physical realm) in the glorious World to Come. Though the Kingdom enters history in two stages, it always has but one essence: *rescue* from all our enemies in the Domain of Darkness, and *restoration* to all the blessings that God intended for his people from the beginning. Accordingly, OTKPs that speak of eschatological redemption are often fulfilled in both stages of the one Kingdom of God.

2. To a greater or lesser degree all OTKPs are covenantally conditioned: They use OT types and shadows to express NT truth, and must be interpreted accordingly.

Our first principle dealt with when OTKP is fulfilled: It is fulfilled eschatologically, in the last days, in the two-staged Kingdom of God introduced

by the New Covenant. Our second principle deals with *how OTKP is expressed*: It is expressed *typologically, christologically,* and *covenantally.* That is, it uses types drawn from OT law and history to speak figuratively about the life, times, blessings, vicissitudes, and final triumph of the people of God living under the New and Eternal Covenant.

We introduced this principle in our discussion of progressive revelation. We saw that the great theme of the Bible is the Eternal Covenant in Christ. In OT times this Covenant was revealed *mysteriously*. That is, it was veiled under a tapestry of types and shadows, awaiting the fullness of time, when the veil would be removed through the coming of Christ, the New Covenant, and the Kingdom of God.

This great truth lies at the very heart of the NCH. It mandates a typological, christological, and covenantal interpretation of the OT in general, and of OTKP in particular. Speaking of the OT Scriptures, Jesus said, "It is those very Scriptures that testify about Me" (John 5:39 AMP). As we have seen, this is true of OT history, OT Law, simple OT Messianic Prophecy, and OTKP. To understand them at their deepest level we must ask ourselves, "What is this text telling us about Christ and the things of the Eternal Covenant?" Here is the master key that gives us full entrance into the world of OTKP. When we come to Micah 4:1-5, or to any other OTKP, we bring the Teacher and the DNT with us. Knowing that the text is covenantally conditioned, we ask them to help us "decondition" it (i.e., decode it). Knowing that here precious NT truth is hidden under an OT veil of type and shadow, we ask the Lord to illumine the text, remove the veil, and dispel the shadow (2 Cor. 3:12–16). And when he does, we respond like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus: Our hearts burn within us as we behold the things of Christ and the Eternal Covenant in all OTKP (Luke 24:32).

3. All OTKPs are fulfilled in the Church, and must be interpreted accordingly.

We have seen that OTKP is fulfilled *eschatologically* because it is fulfilled in the last days; and that it is fulfilled *christologically* and *covenantally* because it is fulfilled in Christ and under the New Covenant. Our third and final principle flows logically from the previous two: OTKP is fulfilled *ecclesiologically* because it is fulfilled among the people of the New Covenant: the Church, comprised of all Jews or Gentiles who have responded in faith to the call of God in the

Gospel.

Among some premillenarians this principle is considered offensive, since they believe it "robs" ethnic Israel of special promises that God made to his OT people. But the offense is based on a hermeneutical error. Such interpreters assume that in OTKP God was promising to exalt *physical* (*i.e., ethnic*) Israel by granting them preeminence in a future millennium. The truth, however, is that in OTKP God is promising to exalt *spiritual* Israel by giving them new life in Christ in the two-staged Kingdom of God. Happily, spiritual Israel includes multitudes of elect Jews. And far from robbing them, amillennarians gladly affirm that God has always had great things in store for them, things far better than that strange mix of peace and war, blessing and curse, and life and death that fills the dreams of our premillennarian brothers.

But as important as it is, this principle requires further elaboration. Two points may be made.

First, we must again remember that some OT prophecies about the future of God's people subtly blend simple OT prophecies with OTKPs. By definition, simple OT prophecies are literally fulfilled in OT times. Therefore, this component of a blended prophecy was fulfilled prior to Pentecost among (some of) God's OT people: ethnic Israel. However, the eschatological component of a blended prophecy is fulfilled after the Day of Pentecost among God's NT people: the Church. Daniel's famous—and quite challenging—prophecy of "the seventy sevens" is an outstanding example of such a blended prophecy (Dan. 9:24–27). In a moment we will discuss it in some detail.

Secondly, there are a number of OTKPs that have what might be called a twofold interpersonal fulfillment. The idea here is less intimidating than my name for it. In these texts the prophet speaks of eschatological Israel's relation to latter-day Gentiles; that is, the relation of Christians to those who are not yet part of the New Covenant community. Therefore, reading them from one angle we can see that they are fulfilled in the relationship between Jewish Christians and their Gentile neighbors who have not yet trusted in Christ. However, from another angle we can see that they are also fulfilled in the relationship between the Church and the unbelieving world around her, a world typified in these prophecies by "the nations" that remain outside of the covenant.

By way of illustration, let us consider Zechariah 8:23. It reads, "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'In those days ten men from all the nations will grasp the

garment of a Jew, saying, "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you."" The phrase "in those days" signals that we are dealing with an OTKP. Therefore, it is fulfilled ecclesiologically, in the Church. But how? Well, it was fulfilled when a Gentile eunuch from Ethiopia asked Philip the Jew for light on the meaning of Isaiah 53 (Acts 8:26–31). Similarly, it was fulfilled when the Gentiles in Antioch begged Paul the Jew to preach the Gospel to them again on the next Sabbath (Acts 13:42). But it was also fulfilled when the Gospel "sounded forth" from the Gentile converts of Thessalonica, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also "in every place" (1 Cor. 1:2). The result was that even more Gentiles believed and became disciples of Christ, realizing that the true and living God was present in the midst of their assemblies (1 Cor. 14:25; 1 Thess. 1:8). And the same has been true all throughout Church history, whenever the Gentile descendants of Abraham have preached the Gospel to unbelievers (Rom. 4:16).

So then: Zechariah 8:23, an OTKP, has a twofold interpersonal fulfillment, not only in spiritual relations between Jewish Christians and Gentiles, but also in spiritual relations between Gentile Christians and unbelievers. Nevertheless, since our text is fulfilled under the New Covenant, it is fulfilled exclusively in the sphere of the Church. And such is the case for all OTKP.

It is astonishing to see how fulsomely the apostles draw upon OT types and shadows to describe the NT people of God. Surely the most impressive example of this phenomenon is found in 1 Peter 2:4–10. Speaking to—and of —Christ's Church, Peter describes it as a spiritual house (2 Sam. 7:27), a holy priesthood (Ex. 19:6; Isa. 61:6), a royal priesthood (Ps. 110; Zech. 6:13), the Zion of God (Ps. 9:11; 48:2), a temple (1 Kings 6:11–13; 2 Chron. 7:1), a chosen race (Deut. 7:7–8; 10:15; Isa. 65:9), a holy nation (Ex. 19:6; Deut. 7:6), a treasured possession (Deut. 7:6; Mal. 3:17), and the people of God (Ex. 3:7; 6:7; Hos. 1:10).

Similarly, Paul can speak of the Church as Abraham's seed (Rom. 4:16; Gal. 3:29), the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22; 4:12; 5:28–30; Col. 1:24; cf. Gen. 2:18–25), the Bride of Christ (Eph. 5:25–26; Isa. 49:18; 62:5; cf. Jer. 2:2), the flock of God (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2; cf. Ps. 78:52; Isa. 40:11), the temple of God (Eph. 2:19–21; cf. Ezek. 43:7), the people of God (Rom. 9:25–26; 2 Cor. 6:16), and the Israel of God (Gal. 6:16; Heb. 8:8–12). Meanwhile, John refers to Christians as the children of God (1 John 3:1–2, 9–10; cf. Ex. 3:9–11), and James addresses the Church as the twelve tribes (James 1:1; cf. Rev. 7:1–4).

Reading these texts, we realize at once that the apostles were masters of the NCH. They interpreted OTKP eschatologically, typologically, christologically, covenantally, and ecclesiologically. They understood that in these prophecies God was speaking of everything that would befall his New Covenant people, whether Jew or Gentile, in the days of the Kingdom of God. They understood that OTKP is about the Church and for the Church.

Did the God of OTKP Lie?

It is time now to address two questions that have greatly troubled our premillennarian brethren.

The first is this: If OT prophecies concerning the birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ were literally fulfilled, by what right do we say that OT prophecies of the Kingdom of God are not?

As we have seen, this question arises from a failure to distinguish between simple Messianic prophecies and OTKPs. The former were straightforwardly expressed and fulfilled in OT times, the latter were typologically expressed and fulfilled in NT times. The purpose of the former was manifold: to supply ethnic Israel with hard evidence that Jesus was/is their Messiah, to equip the Church to confirm and defend the Gospel, and to strengthen the saint's faith in the omniscience and sovereignty of God and the trustworthiness of his Word. The purpose of the latter was also manifold: to give hope to God's OT saints, but also to conceal the mystery of the Covenant and the Kingdom under types and shadows, thereby testing ethnic Israel at the first advent of their Messiah, and also reserving for Christ the prerogative of unveiling "true truth" to Israel and the nations. Again, God was pleased to hide *all* the treasures of wisdom and knowledge in Christ, so that Christ himself might open them up to his own (Matt. 13:10–17; Col. 1:26; 2:3).

This brings us to the premillenarian's second question: If indeed God spoke to his OT saints typologically and figuratively in OTKP, did he not in effect lie to them and deceive them? Had he not used simple prophecies to train them to interpret prophecy literally? Why would he deceive them by changing course and delivering Kingdom truth "mysteriously" in types and shadows?

While at first glance this objection may seem weighty, there are at least four good reasons why it cannot stand.

First, in speaking as he did through the OT prophets, God told the absolute truth. Not one word of all the good words in OTKP has fallen—or will fall—

to the ground (Josh. 23:14). Yes, God did not say everything he meant, for much was purposely hidden under a veil of type and shadow. Nevertheless, he certainly meant everything he said. In OTKP he intended to convey important truths, he intended them to have a desired effect, and he worked in such a way that they did indeed have that effect. The Spirit of Truth bore witness to the truth of God's prophetic words in the hearts of his OT elect, using those words to give them light, courage, and hope. Therefore, in giving his people OTKP God did not lie.

Secondly, even in OTKP itself God gave his people many hints that these revelations were cloaked in mystery, and not to be pressed into a literalist mold. We discussed these hints earlier. Apparent contradictions, patently symbolic texts, and promises of a New Covenant all stood as warnings against an overly literal interpretation of OTKP.

Thirdly, God repeatedly said or intimated to his OT people that they would not fully understand his redemptive purpose and plan until the last days. For example, looking ahead to the time of Christ and speaking of the Gospel he would bring, God warned Israel through Isaiah, saying, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways" (Isa. 55:6-13). Similarly, he spoke of a future day when all the sons of Zion would be taught by the LORD (Isa. 54:13; John 6:45); a day when their Teacher would no longer hide himself; a day when they would see their Teacher and hear a word behind them, saying, "This is the way, walk in it" (Isa. 30:19–21). Micah looks forward to a (Kingdom) time when God himself will teach his ways to all peoples (Mic. 4:2). Jeremiah, speaking of God's redemptive promises to Israel, declares, "In the latter days you will understand this" (Jer. 30:18-31:6). As for Daniel, he was astonished by an apocalyptic vision he had just received, but "there was no one to explain it" (Dan. 8:27). Indeed, after giving him his final vision, the angel of God told him to "keep these words secret and seal up the [whole] book until the end of time" (Dan. 12:4). Only then would a people arise who could give (full) insight to many (Dan. 11:33). Only then would knowledge increase (i.e., to the point of fullness and completion; see Dan. 12:4). Only then would these Kingdom prophecies be fully understood. Confronted by words such as these, what OT saint could fail to walk humbly before the mysteries of OTKP (Isa. 66:2)?

This brings us to our fourth and final point: No sooner did God begin to fulfill OTKP, than he also supplied the keys by which anyone who wanted to

could interpret it correctly. As we have seen, even *before* the coming of the Kingdom Jesus himself revealed the mysteries of the Kingdom to his inquiring disciples (Matt. 13:1–16). After the Day of Pentecost, when the first stage of the Kingdom had begun, he gave his holy apostles and prophets further light—indeed, definitive light—on the nature and coming of the Kingdom and the proper interpretation of OTKP. Ever since then, that (inscripturated) light has been available to honest seekers of all times and places. If, then, in OT times there was indeed occasion for a certain amount of confusion—and therefore for holy caution, patience, and trust—regarding the true meaning of OTKP, in NT times that occasion is completely removed. Henceforth, to all who are willing to receive it, Christ offers the Rosetta Stone: the NCH, by which they can easily translate the mysterious tropes of OTKP into glorious NT truth. Therefore, if any today are deceived by OTKP, they are not deceived by God, but by themselves.

The Apostolic Interpretation of OTKP

How did the apostles actually interpret OTKP? Did they do so literally, looking for its literal fulfillment in a future millennium? Or did they do so eschatologically, typologically, christologically, covenantally, and ecclesiologically, seeing its fulfillment in the Church, under the New Covenant in Christ, and in "the last days" of the two-staged Era of Fulfillment? It is time now to find out.

In this section we will look briefly at seven NT texts in which the Lord's apostles cite, interpret, and apply specific OTKPs. In the interest of saving space, I will not usually reproduce the texts themselves. Therefore, please bring your open Bible to this treasure trove of NT truth about the meaning of OTKP.

1. The Exaltation of the High King of Heaven

(Acts 2:33–36; Psalm 110)

Earlier we looked at Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost and saw how he interpreted Psalm 110, an OTKP that appears quite prominently in the NT. He makes no mention of a future millennial kingdom. In Peter's eyes the psalm has its fulfillment in the heavenly mediatorial reign of Christ. Indeed, he is quite explicit that Psalm 110:1 was fulfilled when Christ ascended into Heaven and sat down at the right hand of the Father. This helps us understand

the rest of the Psalm. Verses 2–3 are fulfilled throughout the entire Era of Proclamation, as God the Father extends the scepter of his Son—the High King of Heaven—over the whole earth. He will do so through the Church, a people who volunteer freely to preach the Gospel in the Day (i.e., the era) of Christ's power (i.e., of his cosmic authority). Verses 4–6—an OTKP concerning the Day of the LORD—will be fulfilled at Christ's Parousia when, in judgment, he places all his enemies beneath his feet, shattering kings, destroying "nations" of rebellious sinners, and definitively crushing Satan, the former "head" over a broad country (Gen. 3:15; John 12:31; Acts 2:35; 1 Cor. 15:25). Peter's interpretation of Psalm 110:1 opens up the meaning of the whole Psalm, a meaning that is confirmed by NT eschatology, easily discerned through the proper use of the NCH, and instructive and encouraging to the Church.

2. What Kind of House Will You Build for Me?

(Acts 7:44–50; Isaiah 66:1–2)

Though Stephen was not an apostle, he sat under apostolic teaching that likely made its way into his great sermon before the Sanhedrin (Acts 2:42). His words contain subtle, inspired, and precious insights into the apostolic view of the Church and the proper interpretation of OTKP.

Having been accused of speaking against the temple (Acts 6:13), the Spirit-filled evangelist concludes his defense by addressing that very subject. In former times it pleased God that Israel should first worship him in a tabernacle, and later on in Solomon's temple. But this arrangement was only provisional, since the Most High cannot dwell in houses made by human hands, nor does he desire to do so (Acts 7:48). In support of these shocking assertions, Stephen then quotes Isaiah 66:1–2:

"Heaven is my throne, and earth is a footstool for my feet. What sort of house could you build for me?" says the Lord, "or what place could serve as the place of my rest? Did not my hand make all these things?" (Acts 7:49–50)

Yes, even in OT times God hinted broadly at the inadequacy and impermanence of Israel's ancient places of worship. But where *does* he desire to dwell? Apparently Stephen had tried to answer that question in previous conversations with his kinsmen. Here he does not. Note, however, that in the

very OT text he cited God himself gives us the explanation: "But I will look to this one, at one who is humble and contrite in spirit, and who trembles at My word" (Isa. 66:2). In other words, the true place of God's rest—the true house in which he is pleased to dwell forever—is the hearts of his humble, contrite, Gospel-believing people. Stephen had learned this great truth both from Christ and Peter (Matt. 12:6; John 2:19–22; 14:23; Acts 2:38; 1 Peter 2:5). Having seen it confirmed in Isaiah, he tried to share it with his Jewish brethren. Alas, he could not get their blind eyes to see or their uncircumcised ears to hear: God's new and eternal temple is his Church, the everlasting body of his Son (Eph. 2:22).

Though Isaiah 66:1–2 is not a prophecy in the strictest sense, it is situated right next door to some stirring OTKPs, and therefore hints at their proper interpretation (e.g., Isa. 65:17–25; 66:7–14, 18–20). As Stephen well knew, these texts tell us much about where God will dwell "in that day." He will dwell in a New Jerusalem of his own creation (Isa. 65:18–19; 66:10, 13). He will dwell in his Holy Mountain, upon which the New Jerusalem will rest (Isa. 65:25; 66:20). He will dwell among the people of a nation born in a day (Isa. 66:8), and among the newborn sons of Zion who will nurse at the comforting breasts of the Holy City (Isa. 66:8–12). But if God cannot dwell in a house made by human hands, will he dwell in a city made by human hands? Who exactly are the inhabitants of Isaiah's eschatological city? Who are the citizens of this mysterious nation that will be born in a day? How is that nation to be born, and when? How would Stephen have answered these questions? How would the apostles? How would you?

3. A Light to the Gentiles

(Acts 13:46–47; Isaiah 49:5–7)

In Acts 13:13–52 Luke recounts the ministry of Paul and his companions to the Jews and God-fearing Gentiles of Pisidian Antioch. Like Peter on the Day of Pentecost, so here: Paul offered his Jewish brethren a sterling exposition and defense of the Gospel, buttressed by many OT Messianic prophecies. When, however, most of the Jews resisted his message, Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said:

It was necessary for the word of God to be spoken to you first; but since you reject it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life—take

note of this—we are now turning to the Gentiles. For thus the Lord has commanded us, saying, "I have put you in place as a light for the Gentiles, so that you may bring salvation to the very ends of the earth." (Acts 13:46–47)

Here, Paul is quoting from an OTKP: Isaiah 49:1–12. Both the prophecy and Paul's handling of it are fascinating. In Isaiah 49:1–6 it is Christ who is speaking. He identifies himself as God's Servant and as God's "Israel"—the Redeemer who will prevail with God to restore the preserved ones of (ethnic) Israel, and serve as a light to the Gentiles so that God's salvation may reach the ends of the earth. Then in Isaiah 49:7–13 we hear the voice of the LORD responding to the Servant's discouragement, assuring him that his work will enable God's people (both Jew and Gentile) to inherit the Promised Land and experience the everlasting comforts of the Kingdom.

Paul's take on this is clear. Yes, the One who opens the door of the Kingdom—both to Jews and Gentiles—is the Lord Jesus Christ, the suffering and triumphant Servant of the LORD. But it is also the Church, the suffering and triumphant Body of Christ. For God has not only placed Christ in the world as a light for the nations; he has likewise placed Paul, Barnabas, and every other member of the body of his Son who brings the light of the truth of the Gospel to those who are bound in darkness (Isa. 49:9; Matt. 5:14; John 1:5). In sum, we find that Paul used the NCH to interpret Isaiah 49:1–12 christologically, ecclesiologically, and eschatologically. It is not fulfilled in a thousand-year Mosaic theocracy, but in Christ, in the Church, and in the twofold spiritual Kingdom that Christ is bringing into the world in these last days.

4. The Rebuilt Tabernacle of David

(Acts 15:12–21; Amos 9:11–12)

The scene: a great council of the Church in Jerusalem. The matter under discussion: Should Gentile Christians be circumcised and compelled to follow the Mosaic Law? Paul and Barnabas, having labored fruitfully among the Gentiles, say no. Peter agrees, citing God's sovereign work of grace in Cornelius's household. Then James—the leading elder of the church in Jerusalem—gives his judgment:

Men and brothers, listen to me: Simon has just related how God first demonstrated his desire to take from among the Gentiles a people for his name. And with this the words of the prophets agree; as it is written, "After these things I will return and raise up once again the fallen tent of David; I will rebuild its ruins and rear it up again, so that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, even all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things known from long ago." (Acts 15:13–18)

For opening a window onto the proper interpretation of OTKP this is one of the most important texts in the DNT. To see why, we must understand James's premise. It is crystal clear: The ongoing conversion of Gentiles under the evangelistic ministry of Peter, Paul, and Barnabas is fulfilling the prophecy of Amos. Indeed, it is fulfilling *all* the OTKPs to this effect (Acts 3:24; 15:15). In James's mind the prediction of Amos is but a single example; had he been so inclined, he could easily have cited more. In his regular teaching ministry, he undoubtedly had. So too had the other apostles. As we shall see below, all of them taught that *OTKPs of the conversion of the Gentiles are being fulfilled in Christ, under the New Covenant, and in (the growth of) the Church*.

Bearing this premise in mind we can easily see how James understood Amos's prophecy, and why he used it. The phrase "after these things" (or "in that day" in the Masoretic Text) signals that the prophecy will be fulfilled in the last days. But for James, the last days have arrived. They are the days of Christ and the New Covenant. And what is God doing in these last days? He is rebuilding the fallen tent (or booth) of David. In other words, he is restoring the fallen dynasty of David.

This was a common motif in OTKP. Over and again God promised that he would restore Israel to her homeland, raise up a (Messianic) son of David, and cause his dynasty to remain forever (Ps. 89:34–37; 132:13–18; Isa. 9:7; Jer. 33:14–18; Ezek. 37:24–25; Hos. 3:5; Zech. 12:10–12; 13:1). But James has seen that Jesus Christ, the root and offspring of David, is the Messiah (Rev. 5:5). He also has seen that Christ's Church—comprised of all who believe in him, whether Jew or Gentile—is his eschatological dynasty. For James, the Church is David's booth, tabernacle, house, and family. It is no longer fallen, but is now being restored, never to be torn down again.

And why exactly is God restoring this tabernacle? Amos had said, "So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD" (Acts 15:17 NKJV; see also Amos 9:12). In view of all that was happening before their very eyes—whether in

Cornelius's household, or in Samaria, or in the far-flung Gentile churches—this could only mean one thing to James and the other apostles: Now that God has finally sent the world its Redeemer, and now that he has seated him as High King upon David's heavenly throne, he (God) has begun to fulfill his ancient promise to father Abraham: that in his Seed *all the nations of the earth* would be blessed (Gen. 22:18), and that in the end God will have a people for his own possession, called out of every tribe, tongue, family, and nation (Rev. 5:9).

So then: Following James, and using the NCH, we see that Amos's prophecy—and all the others like it—is not fulfilled in a future millennium, but in the present Era of Proclamation. It is not fulfilled on earth in Palestine, but in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. And—as all of the leaders of the Council agreed—it is not fulfilled through adherence to the Mosaic Law, but rather through simple faith in the One who fulfilled the Law and the Prophets. Accordingly, from now on there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile: All who have believed are kings of the earth and a royal priesthood in the heavenly dynasty of Christ Jesus our Lord (Ps. 89:27; 138:4; Acts 15:9; Rom. 10:12; Gal. 3:28; 1 Peter 2:9; Rev. 21:24).

5. Sons of the Living God

(Romans 9:19-26; Hosea 2:14-23)

In Romans 9–11 Paul is addressing the scandal of widespread Jewish rejection of the Gospel. In chapter 9 his main point is that God's OT promises of eschatological salvation for "Israel" have not failed, because "they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel" (9:6). He means that the OT Kingdom promises were not made to *ethnic* Israel, but to *spiritual* Israel: to the spiritual nation of elect Jews and Gentiles who, by God's sovereign grace, would become spiritually circumcised believers in the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 2:28; Phil. 3:3; Col. 2:11). These are the true human parties of the Eternal Covenant, the true "Israelite" remnant of whom God repeatedly spoke in OTKP.

In making this argument, Paul quotes Hosea 2:23:

I will call them "my people" who were not my people, and her "Beloved" who was not beloved. And it shall be that in the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," there they shall

be called the sons of the living God. (Romans 9:25-26)

Paul's handling of this verse is thought-provoking and instructive. He uses it to lend OT authority to his assertion that the NT Israel of God is comprised not only of Jews, but also of Gentiles. For Paul, the "beloved people" of whom Hosea spoke are Gentiles: Gentiles who, by God's grace, have found their way into God's eternal family.

When, however, we consult Hosea himself, we find that the extended OTKP of which this verse is the conclusion carries (or *seems* to carry) a very different sense. There God seems to be addressing ethnic Israel in her sin, the very Israel whom he has just divorced and will soon send away into captivity (Hos. 1:6, 9; 2:2). Moreover, it is to this same Israel that he seems to promise a coming Kingdom, a kingdom that consists of rescue from captivity, a new (marriage) covenant, a new heart purged of its former idolatries, and peace, prosperity, and eternal life as a nation forever sown in the Promised Land (Hos. 2:14–22). This is the Israel to whom the covenant-making God will say, "You are My people!" And this is the Israel that will reply, "You are my God!" (Hos. 2:23).

What are we to make of this? In Hosea, God seems to be speaking to ethnic Jews, yet in Romans Paul says he is speaking to Gentiles. How are we to reconcile this apparent contradiction?

Paul himself has given us the answer. In the mind of God, they are not all "Israel" who are descended from Israel. In the mind of God, the true human parties to the Eternal Covenant—the true "Israel of God"—are elect believers in Jesus Christ, whether Jew or Gentile (Gal. 6:16). It is of this "Israel" that God speaks in Hosea's great OTKP, albeit in typological and covenantally conditioned language. Was God therefore speaking about elect Jews? Yes. But was he also speaking about elect Gentiles? Yes. Therefore, Paul did not hesitate to apply Hosea 2:23 to Gentile Christians. He could, however, just as easily have applied it to himself, or to the many Jewish priests who had lately become obedient to the faith (Acts 6:7). Prior to their conversion, they too were Lo-Ammi: not God's people (Hos. 1:9). After their conversion, they too were Ammi and Ruhamah: God's people, and those who had obtained compassion (Hos. 2:1). Hosea's prophecy speaks of—and to—Jew and Gentile alike.

Here, then, is yet another instance in which we find the apostle using the NCH. To Paul's mind, Hosea was not speaking about God's plans for ethnic Israel in a future millennium. No, he was speaking about his plans for the

Church of his Son—comprised of both Jew and Gentile—in the two-staged Kingdom to come. And this is how Paul understands all OTKP, how he finds the Gospel in it, and how he preaches the Gospel from it. Surely God is calling his Church to do the same.

6. The Temple of the Living God

(2 Corinthians 6:14-18; Ezekiel 37:26-28)

In this text Paul is addressing the Corinthians. He is concerned about their spiritual health, for corrupting influences have crept into their church. By way of admonition, he issues a command, asks a series of penetrating questions, and then buttresses his exhortation by citing several relevant OT texts. Here are the words themselves:

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? And what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? And what agreement does the temple of God have with idols? For we are the temple of the living God, just as God said: "I will live in them and walk among them; I will be their God, and they will be my people. Therefore come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. And I will be a father to you, and you will be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord, the mighty ruler over all." Beloved friends, since we have these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. (2 Cor. 6:14–18)

As a glance at the cross-reference column of your study Bible will show, Paul has cited or alluded to at least ten different OT passages. Some are taken from the Law (Ex. 6:7; 29:45; Lev. 26:12), but most are found in the Prophets (Isa. 43:6–7; 52:11; Jer. 31:1, 33; Ezek. 37:26–28; Hos. 1:10). We need not discuss them at length to discern his thrust: All throughout OT times God manifested a desire to live within his people. In the OT prophets he promised that one day he would do so. That day has come. Because of the work of Christ, the people of Christ have become the eternal temple of the living God. And because God is holy, his temple must be holy as well.

Since the idea of the Church as God's temple is the central theme of this

cluster of OT texts, I think it likely that Ezekiel 37:26–28 is the core around which Paul has gathered all the rest. It reads:

And I will place them [in the land] and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in their midst forever. My dwelling place also will be with them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people. And the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when my sanctuary is in their midst forever. (author's translation)

Reading this prophecy literally, as many premillennarians do, one could argue that it looks forward to a day when God will restore ethnic Israel to her homeland and dwell among them in a temple that is bigger and better than any they have ever known. But that is not how Paul understood it. Rather, as our text clearly shows, he understood it as a prophecy about Christ and his Church (Ezek. 37:24–25). For Paul, the Church is the true temple of the living God, of which all former temples were mere types and shadows. And just as God said through Ezekiel, this is the sanctuary where he will live *forever*. There is no going back.

Paul's beautiful string of OT prophetic pearls confirms yet again what we have seen all along: Together with the rest of the apostles, he reads the Law and the Prophets eschatologically, christologically, typologically, and ecclesiologically. Like the sun shining upon flowers in the spring, the NCH opens them wide so that their intoxicating fragrance can fill the house.

7. New Heavens and a New Earth

(2 Peter 3:13; Isaiah 65:17; 66:22)

Our final text gives us the apostle Peter discussing the Consummation (2 Peter 3:1–13). The Lord has tarried for some years, ignorant skeptics are mocking at the promise of his return, and believers are having doubts. Accordingly, the apostle is eager to illumine their minds, strengthen their faith, and build up their perseverance.

After reminding them that God has supernaturally intervened in history on many previous occasions, and after explaining that he has wise reasons for delaying the return of his Son, Peter offers a solemn description of the cosmic conflagration that will engulf sinners on the Day of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then, to encourage his trembling brethren, he closes with our text: "Nevertheless, in accordance with his promise we are looking for new heavens

and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13).

In speaking thus of the World to Come, Peter is referring to an OTKP: Isaiah 65:17–25 (cf. Isa. 66:18–24). But before turning to it, we must ask ourselves: What exactly did the apostle have in mind when he said that Christians are looking for a new world "in which righteousness dwells"?

Our first clue is found in the verses immediately preceding this one. There we learn that the World to Come will be a *replacement*. In a manner analogous to the events of Noah's day, God will replace the old world with a new one that is *altogether purged of evil, suffering, and death*. Not only will the fires of divine judgment engulf ungodly men in destruction (2 Peter 3:7), but they will also consume "the earth—and the works done in it" (2 Peter 3:10). In other words, in the final conflagration *everything* scarred by man's sin, and *everything* groaning beneath God's curse, will be purged by fire (Rev. 21:1–4; 22:3). As a result, the new world that emerges from the ashes of the old will be one in which *perfect* righteousness dwells.

Peter is not alone in affirming this truth. His Master had said that at his return he will cast out of his Kingdom "all things that offend," so that afterwards the righteous may shine forth like the sun in the Kingdom of the Father (Matt. 13:41–43 NKJV). Similarly, the apostle Paul had taught that at Christ's return every remaining enemy in the Domain of Darkness—including death itself—will be placed under his feet, with the result that the *entire* creation will be released from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Rom. 8:18–25; 1 Cor. 15:20–28, 50–55). Thus, for Christ, Paul, Peter, and all the other apostles, the new world waiting up ahead will be a world in which *perfectly* righteous people will dwell with God in *perfect* health, holiness, and joy.

When, however, we read the OT text that Peter cited (Isa. 65:17–25), we find that the world it describes is indeed very good, and certainly far better than the one we know today. However, it is not perfect, for in that world death will eventually overtake both young and old (Isa. 65:20, 22). Stumbling over this, premillennarians therefore assert that Isaiah must have been speaking about the millennial world, a world that will be better than ours, yet still fall short of the perfection of the new heavens and the new earth.

But this solution is impossible. Isaiah himself says nothing of a one-thousand-year epoch, nor does he even hint that the world he is describing will be temporary. On the contrary, God's people will "rejoice forever" in the world

that he will create (Isa. 65:18), a world that will endure before him (Isa. 66:22). Yet Peter—who has not breathed a word about a millennium in any of his sermons or letters—obviously believes that the world Isaiah promised is the perfect and eternal world of Christian hope and aspiration.

How are we to resolve this apparent contradiction? Will the World to Come be eternal and perfect, or will it (temporarily) be marred by residual sickness and death? Once again the NCH comes to our rescue. The solution is to read Isaiah's prophecy as a covenantally conditioned revelation of the perfect world that God has promised to all who are found faithful at the Lord's return. On this view, the Spirit was pleased to picture the new heavens and the new earth to Isaiah (and to his fellow OT saints) under familiar OT images of divine blessing, images rooted in the Mosaic Law. Thus, in Isaiah's prophecy the promise was—among other things—of great longevity (Isa. 65:20; Ex. 20:12; Deut. 4:40). But in the NT we learn what the OT promise of longevity typified. It typified eternal life: the same eternal life offered to mankind in the Garden of Eden, forfeited at the fall, regained by Christ, and fully inherited at Christ's return, when he himself will create new heavens and a new earth in which *perfect* righteousness dwells (John 1:29; Eph. 1:10; Phil. 3:21). Illustrating this approach to our text, OT scholar Derek Kidner comments on Isaiah 65:17–25 as follows:

[Here] the new is portrayed wholly in terms of the old, only without the old sorrows; there is no attempt [as in the NT] to describe any other kind of newness. All is expressed freely, locally, and pictorially, to kindle hope rather than feed curiosity.⁴

Summing up, in this solemn and majestic text the apostle Peter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, supplies God's New Covenant people with "true truth" about the Day of the Lord and the World to Come. Moreover, by identifying that truth as the fulfillment of specific OTKPs, he teaches us how to interpret those prophecies and all others like them. First and foremost, we must remember Augustine's great dictum: "The New Covenant is in the Old Covenant concealed; the Old Covenant is in the New Covenant revealed." Having done that, the door to OTKP will be opened, and we may freely enter into its garden deeps.

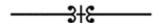
Conclusion

In this chapter we have again seated ourselves at the feet of the Teacher and asked, "How shall we interpret OTKP?" His answer has been clear and most encouraging.

On the one hand, we cannot interpret it literally as being fulfilled in a future millennium. Down that road lie all sorts of obstacles: prophetic silence about a future millennium, apparent contradictions, historical anachronisms, manifestly symbolic texts, Jeremiah's crucial prophecy of a New Covenant (Jer. 31), and (most importantly) NT teaching about the nature and structure of the Kingdom of God.

On the other hand, we can and must interpret OTKP by means of a skillful use of the NCH. In particular, we must interpret it *eschatologically*: as being fulfilled in the two-staged Kingdom of God introduced by Christ in these last days. We must interpret it *christologically* and *covenantally*: as being fulfilled in Christ, and in the spiritual blessings and institutions of the New Covenant that he introduced. And we must interpret it *ecclesiologically*: as being fulfilled in the Church: the people of the New Covenant, comprised of believing Jews and Gentiles of all times.

Down this road lies a good understanding of OTKP. Down this road lies the resolution of all apparent contradictions and historical anachronisms. Down this road lies the harmonization of OTKP with NT teaching about God's covenants and his promised Kingdom. And down this road lies fresh equipping for effective ministry in the Era of Proclamation, together with great encouragement amidst the many challenges such ministry will entail. In sum, down this road lies a bridge enabling us to cross the Great Divide and find a key that unlocks the darkest door of the GETD, thereby flooding the house with light.



In this confidence let us therefore take our next step: Let us venture once again into the thickets of OTKP, this time to wrestle with a number of texts that are *not* expounded in the NT. Please note: These texts are bastions of premillennial thinking. Many of you have heard premillennarians teach on

them, and scold their amillennarian brothers for avoiding them. I will not do so. I have already explained why premillennial interpretations are impossible; now I hope to show that amillennial interpretations are not just viable, but vastly superior to the premillennial.

Can this be done? Can Christ's Church really cross the Great Divide and enter a Beautiful Land where she speaks with one voice about the true meaning of OTKP? Most confidently, I reply: "Yes, yes, a thousand times yes—but *only* if we bring the Teacher, the apostles, and the NCH with us as we venture into its forest deeps."

Happily, they are all beside us now. Let us therefore head out once again.

^{1.} George Eldon Ladd, New Testament Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1993), 58.

^{2.} Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1994), 1127.

^{3.} See chapter 12 of the HKOH for further discussion of this subject.

^{4.} See The New Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1979), s.v. Isaiah, 624.

CHAPTER 8

OLD TESTAMENT KINGDOM PROPHECIES CONSIDERED: PSALMS, ISAIAH, JEREMIAH, EZEKIEL

y goal in the next two chapters is to apply the NCH to a sampling of OTKPs drawn from the three great seasons of Israel's history: pre-exilic, exilic, and post-exilic. As promised, I have purposely chosen premillennial favorites. Also, I have sought to address some of the more difficult OTKPs: texts that seem to resist the typological and figurative interpretation to which our premillennarian brethren so strenuously object. To save space I have not reproduced the passages here. Also, in addressing them I have not gone into great exegetical detail. Rather, my goal has been to demonstrate the power and fruitfulness of the NCH by offering a short but substantial overview of each prophecy. Wherever appropriate, I have also engaged premillennial interpretations and arguments surrounding the text under consideration.

And now, with Bibles in hand, the Teacher at our side, the NCH in our heads, and the Spirit of Truth in our hearts, let us set out.

1. The Reign of the LORD's Anointed

(Psalm 2)

This is the first of several *royal* or *Messianic* psalms (e.g., Psalms 2, 18, 20, 45, 72, 89, and 110). As a rule, these are blended prophecies, referring both to a present earthly king and the future Messianic King. Such is the case here. Psalm 2 has an OT fulfillment, presumably in the persons of King David and his royal seed; but, as the NT makes abundantly clear, it also has an eschatological fulfillment in Christ (Acts 4:25–27; 13:33; Heb. 1:5; 5:5; Rev. 12:5). In what follows I will focus exclusively on the Messianic meaning.

The Nations Rage (vv. 1-3)

Verses 1–3 speak of the rage of the nations that vainly rebel against God and his anointed. According to the NT this rage was first directed, with lethal but redemptive effect, against Jesus of Nazareth, who was rejected both by Jews and Gentiles (Acts 4:25–26). However, the NT also repeatedly warns that despite assured evangelistic success, the nations also will rage against Jesus's followers, for they too are the LORD's anointed, having been endowed with the indwelling Holy Spirit for Kingdom service in the Era of Proclamation (Matt. 10:24–25; John 15:20; 1 John 2:20, 27; Rev. 12:13, 17). Verses 1–3 will also be fulfilled in the Last Battle, when the rage of the nations, fueled by the rage of Satan, explodes one final time against the Church, which will follow in the footsteps of her Lord in (various kinds of) death and resurrection life (Rev. 11:7–13; 12:7).¹

The LORD Replies (vv. 4-6)

Verses 4–6 give God's response to the rejection of his Messiah. He derides the nations for their futile attempts to thwart his sovereign will. But, through the exaltation of Christ and the subsequent proclamation of the Gospel, he also speaks to them in his wrath. I paraphrase as follows: "Though you have crucified my Son (and so fulfilled my redemptive plan), I have installed him as King of the universe at my own right hand. I have set him upon the Zion above—Heaven itself—from which he will soon return to judge the world in righteousness and consign every impenitent rebel to hell. Now you have been warned; hopefully you will fear, repent, and believe on him" (Matt. 23:33; Acts 17:31; 1 Thess. 1:10; Heb. 12:22; Rev. 12:5; 14:7).

The Inheritance of the Son (vv. 7–9)

In verses 7–9 we hear the voice of the Son, sharing with us the words of the Father, spoken to him immediately after his exaltation to God's right hand. Here again is a New Covenant paraphrase: "Because of your obedience unto death—because of your faithfulness to lay the foundation for the redemption of my people—this day, through your resurrection, I have begotten you, the God-Man, as my eternal divine-human Son; as the One who will inherit all my wealth and serve as Head over all my redeemed creation; as the High Prophet, Priest, and King of my people and their world. Therefore, simply ask, and I will give you the raging nations as an inheritance. Those for whom you died I will draw to you, so that they may become your eager subjects and my

own beloved children. Those who continue in sin I will give to you for judgment, so that throughout your heavenly reign—but especially at its end, when you return in power and glory—you may strike them with a rod of iron and shatter them like an earthen pot" (John 6:44; Acts 13:33; Eph. 1:10; Phil. 2:1–11; Col. 1:13; Heb. 1:5; 5:5; Rev. 2:26–27; 12:5; 19:15).

The Way of Wisdom (vv. 10–12)

In verses 10–12 we hear the voice of David—but especially the voice of the Holy Spirit—issuing a final warning. To paraphrase: "You kings, you judges, and you sinners everywhere: In view of all that God has done in Christ, it is high time for you to exercise discernment. Understand that Today is the Day of Salvation; that for as long as Christ is pleased to tarry in Heaven you can still take refuge in him. But do not wickedly delay, for his wrath may suddenly flare out against you, or he may suddenly return for judgment. Therefore, fear God, repent, and come to Christ now. There is no other refuge from his wrath. How blessed you will be if you hide yourself in him!" (Luke 4:16–20; Acts 2:37–40; 2 Cor. 6:2).

Does Psalm 2 speak of a thousand-year reign of Christ emanating from earthly Zion, as premillennarians assert? The NT texts cited above—and indeed the whole body of NT eschatology—answer with a resounding "No!"

2. The Rod of Jesse, a Banner for the Nations

(Isaiah 11:1-16)

This chapter is a premillennarian favorite. It is a prophetic necklace comprised of four distinct but closely related OTKPs: Isaiah 11:1–5, 6–9, 10, 11–16. This is clear from the unique substance of each prophecy, and also from the fact that two of them are introduced by the words "In that Day," a literary sign that a fresh Kingdom prophecy is about to begin. Accordingly, we must not conflate the four prophecies into one, as our premillennarian brothers tend to do. Rather, we must recognize that their temporal spheres of fulfillment may well differ: Some may look ahead to the Kingdom of the Son, others to the Kingdom of the Father, and still others to both.

The Reign of Israel's Messiah (vv. 1–5)

The purpose of this OTKP is to briefly describe the design, course, and universal impact of the Messiah's reign. The NT tells us that it is fulfilled in the

Person and Work of Christ, especially in his heavenly mediatorial reign. Born to Joseph and Mary (both descendants of David), Jesus is a shoot springing up from the (seemingly dead) stump of Jesse, who was David's father. He is the One whom God has appointed to restore the dynasty of David (i.e., the Church). He is the One who will spiritually revive it, rule over it, and make it into a royal family that will endure forever (v. 1; Mark 11:10; Luke 1:32; Acts 15:12–21; 1 Peter 2:9; Rev. 22:16).

To ensure that he might have the wisdom and power to accomplish all this, the Father will anoint him with the Holy Spirit (v. 2). This first occurred at the river Jordan, where Jesus was equipped for his earthly ministry (Matt. 3:16; John 1:32). But it also occurred in still fuller measure after his ascension, when he became the High King of Heaven and earth, with a charge to spearhead the advance of the Gospel in the world below (v. 2; Matt. 28:18; John 5:19–29; Acts 2:33; Rev. 5:6–7). Henceforth, with a perfect justice sadly lacking in most of Israel's former kings, he "decides with fairness for the afflicted of the earth," granting eternal life to all who, by God's grace, recognize their own poverty of spirit, and therefore decide for him and the Gospel (vv. 3–4a; Matt. 5:3; Luke 18:9–14; 1 Cor. 1:26–31).

When at last the Era of Proclamation draws to a close, he will come again in power and glory to judge the world in righteousness and faithfulness, gathering his resurrected and glorified Church safely to his side in the air, but striking the earth itself with the rod of his mouth, and slaying the impenitent wicked with the breath of his lips (vv. 4b–5; 1 Thess. 4:13–18; 2 Thess. 2:8; 2 Peter 3:1–7; Rev. 19:5). With this, the Days of the Messiah's heavenly reign will reach their end. The World to Come is about to begin.

Eternal Life on the Mountain of God (vv. 6-9)

As expected, the World to Come is indeed the theme of Isaiah's next prophetic pearl. Here we do not have a photograph, but a covenantally conditioned picture of life in the new heavens and the new earth. Recalling both the primordial peace of Eden, as well as God's promise in the Law that he would protect his obedient people from the wild animals of Canaan (Lev. 26:21–22), the prophet uses OT language and imagery to give us a foretaste of the perfect harmony that will obtain between the Church (represented here as *children*: the children of God) and the realm of nature in the new heavens and the new earth (vv. 6–8). Will that world include animals from which Christ

has lifted every burden of the curse? This prophecy, together with Genesis 6:17–22 and Romans 8:18–25, would certainly seem to suggest it.

That this is the correct interpretation of verses 6–8 is clear from verse 9, the capstone of the prophecy. It too describes the World to Come, but under different imagery. Now it has become God's Holy Mountain, for it is the place of his eternal rest, just as Zion, in OT times, was the place of his temporary rest (2 Chron. 6:41; Ps. 132:13–14). Note carefully that in those days the earth will be *fully* filled with the knowledge of the LORD, even as today the waters *fully* cover the (basins of the) sea. This is no millennium, where saints and sinners, good and evil, and life and death mingle together. No, this is the new heavens and the new earth, whose nature we here see dimly, as in a mirror, but in the NT, face to face (1 Cor. 13:12; 2 Cor. 3:12–18; Rev. 21–22).

An Ensign for the Nations (v. 10)

This verse is Isaiah's third prophetic pearl. It is fulfilled in both stages of the Kingdom, though its close association with verses 11–16 suggests that the accent falls primarily on the Kingdom of the Son. In the days of Christ's heavenly reign, the nations will resort to the (divine) root of Jesse. How so? The NT reply is clear: The Church, through her preaching of the Gospel, will lift up Christ, just as an army lifts up its ensign (John 12:32). The result will be that "nations" of believers from every tribe, tongue, and people will flow to him for salvation (Rev. 7:9). In those days Christ's resting place will be "glory." This could mean that his resting place is in Heaven: the place where God's glory dwells (Ps. 26:8), and the place where believers who trust in Christ's finished work are resting with him by faith (Eph. 1:20; 2:6; Heb. 4:3). Or it could mean that his preferred resting place is his Church, which, through the gift of the Spirit, has received his glory (John 14:15–18; 17:22). Perhaps it means both.

But this prophecy will also be fulfilled in the Kingdom of the Father. For having resorted to Christ for salvation during their days upon the earth, the nations of the redeemed will now *continually* resort to him, eternally giving thanks to the one mediator between God and man who so graciously secured for them a home in the glorious new world that now has come (Eph. 3:21; 1 Tim. 2:5; Rev. 5:8–14; 7:9–17; 22:2).

Israel's Second Exodus (vv. 11–16)

The fourth and final pearl in Isaiah's prophetic necklace may aptly be called Israel's Second Exodus. Its sphere of fulfillment is the first phase of the Kingdom, the Era of Proclamation, during which God rescues his eschatological people from spiritual Egypt (i.e., the Domain of Darkness), and then leads them into the Promised Land of his completed Kingdom. In verse 11 the Spirit speaks of the regathering of God's remnant. While this may allude to the Jewish restoration under Cyrus, its ultimate focus is on eschatological Israel: the Church, the elect remnant of humanity. The Father will draw her to Christ out of many (i.e., all) nations, for ever since the events of Eden and Babel her members have been scattered to the four corners of the earth (v. 12; John 6:44; Rev. 7:1–10). In vv. 12–13 God promises that as they gather together in faith beneath his exalted Banner (i.e., Christ), the nations of the redeemed—long exiled from the primordial unity of Paradise—will find that former enmities and divisions, such as those that troubled Judah and Ephraim, are now miraculously dissolved in the oneness of the Body of Christ and the unity of the Holy Spirit (Gen. 3:24; John 17:20–23; 1 Cor. 12:12–13; Eph. 2:11–22; 4:1–6; Col. 3:15).

Verse 14 uses concrete OT imagery to depict the eschatological triumph of the Church over the hostile world system. Just as ancient Israel swooped down victoriously upon her enemies to the North, South, East, and West, so the Church will triumph over her foes worldwide—whether by evangelistic success, or by a final administration of divine retribution (Rom. 16:20; 1 Cor. 6:2; 2 Cor. 2:14–16).

Alluding again to the exodus, verses 15–16 bring the prophecy to a close by promising a latter-day Red Sea crossing—indeed, a multitude of such crossings—by which God's far-flung people will walk safe, sound, and "dry shod" upon a highway of holiness straight into the Promised Land (Isa. 11:15; 40:3–5; 57:14). The highway is the Person and Work of Christ, and the Promised Land is the spiritual Kingdom into which he effectually calls the New Covenant Israel of God (John 10:16; 14:6; Col. 1:13).

Does the NCH give a satisfying interpretation of Isaiah 11? Does it rescue this prophecy from irrelevance to today's Christians? Does it fill the Christian mind with wonder, and move the Christian heart to praise, hope, and devoted Kingdom service? You be the judge.

3. Arise and Shine!

(Isaiah 60)

Many premillennarians claim that this stunningly beautiful prophecy of Jerusalem's latter-day glory gives us a photograph of life in the Millennium, when, for one thousand years, Israel (and especially her capital city) will be the head, and not the tail, among the nations. However, the chapter itself powerfully resists such literalism: It explicitly gives us Jerusalem's *eternal* state (vv. 11, 15, 20–21), entangles us in various anachronisms (vv. 6–9), envisions a resurrection of the Mosaic Law (v. 7), and often uses evidently symbolic language (vv. 2–3, 17–18). For these reasons, I heartily concur with commentator Derek Kidner when he writes:

These glowing, exultant chapters [60–62] depict blessings that transcend the old order, and even, in places, the Christian era itself [i.e., the Era of Proclamation]; but the language is that of the OT ordinances and of the literal Jerusalem. It will [therefore] need translating into terms of "the Jerusalem above." Formatter: replace spaces before, between, and after dots with microspacesHere the return of dispersed Israelites to Jerusalem is made the model of a far greater movement: the worldwide inflow of converts into the Church; and the vision repeatedly looks beyond this to the end: to the state of ultimate glory.²

In so speaking, Kidner shows himself a master of the NCH. He sees Isaiah using covenantally conditioned imagery to speak "mysteriously" of both stages of the eschatological Kingdom introduced by the New Covenant in Christ. A closer look at our text abundantly vindicates his approach and helps us to see how richly Isaiah speaks to the hearts of Christians everywhere, whether Jew or Gentile.

Lift Up Your Eyes (vv. 1-3)

Verses 1–3 sound the theme of the chapter. In words that would have comforted struggling OT saints, God promises that in the last days many nations will stream to Zion, there to worship the one true God in concert with the people of the one true God. According to the NT this promise began to be fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost, when Christ first poured out his Spirit upon the New Jerusalem—the nascent Church—and seated her in heavenly places on the Zion above (Acts 2:1–4; Eph. 1:20; 2:6; Heb. 12:22). On that happy

day her light finally came, the glory of the Lord rose upon her, and she herself arose like a bright morning star shining in the Domain of Darkness (v. 3; Rev. 22:16).

Henceforth she is as a city set upon a hill (Matt. 5:14). Through the preaching of the Gospel she sends out her light, calling people everywhere to forsake the Domain of Darkness and enter safely into the eternal City of God (John 1:5; 8:12; Phil. 2:15). Throughout the entire Era of Proclamation many do: Parthians, Medes, Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia; people from every tribe, tongue, family, and nation (Acts 2:9–11; Rev. 5:9). And they will continue to do so, even until the end of the age, when Christ returns to fully glorify the Zion of the Holy One of Israel, and to bring in the new heavens and the new earth (vv. 14, 19–22; Matt. 24:14; Acts 1:8; 2:9–11; Rev. 21:10–11).

The Wealth of the Nations Will Come (vv. 4–9)

Verses 4–9 elaborate upon these things, using concrete imagery drawn from Israel's life under the Law to depict the eschatological fulfillment of her mission to the nations. In other words, they depict God effectually calling his elect sons and daughters to Christ and the Church (v. 4; John 6:37; 10:16; Rom. 8:30; 1 Cor. 12:13). When they come, they will bring great wealth: not simply their material possessions, but also the more valuable riches of gratitude, love, obedience, consecrated service, and the fruits of that service: new believers in Jesus (v. 5; Mark 10:29–30; 12:28–30; John 14:15; Rom. 12:1; 15:16; Col. 3:15). These precious spiritual sacrifices will come up with acceptance upon God's altar (vv. 6–7; Heb. 13:15; 1 Peter 2:5). As the Church offers them, she will grow in holiness; as she grows in holiness, she will be built up as a beautiful spiritual house wherein the God of glory himself will be pleased to dwell (vv. 8–9; Matt. 16:18; John 14:23; Eph. 2:22; 1 Peter 2:5).

They Will Bow at the Soles of Your Feet (vv. 10-14)

Verses 10–14 speak again of the rise of eschatological Zion, this time with special emphasis upon her relation to her enemies, whether past or present. Those who formerly were the instruments of God's wrath toward his Zion will be the very ones to build up her walls (v. 10). Those who refuse to serve her will be utterly ruined (v. 12). The sons of those who previously afflicted her will now come and bow themselves at her feet (v. 14). These challenging verses

speak not only to Jews, but also to Gentiles. In the days of the Kingdom, Jewish Christians will marvel to see Egyptians, Mesopotamians, Romans, and other former oppressors coming to Christ, humbling themselves before the God of Abraham, and co-laboring with them for the growth of the Church (Acts 2:1–12). Likewise, Gentile Christians will marvel to see God bringing "nations" of former persecutors into his Holy City. Amidst all their marveling, both Jew and Gentile will also tremble at the eternal ruin of those who refuse to love and serve the Church, for failure to love and serve the heavenly Husband whom she proclaimed (vv. 12, 14; Matt. 10:40; Luke 19:27; John 20:23; Gal. 1:22–24; Eph. 5:22–27; 1 John 4:20–21; Rev. 3.9).

An Everlasting Praise (vv. 15–16)

Verses 15–16 contrast the destiny of the former Jerusalem with that of the latter. The former, living under a Law that left her earthbound, was scorned and destitute, trodden under foot by the Gentiles because of her sins (Luke 21:24; Gal. 4:24–27; Heb. 7:19; 8:7–13). The latter, living under a Christ who translates her into heavenly places, is favored and robust, nourished by the milk (i.e., the life-giving devotion) of multitudes of redeemed Gentiles whom God, from the very beginning, purposed to bring into his Holy City, Family, Nation, and Land (Gen. 22:18; John 10:16; Gal. 4:24–27). Such is the redemptive power of the Mighty One of Jacob (v. 16).

Walls of Salvation, Gates of Praise (vv. 17-18)

Verses 17–18 launch the climactic description of the New Jerusalem in the World to Come. The opening lines of verse 17 speak of the glorification of the Church (Rev. 21:9–21). Because of the Person and Work of Christ, the eternal City of God will enjoy peace, righteousness, security, salvation, and a spirit of endless praise (1 Cor. 1:30–31).

Your God Will Be Your Glory (vv. 19–22)

In verses 19–22 we arrive at the Kingdom of the Father (and the Son): the new heavens and the new earth. Sun and moon have given way to the glory of God: the true and everlasting light of the New Jerusalem (vv. 19–20; Rev. 21:23; 22:5). The days of the saints' mourning are ended (v. 20; Rev. 21:4; 22:3). God's people are perfectly righteous (v. 21; 2 Peter 3:13). Here they will live forever, eternally planted in the eschatological Promised Land (v. 21; Isa.

66:22). And here the little flock of Jesus—more than conquerors through him who loved them—will have become a great multitude and a mighty nation (v. 22; Luke 12:32; Rom. 8:37; Rev. 7:9–12). All this the LORD will hasten in its time (v. 22). Even so, Lord Jesus, come (Rev. 22:20)!

4. A Nation Born in a Day

(Isaiah 66)

This is one of the most difficult chapters in the entire prophetic canon. As such, it has proven a fertile field for speculation, especially among dispensationalists, some of whom find here predictions of the birth of the modern Jewish state, Jewish evangelism during a seven-year tribulation era, a premillennial regathering of Jews to Palestine, and living conditions in the Millennium itself. I will argue, however, that the NCH supplies a far simpler understanding, one that not only accords with NT eschatology, but also speaks with power and comfort to Christians everywhere.

This OTKP continues a theme struck in Isaiah 65: the contrasting destinies of the faithful remnant vs. the apostate multitude. The former, a minority in Israel, have suffered rejection, mockery, and persecution at the hands of the latter, even as the nation as a whole has grown ripe for judgment (Isa. 28:9–22; 66:5). Accordingly, in chapters 65–66 God encourages his saints with rich promises of consummate justice: Those who forsook the LORD will perish, but those who sought him—mourning over Jerusalem's degradation—will live to see the day when he bestows eternal glory on the City of God, and also brings the Gentiles into her blessed precincts (Isa. 65:10–11, 13–16; 66:10–11; Luke 6:20–26).

The LORD's Chosen Temple (vv. 1–2)

In verses 1–2 God reminds his people that no house—no temple made of stone—can contain the infinite Creator of the universe. He does, however, hint at his preferred resting place: the hearts of those who are poor and contrite in spirit (Matt. 5:3; Luke 18:13). Doubtless these words would comfort pious Jewish exiles in the years ahead. However, with the benefit of NT hindsight we can see that they also anticipate a better Day—an eschatological Day—when God, through Christ, by the Spirit, will take up his eternal residence in the Church. As evangelist and martyr Stephen well understood, in that Day her members will worship him, neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, but in

spirit and in truth (John 4:21-24; 14:23; Acts 7:48-50; Eph. 2:22).

Judgment Is Sure (vv. 3-6)

Verses 3–4 use graphic language to depict the loathing with which God greets the religious observances of the apostates, and also the judgment that awaits them because of their willful sins, which include their rejection of the mercy offered to them in the admonitions of the prophets (Luke 12:47–48; John 15:22–24).

In verses 5–6 God begins to speak directly to his faithful remnant. He assures them that he will judge their "brothers" who excluded them (presumably the religious officials who barred them from sanctioned public worship), and who also blasphemously mocked them (Matt. 27:39–44; John 9:34). Verse 6 intimates the fall of Jerusalem, not only to the Babylonians, but also to the Romans. Like the rending of the temple veil at Christ's death, the fall of Jerusalem at the hands of Rome bespoke the end of the Old Covenant, the beginning of the New, and the appearance of "the Jerusalem above" as the eschatological dwelling place of God (Matt. 27:51; Mark 11:14; Luke 21:6, 20–24; Gal. 4:21–31).

A Nation Born in a Day (vv. 7-13)

Verses 7–13, which clearly take us into the eschatological era, speak of this very thing, and therefore offered great hope to the struggling OT saints. The "she" of verse 7 is Zion, a figure for the OT Church that, in Jesus's day, was typified by, and embodied in, Mother Mary. Suddenly and supernaturally she will give birth to a male child: Jesus Christ, the Son of Man and the Last Adam (Rom. 5:12–21; Rev. 12:1–2, 5). After he has completed his great redemptive work, her pains will indeed come upon her, since the Church now begins to share in his sufferings, and will continue to do so even to the end of the age (John 15:20; Rom. 8:17; Phil. 3:10; Rev. 12:1–6, 13–17).

In verse 8 the birth of Christ (the Head) is conflated with the birth of the Church (his body). The Spirit's message is: Because of Christ's redemptive work on earth, God, on the Day of Pentecost, will suddenly and supernaturally beget a new Land, a new Nation, and a new City (v. 10; 1 Peter 2:9). These three are none other than his elect sons (and daughters), the inhabitants of the Zion and Jerusalem above, begotten from above throughout the entire Era of Proclamation through the Gospel preaching of the Church (1 Cor. 4:15; Heb.

12:22; 1 Peter 1:23).

In verse 9 God assures his disheartened (and exiled) OT saints that their toil has not been in vain; that divine omnipotence stands behind the promise of Jerusalem's latter-day restoration. Therefore, in verses 10–11 he exhorts them to receive the promise by faith so that they too, as future members of the Body of Christ, may one day experience eternal spiritual comfort and delight (John 1:16; 1 Cor. 14:3; 2 Cor. 1:3–7; Eph. 1:23; Phil. 2:1; 2 Thess. 2:16–17).

Verses 12–13 further explain why the saints should rejoice: Through Christ, God will extend peace—reconciliation and spiritual reunion—to his Church, flooding her not only with multitudes of Gentiles, but also with the glorious riches of their grateful love and devoted service (John 10:16; 17:22–23; Rom. 12:1–2; 15:10; Eph. 2:11–22). In those days, the Father—with a Mother's love —will richly comfort his own (1 Thess. 2:1–12).

The LORD Will Come in Fire (vv. 14-17)

Verses 14–17 reprise the theme of the contrasting destinies of the faithful remnant and the apostates. The hand of the LORD—which will bring in the New Jerusalem—shall be made known to his saints; as for his enemies, he reserves only indignation (v. 14; Rom. 2:1–11). The judgment of verses 15–16, adumbrated by the OT destruction(s) of the earthly Jerusalem, is clearly eschatological, seeing that it falls upon all flesh. Christ the Lord will accomplish it at his Parousia (2 Thess. 1:7–10). Once and for all he will purge the earth of idolatry, here set forth as the bane of OT Israel and Jerusalem (v. 17; Acts 17:22–31).

They Shall See My Glory (vv. 18–21)

Verses 18–21 promise the faithful remnant that their spiritual seed will one day gather the Gentiles into God's Kingdom, where they (the Gentiles) will enjoy the pleasures and privileges of full membership in the covenant community (see v. 12). This beautiful prophecy is fulfilled in the Era of Proclamation. It begins in v. 18b, with God declaring that the time is coming for him to gather all nations, and for the peoples to behold his glory. This reminds us of Jesus's words, spoken in response to a Gentile show of interest in his ministry: "And as for me, if I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all to myself" (John 12:32). Through the preaching of the Gospel, the Spirit will effectually call God's elect (both Jew and Gentile) into the Kingdom, enabling

them to behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and to eagerly receive the benefits of his redemptive work on their behalf (John 1:14; 3:1–8; 6:4; 10:16; 14:9; 2 Cor. 4:6).

Christ himself is the sign spoken of in verse 19, a banner beneath which the peoples may gather for salvation (Isa. 11:10, 12; 49:22; 62:10; Luke 2:34). God will set this sign among his Church: first by sight among his elect remnant of Jews, and later by faith among his elect remnant of (more Jews and) Gentiles. Both groups, through faith in Christ, are reckoned as survivors of the wrath to come (John 5:24; Rom. 5:1–2; 1 Thess. 1:10). So that still others may be saved, God will send them to "the remotest parts of the earth," here typified by seven of ancient Israel's most distant neighbors (Acts 1:8; Rev. 5:9). There the Church will preach the Gospel, wherein the glory of God is declared, and whereby the nations that are sunken in idolatry will at long last hear of God's fame (as Creator, Redeemer, and Judge), and behold his glory for themselves (v. 19; Mic. 4:4–5; Rom. 10:14–15; 15:14–21).

Verse 20—virtually impervious to a literal, futuristic interpretation—speaks of their good success: Using every spiritual device at their disposal (Rom. 15:18–21; 1 Cor. 9:19–22), the latter-day evangelists will transform their pagan neighbors into brothers and sisters in Christ (Eph. 2:11–18), transport them to the Zion and Jerusalem above (Gal. 4:21–31; Heb. 12:22), and present them as a spiritual sacrifice in the house of the LORD (Rom. 15:15–16; Phil. 2:17). While all of them will become part of Christ's royal priesthood, some, according to the typology of verse 21, will be ordained as spiritual leaders in his Church (Eph. 4:7–16; Titus 1:5; 1 Peter 2:5, 9).

Final Destinies (vv. 22–24)

In verses 22–24 we pass from the Era of Proclamation into the Era of Reward and Retribution. Here we encounter the contrasting *final* destinies of saints and sinners. Just as the new heavens and the new earth will endure forever before God, so too will Zion's offspring: the resurrected and glorified Church of Christ, the faithful of all times and all places (John 5:28–29; 11:23–26; 1 Cor. 15:50–58; Col. 3:4; Heb. 11:1–4; Rev. 21:2, 10–11).

As we saw earlier, the NT forbids a literal interpretation of v. 23, for it tells us that ceremonial "months, seasons, and years" have been fulfilled and rendered obsolete by the New Covenant (Gal. 4:10; Col. 2:16–17; Heb. 8:13). It also tells us that in the World to Come the sun, moon, and stars will give

way to the perpetual light of the glory of God (Rev. 21:23, 22:5). Thus, under OT imagery, the message here is simply that all redeemed flesh—both Jew and Gentile—will enjoy the worship of God forever (Eph. 1:3–14; Rev. 15:4).

Similarly, the meaning of verse 24—which alludes to the perpetual burnings in the accursed Valley of Hinnom just outside Jerusalem—is that the saints will look with satisfaction (and doubtless other emotions as well) upon the eternal punishment of the wicked, who at long last are receiving their just due (2 Kings 23:1–14; Dan. 12:2; 2 Thess. 1:1–10; Rev. 15:2–4; 16:4–7; 22:15).

5. God's Coming Shepherd-King

(Jeremiah 23:1–8)

This short OTKP is one of Jeremiah's earliest predictions of "Israel's" latter-day restoration. Many premillennarians locate its literal fulfillment in a future millennium. But what does the NCH have to say?

Woe to the Shepherds (vv. 1–2)

In verses 1–2 God warns of coming judgment against Israel's faithless leaders, both temporal and spiritual. Because of their failure to faithfully shepherd God's flock, the sheep will soon be scattered among the nations, and they themselves will be punished. In the near term, this prophecy will be fulfilled by the Babylonian captivity; in the far term, by a final dispersion at the hands of Rome (see Ezek. 34:1–31; Zech. 11:1–14). But behind the egregious failures of Israel's leaders we behold the still worse failure of Adam, whose sin in Eden drove his entire family into exile in the Domain of Darkness.

I Will Gather My Flock (vv. 3-4)

In verses 3–4 God offers the faithful hope, promising that he will gather the remnant of his flock out of all the countries where he has driven them, give them godly shepherds, and make them fearless and fruitful in the Promised Land. Since they will fear *no more*, we know that the reference here is to "Israel's" eschatological ingathering (v. 4). The NCH explains: On the one hand, this prophecy is fulfilled among elect Jews who, in the last days, will turn to Christ and therefore inherit the blessings of the Kingdom. On the other hand, it is also fulfilled among elect Gentiles who will do the same. Both are *remnants*—some from Israel, all from Adam's fallen race. Both, because of sin, have gone into exile—some from Palestine, all from Eden. But both, because

of God's sovereign grace, will be gathered to Christ for eternal life in their eschatological homeland.

David's Righteous Branch (vv. 5-6)

In verses 5-6 God speaks of a divine/human Agent through whom he will grant ultimate covenant blessings to his holy nation (1 Peter 2:9). In fulfillment of his ancient promise to David, God will raise up a righteous Branch from (the line of) David (Matt. 1:1; Luke 1:32, 69). He will be a King whose righteous reign overspreads the whole land. This promise is fulfilled in Christ, whose heavenly reign overspreads the whole earth through the preaching of the Church during the Era of Proclamation (Matt. 13:31–33; Acts 1:8; Col. 1:6; Rev. 5:9). Whether from his throne above or at his Parousia, he is the One appointed by God to execute judgment and righteousness in the earth (v. 5; Matt. 28:18; John 5:22; Acts 17:31). In the days of his reign, Judah and Israel—the one typifying God's Messianic Tribe, the other his eternal Family and Nation—will dwell securely in the only true ark of safety, Jesus Christ (John 10:28–29; Eph. 2:14–18; Heb. 8:6–13). Why? Because the perfect righteousness of the Righteous One will be credited to all who call upon him as Savior and Lord (John 16:8, 10; Acts 3:14; Rom. 3:21–22; 10:9– 13; 1 Cor. 1:30).

A Second Exodus (vv. 7–8)

In verses 7–8 God again takes up a favored prophetic motif, casting the great eschatological ingathering as a Second Exodus. These beautiful words, full of praise for God's sovereign grace, can and will be spoken by all of Christ's saints, whether Jew or Gentile. For just as in ancient times God rescued ethnic Israel from their Egyptian oppressors and restored them to the Land of Promise, so too in the last days will he rescue eschatological Israel—the Church—from every enemy in the Domain of Darkness, and restore them through Christ to their heavenly homeland: initially in the Kingdom of his Son, and consummately in the glorious World to Come (Matt. 12:29; 2 Cor. 1:10; Eph. 2:1–10; Col. 1:13; Heb. 12:22).

Introduction to Ezekiel

Our final two OTKPs are found in the book of the exilic prophet Ezekiel. In order to understand them properly it is important for us to discern the

structure of the book as a whole, as well as the NT significance of that structure. On this score, OT theologian Ian Duguid's outline is of great help:

- I. Ezekiel's Call and Commission (1–3)
- II. Oracles of Israel's Doom (4-24)
- III. Oracles Against the Nations (25–32)
- IV. Oracles of Good News (33–48)

In the pages ahead we'll be looking at two prophecies found in Ezekiel's Oracles of Good News. I have outlined that section as follows:

- I. Promises of Israel's Eschatological Restoration in the Days of the Messiah (33–37)
- II. Promises of Divine Rescue at the Last Battle Between Israel and Gog and His Confederacy of Hostile Nations (38–39)
- III. A Vision of Israel's Everlasting Worship in the World to Come (40–48)

Before plunging into our texts let us recall for a moment NT teaching on the coming of the Kingdom of God. We have seen that the Kingdom enters history in two stages: a temporary spiritual Kingdom of the Son, followed by an eternal spiritual and physical Kingdom of the Father, the two being separated by the Parousia of Christ and the Consummation of all things. But what is the preeminent sign and trigger of the Consummation, the one eschatological event that, more than any other, heralds and elicits the return of the High King of Heaven in glory? As we shall see later, it is the Last Battle: the final global clash between God and Satan, Christ and the Antichrist, and the Church and the World.³

These NT mysteries give us the key to Ezekiel's Oracles of Good News.

In chapters 33–37 Ezekiel is prophesying about the great spiritual renewal that God will accomplish among his people in the Days of the Messiah. Here the prophet is using covenantally conditioned language to speak about the Era of Proclamation, during which God the Father will bring the Church—"the Israel of God"—into the spiritual Kingdom of his Son (Gal. 6:16).

In chapters 38–39 Ezekiel is preparing God's people for the latter-day Deception, Destruction, and Disposal of "Israel's" last and most fearsome

enemy: Gog and his confederacy of hostile Gentile nations. Here the prophet is using covenantally conditioned language to speak about the Last Battle between the Church and the World, and about the Day of the Lord Jesus Christ, which will bring that battle to an end.

Finally, in chapters 40–48 Ezekiel is giving God's people a vision of their Blessed Hope: the Everlasting Temple (40–42), the Everlasting Glory (43), the Everlasting Worship (43–46), the Everlasting Wholeness (47), the Everlasting Homeland (47–48:29), and the Everlasting City (48:30–35). Here the prophet is using covenantally conditioned language to picture the eternal worship of the Church in the glorious World to Come.⁴

Is this the true meaning of Ezekiel's Oracles of Good News? Is he really speaking about the Kingdom of the Son, the Last Battle, and the World to Come? Do the details of our two prophecies support this interpretation? Let us turn to them now and find out.

6. Resurrection Life in the Valley of Dry Bones

(Ezekiel 37:1–14)

Premillennarians generally agree that this OTKP speaks about the future of ethnic Israel. Beyond that they differ widely among themselves. Some say it has already been partially fulfilled in the recent return of millions of Russian and European Jews to Palestine. Others (i.e., dispensationalists) say it will be fulfilled during a seven-year tribulation, when a believing remnant of Jews will fan out across the globe to gather their dispersed brethren back to their ancestral homeland, there to await the Second Coming of their Messiah (Isa. 66:18–21). Still others argue that it will be fulfilled *after* Christ's return, when, through the same faithful remnant, the Lord will gather his far-flung Jewish brethren to rule with him during the Millennium.

But might there be a different interpretation, an interpretation that unites all Christians and speaks to them in the here and now? "Yes," says the NCH, "there is. And when you see it you will rise to your feet and find yourself running to the Gospel battle!"

Let us consider it now.

In Ezekiel's previous Oracles of Good News God had given his people glorious promises of an ultimate eschatological restoration. Among other things, he had promised to bring them back from captivity (34:12–13; 36:24), cleanse them of their filthiness and idolatry (36:25; 36:33), give them a new

heart (36:26), place his Spirit within them (36:27), set his servant David over them as Prince and King (34:23–24), and grant them eternal peace and prosperity on the mountains of Israel (34:13–15, 25–31; 36:8–15, 33–38). Thus shall the great promise of the Covenant be fulfilled: In an eternal homeland purged of sin and secured from judgment, the LORD will be their God and they will be his people—forever (36:28; cf. 37:24–28).

Here in chapter 37 Ezekiel gives us a mysterious vision of how all this will come to pass: Because of the greatness of God's grace, a people lying dead in the Valley of the Shadow Death will soon be miraculously transformed and definitively transferred: planted once and for all upon the mountains of Israel, where they will forever live in peace and prosperity with their Messiah and their covenant-keeping God.

The Valley of the Shadow of Death (vv. 1-2)

The vision begins with the LORD carrying Ezekiel in the Spirit to a valley where he beholds a great multitude of bones scattered over the face of the ground. Upon close inspection he realizes that they are "very dry"—that is, long dead, and therefore thoroughly dead (vv. 1–2). Reading these verses, the Jews in exile may well have recalled how Jeremiah had predicted that the Babylonians would fill the accursed Valley of Topheth with the bones of the inhabitants of sinful Jerusalem (Jer. 7:32–8:2). But God does not name this valley, and for good reason: The vision does not speak of a physical place, but of a spiritual condition. This is the Valley of the Shadow of Death (Ps. 23:4; 107:10, 14; Isa. 9:2; Jer. 2:6; Luke 1:79). This is the great spiritual wasteland into which God, because of the sin of Adam, cast all the sinful exiles of Eden (Gen. 3:22–24; Luke 4:5–7; Rev. 12:6, 14). This is the Domain of Darkness, whose unregenerate inhabitants, despite having a reputation that they live, are in fact completely dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1–10; Col. 1:13; 2:13; Rev. 3:1).

Can These Bones Live? (v. 3)

Now that the inspection is complete, God has a question for the prophet: "Son of man, can these bones live?" Ezekiel well understands that nothing is too hard for the LORD (Gen. 18:14; Jer. 32:27). However, not knowing what the bones symbolize, he is uncertain as to whether or not God wills for them to live. So he responds, "Lord God, You Yourself know" (v. 3). This calls to

mind Christ's exchange with his incredulous disciples, when they asked, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus's answer applies here: "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible" (Mark 10:27). The sovereign LORD can indeed save spiritually dead sinners. Moreover, in the case of his elect, nothing in Heaven or upon the earth can stop him from doing so (John 6:37; 10:16).

Prophesy to Them! (vv. 4-6)

In verses 4–6 we hear God's command to Ezekiel: He must prophesy to the dry bones, telling them that God will put sinew and flesh upon them, cover the flesh with skin, and fill the bodies with breath so that they will live again and come to the knowledge of the One who has just raised them from the dead.

These verses speak of a creation. The imagery clearly recalls the creation of Adam, whose body God formed from the dust of the earth, and then brought to life by breathing the breath of life into his nostrils (Gen. 2:7). Here, however, we are dealing with something different. This is a *re-*creation. And it is a *spiritual* re-creation rather than a physical. The NT tells us that Christ himself will accomplish it (John 20:19–23), with the result that his people will know both him and his Father as their sovereign Creator and Redeemer (John 14:15–20). A NT paraphrase of God's message to Ezekiel might go like this: "In that day God will regenerate a great multitude of elect sinners (i.e., his Church), raising them up from the spiritual death that they inherited from the First Adam, and bringing them to an eternal newness of life that they will inherit through the Last" (Rom. 6:1–4; 1 Cor. 15:45; Eph. 2:6; Col. 3:1).

Does this prophecy also allude to the resurrection of the body? To be sure. However, it does so in a manner that awaits further light on the (two) stages of the Kingdom. That light is given in the DNT, where we learn that a saint's *spiritual* resurrection (through faith in Christ) precedes, prepares for, and guarantees his *bodily* resurrection, which is set to occur at the end of the present evil age (John 5:24–29; 11:25–26; Rom. 6:5). So then: Ezekiel 37 does indeed allude to the resurrection of the body, but that is not its focus. Its focus is the spiritual resurrection of the Israel of God: the Church (Gal. 6:16). Before she can attain the resurrection of the body, something spiritual must occur: She must first be spiritually resurrected, spiritually assembled, and led out by God into spiritual war (Ezek. 37:10; 38–39; Rom. 6:1-14).

Come, O Breath, So That They May Live! (vv. 7-10)

In verses 7–10 we find the prophet doing exactly as he was bidden. Moreover, when he does, all unfolds exactly as God said it would. Such mighty prophesying pictures the spiritually re-creative power of the Gospel in the mouth of the prophetic Church (Rom. 1:16; 10:17; Col. 1:6; 1 Thess. 2:13; Heb. 4:12; 1 Peter 1:23; Rev. 11:1–3).

In accordance with the pattern laid down in Genesis, Ezekiel sees that the eschatological re-creation will occur in two stages. First, the dead bones will become bodies (vv. 7–8), then the dead bodies will become living bodies, for the breath (i.e., the Spirit) of God stands them on their feet, henceforth ready to serve as an exceedingly great army (vv. 9–10). All of this pictures the ongoing creation of the Church Militant throughout the Era of Proclamation. In a microcosm it was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost, when the Spirit fell upon and filled 120 "rattling bones" who had previously come together in one place (Acts 2:1). As a result, they stood up boldly to wage a loving holy war in the name of Christ and the Gospel (Acts 2; 4; 10; 13). But the vision will continue to be fulfilled right up to the end of the age, whenever and wherever God assembles, builds up, and sends out the Body of Christ through interaction with his Spirit and his (Gospel) Word (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 4:12, 15–16; Col. 2:18–19).

Notably, this ecclesiological interpretation is supported by verse 9, which represents the Spirit as coming from the four winds. This alludes to the four corners of the earth, from which God will gather his universal Church, comprised of Jew and Gentile (Mark 13:27; Rev. 7:1–8). It is also supported by verse 10, in which eschatological "Israel" is portrayed as an exceedingly great army, a metaphor repeatedly used to describe the NT Church, who are cast as good soldiers of Jesus Christ (Luke 14:31; 1 Cor. 9:7; Eph. 6:10–18; 2 Tim. 2:3; Rev. 19:14).

The Whole House of Israel (vv. 11–14)

In verses 11–14 God finally interprets the vision for Ezekiel. It is yet another oracle of eschatological "Israel's" restoration (Gal. 6:16). Ethnic Jews will indeed be among them, for in many times and places they have felt themselves hopelessly lost and cut off. But so too have multitudes of Gentiles (v. 11; Matt. 4:12–16; 15:25; Eph. 2:12); and since, through Christ, they also will enter the

Eternal Covenant, God will not be ashamed to call them "my people" (Rom. 9:25–26; 2 Cor. 6:16; Heb. 2:11; 8:10; 11:16; Rev. 18:4).

God's promise to them is manifold: He will raise them up from the grave of spiritual death, transport them to their heavenly homeland, and plant them on the top of his Holy Mountain (v. 12; Ezek. 36:8–15; 40:1–2; Gal. 4:26; Col. 1:13; Heb. 12:22; Rev. 14:1). Note carefully from the conclusion of the prophecy that when this happens his people will realize that the great transformation was not of their own doing. Rather, God himself, by his sovereign grace, was the One who made them alive together with Christ, raised them up together with Christ, and caused them to be seated together with Christ in the heavenly places. There they will enjoy the glories of the Zion above (and vicissitudes upon the earth below) until the happy day when the High King returns and raises them bodily for eternal life in the glorious Homeland to Come (v. 13–14; John 15:16; Rom. 8:28–30; 1 Cor. 1:26–31; Eph. 2:4–10; Titus 3:4–7; 1 John 3:14; Rev. 14:1; 21:1–5).

By pushing this prophecy into a distant millennial future, and by limiting its fulfillment to ethnic Israel, prophetic literalism turns it into a valley of dry bones. But when the NCH breathes upon it, how the dry bones live!

7. Israel's Last Battle

(Ezekiel 38–39)

These mysterious chapters give us Ezekiel's famous prophecy of the Deception, Destruction, and Disposal of Israel's great eschatological enemy: Gog and his confederacy of hostile Gentile armies. In the latter days, by divine decree, they all will go up against a people fully restored to the LORD and his covenant blessings, thinking to annihilate them and seize their homeland. But it is Gog and his armies who will be annihilated. Under furious strokes of divine judgment, they will suffer complete and everlasting destruction upon the mountains of Israel.

How shall we understand this prophecy?

The answer from our premillennarian brethren is both predictable and disappointing. Embracing prophetic literalism, they argue that Ezekiel is predicting a military war against latter-day Jews who are spiritually renewed and happily resettled in their ancestral homeland of Palestine. But once again there are telling disagreements among the interpreters. Some, following the lead of Revelation 20:7–9, place this battle at the end of the Millennium.

Others say it will take place just prior to Christ's Second Coming and the onset of the Millennium. This, however, forces the latter group to explain why Ezekiel has the Messiah living in the land *before* the Last Battle, rather than coming to it afterwards (Ezek. 37:24–25).

There are other problems as well, and of the same kind that appear throughout OTKP. As we have seen, the conspicuous use of figurative language warns against prophetic literalism. But if, in the case before us, that warning is ignored, our text is immediately seen to be in conflict with other OT prophecies of the Last Battle (Joel 3:1–17; Micah 4:11–5:1; Zech. 14:1–3), to entangle us in numerous anachronisms, and to plunge us into incredulity. For consider: Would (or could) modern armies bring wooden weapons to the field of battle? Would there be enough such weapons for a nation of millions to use them as fuel for seven years (Ezek. 39:9)? If all the people of the land worked daily for seven months to bury the bodies of their defeated foes, how many millions of corpses would there have to be (Ezek. 39:12–13)? How could the Israelites bear the stench or avoid the spread of disease?

No, prophetic literalism is not the key to this prophecy. But if not, what is? Once again the NCH points the way. On this view, chapters 34 and 36 use covenantally conditioned language to describe the eschatological restoration of God's people—both Jew and Gentile—in the Kingdom of his Son. Chapters 40–48 use covenantally conditioned language to describe the eternal worship of those people in the Kingdom of their Father: in the eternal World to Come. Accordingly, here in chapters 38–39 the Spirit must be using covenantally conditioned language to describe the Last Battle between God and Satan, Christ and the Antichrist, and the Church and the World—a battle that will be brought to a solemn and triumphant conclusion by the Parousia of Jesus Christ on the Day of the Lord.

Does the text itself support these conclusions? Let us turn to it now and see.

The Deception of Gog (38:1-17)

In verses 1–6 God commands Ezekiel to prophesy against Gog—who is consistently represented as a person—and the seven nations that will join him in their eschatological assault against Israel: Meschech, Tubal, Persia, Ethiopia, Libya, Gomer, and Togarmah. The number is symbolic, indicating that these nations typify the entire world. So too does the fact that they are situated to the north, east, and south of Israel. Revelation 20:7–10 confirms this

interpretation, declaring that Gog and Magog will be gathered from "the four corners of the earth." The message, then, is that Gog—unveiled in the NT as a personal Antichrist controlled by Satan himself—will gather together the entire world system for a final attack against the NT people of God: the Church. Her enemies will mean it for evil, but the all-sovereign God of providence, intent on a final majestic display of his glory, will mean it for good (Gen. 50:20; Rom. 8:28; 9:14–18; 11:36; 2 Thess. 2:1–12).

In verses 7–9 God elaborates. The battle will occur "after many days" and "in the latter years"—that is, at the end of the Era of Proclamation. By his providence God himself will summon his foes, emboldening them to gather together against the LORD and his anointed servants (Ps. 2:1–3; Acts 4:23–31; Rev. 13:7). Accordingly, they will go up against a people rescued out of the nations; a people now dwelling securely in their homeland and upon the mountains of Israel (v. 8). That is, they will attack the Church: a people called out of the worldwide Domain of Darkness (where their lives were an uninhabited waste), and into the heavenly places in Christ (where, being inhabited by Christ, they now dwell in peace and security with their mighty risen Lord; Eph. 1:3; 2:6; Col. 3:1–3; Heb. 12:22). Observe again from verse 9 the universality and magnitude of the attack against the Church: "Many peoples" are joined with Gog, and together they cover the land like a cloud (Rev. 13:3, 8; 20:8–9).

In verses 10–13 God elaborates further, this time probing the evil motivations of Gog and his hordes. Seeing both the prosperity and powerlessness of a peace-loving people who trust in God rather than walls and weapons, they will be emboldened "to capture spoils and to seize plunder" (v. 12). So too will many covetous onlookers, typified by the merchants of Sheba, Dedan, and Tarshish (v. 13; Rev. 18:15–19). These images speak of spiritual conditions in the last of the last days. Hitherto the Church has enjoyed a wealth of adherents, as well as religious, moral, and cultural influence; now, however, all is attenuated. Spiritually speaking, she is no longer "the navel of the earth," the spiritual center of world civilization (v. 12). The moral force of the Gospel—and the moral influence of the Church that proclaims it—no longer register on the conscience of a lawless world. Accordingly, it now dawns on the rulers of this present evil age that there is nothing to prevent them from seizing, not simply the property, but also the religious, philosophical, and moral high ground of the followers of the Prince of Peace (Matt. 24:12; 2 Tim.

3:1–9; 2 Thess. 2:1–12). Foolishly, they decide to try.

Before pronouncing judgment on his foes, God reiterates his decree one final time (vv. 14-17). Yes, Gog will discern the vulnerability of the LORD's little flock (v. 14). And yes, a multitude of latter-day nations will follow him in the attack, animated by the same spirit that motivated so many of Israel's former enemies to invade Palestine from the north (v. 15; Isa. 41:25; Jer. 1:13–15; 6:22–26). But why are these things so certain? It is because God himself has ordained them, and because he has done so in order to manifest his glory to all mankind (v. 16). As in the Exodus, so at the Last Battle: God will demonstrate his wrath and make his power known upon vessels fitted for destruction, even as he displays the riches of his glory upon (persecuted) vessels of mercy, whom he lovingly prepared beforehand for glory (Rom. 9:22-23; 2 Thess. 1). Over the course of many years the former prophets spoke of these very things. Why? Because God himself had decreed them, and wanted his people to know it (v. 17; Deut. 32:34–43; Isa. 34:1–6; 63:1–6; 66:15–16; Joel 3:9–14; Mic. 4:9– 13). Amidst all their tribulations the saints are instructed to take refuge and find comfort in the absolute sovereignty of their covenant-keeping God.

The Destruction of Gog (38:17-23)

Having spoken at length of the deception of Gog, the LORD now unveils his destruction. When the murderous armies attack his beloved land, he (the LORD) will jealously pour out his fury, anger, and blazing wrath upon them, even as he did upon his uniquely begotten Son, so that all who would trust in him might be rescued from these, the deadliest enemies of man in the Domain of Darkness (Ezek. 20:33–35; Matt. 27:4; Rom. 3:25; 1 John 2:2; 4:10).

The first judgment is an earthquake. It is cosmic in scope, affecting seven sectors of the creation: fish, birds, beasts, all men, all mountains, and all human constructs (vv. 19–20; Heb. 12:25–29; Rev. 6:12; 11:13; 16:18). In verses 21–22, seven more judgments are announced: sword, pestilence, blood, overflowing rain, hailstones, fire, and brimstone (Rev. 17:16). The numbers are clearly symbolic, and so too is the message. The NCH decodes it. Ezekiel's catalog of OT punishments symbolizes the one cosmic judgment by fire that is set to occur at the return of Christ (Matt. 3:12; Luke 17:29; 2 Thess. 1:8; 2 Peter 3:7, 12; Rev. 20:9). When it comes, all men and nations will see and confess that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the indeed the one, true, living, and altogether holy God (v. 23; Phil. 2:9–11; 2 Thess. 1:3–10).

The Disposal of Gog (39:1–20)

Chapter 39 gives us the disposal of Gog and his hordes. Verses 1–8 begin with a brief recapitulation of his deception and destruction, wherein we learn again of the universality (v. 6), purpose (v. 7), and certainty (v. 8) of the coming judgment. Observe from verse 6 that when it does come, all the earth will be living in security. But when people are saying "Peace and safety," sudden destruction will come upon them like labor pains upon a pregnant woman; and they will not escape (1 Thess. 5:3).

The theme of verses 9–10 is eschatological pillage and plunder. That the passage is symbolic is clear from the numbers used: six kinds of weapons will be used for fire over the course of seven years. Six is the number of man, seven the number of completion. The message? Time and again Israel had been pillaged and plundered by her human enemies. The Last Battle will be their last attempt: the attempt in which fallen man will do his very worst. But here, says God, is where it all ends, and where the tables are turned forever. For here eschatological Israel will pillage and plunder *all* her foes for *all* time. Here her victory will be complete (vv. 7–8).

The NT unveils the fulfillment of our text. By God's decree the saints will have a share in the Judgment. "Do you not realize," asked the incredulous apostle, "that the saints will judge the world?" (1 Cor. 6:2; see Rom. 16:20; Rev. 20:4). In that Day the glorified Church will pillage her enemies and plunder their illicitly held possessions. When the fires of judgment have performed their work, a world formerly gone over to Satan and his seed will forever belong to the saints of the Most High. The humble will inherit the earth (Gen. 3:15; Dan. 7:18; Matt. 5:5; Luke 4:5–7; 2 Peter 3:10–13).

The message is much the same in verses 11–16, which describe the burial of the hordes of Gog. The imagery of verse 11 is designed to communicate the immensity of the burial ground, while that of verses 12–15 staggers us with the multitude of dead bodies that will lie there. Verse 16 makes the latter idea explicit, declaring that the valley will suddenly become a city (or at least play host to a city) that men will call *Hamonah* (i.e., Multitude). The NT gives the interpretation: In the Judgment the resurrected saints will receive from Christ the honor of co-laboring with him in the eschatological cleansing of the world. The Church will have a role in the final casting out of all things that offend (v. 13; Matt. 13:41; 1 Cor. 6:2–3).

Verses 17–20 alert us to the symbolic character of the entire prophecy, since now we learn that the corpses of Gog are not actually buried in the valley, but instead become a sacrificial meal prepared by the LORD on the mountains of Israel for every sort of bird of the air and beast of the field. Here again the theme is the Judgment. We are assured of this by its NT counterpart, Revelation 19:17–21. Drawing liberally from Ezekiel's words, the Spirit associates "the Great Supper of God" with the Second Coming of Christ as Judge of all (Rev. 19:11–17). Passages from the DNT decode the symbolism of both prophecies: At the Parousia, by the authority and power of Christ, the holy angels (and perhaps the saints as well) will fall upon the wicked and cast them into Gehenna, where the latter will be eternally devoured by the fires of divine judgment (Matt. 13:39–43; Rom. 2:5–10; 2 Thess. 1:3–12; 2:8; James 5:3; Rev. 19:20; 20:14–15). Thus shall they become a kind of sacrifice, not to atone for sin, but to glorify the holiness, righteousness, justice, wrath, and power of the divine Judge of sin (Rom. 9:19–24; Rev. 15:1–8; 16:4–7).

A Final Promise of Restoration (39:21–29)

This section brings the prophecy of Israel's Last Battle to a close, paving the way for Ezekiel's description of eternal life and worship in the World to Come (Ezek. 40–48). Appropriately enough, it gives us yet another promise of Israel's eschatological restoration (vv. 25–29).

In verses 21–24 God casts a backward glance at his supreme purpose in the Judgment previously described: "That they may know." He desires all to know his glory (v. 21). He desires Israel to know his covenant faithfulness (v. 22). And he desires the Gentiles to know that whenever they (briefly) triumphed over his people and nation, it was not because he was unable or unwilling to save them, but because they had sinned, with the result that for a little season he was forced to hide his face from them in judgment (vv. 23–24; Isa. 54:8).

Mindful of this purpose, and eager to instill hope in his suffering people, God therefore concludes the prophecy with yet another promise of eschatological redemption (vv. 25–29). The blessings are familiar. He will restore the fortunes of Jacob and have mercy on the house of Israel (v. 25). They will forget their former disgrace and live securely in their own land (v. 26). Their holy and blessed life will bring honor to God's name (v. 27). They will learn to see his sovereign hand, both in their previous exile and in their return (v. 28). And when in fact they have returned, they will rest in this

glorious confidence: Never again shall God hide his face from them in judgment, for he will have poured out his life-transforming Spirit upon all the house of Israel (v. 29; Heb. 8:1–13).

How shall we interpret this final promise? That it *appears* to be speaking exclusively of ethnic Israel can scarcely be denied. However, the NT assures us that such is not the case. For since the prophet is clearly foreseeing the redemptive work of God in the last days, the promise is—and is yet to be—fulfilled in Christ, under the New Covenant, in the twofold Kingdom that he has introduced. Here again, however, his words are veiled: cast in ideas and images designed to give hope to God's captive OT saints.

We conclude, then, that here Ezekiel is actually speaking of eschatological Israel, of God's elect in all nations, whether Jew or Gentile (Gal. 6:16). Having sinned in Adam—and also by their own evil choices—God has exiled them in the Domain of Darkness, where they have suffered grievously at the hands of their many enemies. But because of his everlasting love for them, he will soon take action. He will set his glory—the Person and Work of his Son—among them, draw them to him, justify them, fill them with his Spirit, and plant them securely—with neither shame nor disgrace—in their heavenly homeland above.

And yes, at the end of the age the confederate world system will mount a fierce attack against the holy nation, for God has decreed that they shall follow in the footsteps of their Redeemer (John 15:20; Rev. 11:7–10). But after they have suffered a little while, and after they have been sanctified through their suffering, God will yet again set his glory among the nations, this time at the return of the High King of Heaven and Earth, who will swiftly destroy and dispose of all his enemies, and then establish his people once and for all in their ultimate homeland: the new heavens and the new earth (1 Peter 1:3–9).

On that day, all men and all nations will come to know the LORD: the sovereignty, righteousness, justice, power, wrath, love, mercy, grace, goodness, and faithfulness of the one true living God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

^{1.} This is not to say that in the Last Battle all Christians will be martyred. Rather, it is to say that because of widespread disapproval, rejection, marginalization, and persecution the true spiritual Church will appear to be dead: small, irrelevant, powerless, and/or hopelessly outdated.

^{2.} The New Bible Commentary, s.v. Isaiah, 621.

^{3.} For a list of all biblical texts dealing with the Last Battle see Appendix III. We will discuss the Last Battle in chapters 12 and 14.

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CHAPTER 9

OLD TESTAMENT KINGDOM PROPHECIES CONSIDERED: DANIEL, ZECHARIAH

Daniel's famous prophecy of the seventy sevens (Dan. 9:24–27), and Zechariah's mysterious oracles about "Jerusalem in that Day" (Zech. 12–14). Can the NCH open them up for us? Can it resolve the longstanding controversy that surrounds them? Let us turn to them now and see.

Daniel's Prophecy of the Seventy Sevens

(Daniel 9:24-27)

The year is 539 BC. Daniel, still in captivity under Darius the Mede, has been reading the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 25:11–12; 29:10). He realizes that the seventy years of Jerusalem's desolation are nearing an end, but also that many captive Jews remain unbroken and impenitent (Dan. 9:13). They are not spiritually qualified for the great restoration promised decades earlier.

So Daniel prays (Dan. 9:3–23). First, he rehearses and confesses the sins of God's covenant-breaking people (vv. 3–10). Then he acknowledges God's justice in sending them into captivity (vv. 11–15). Finally, he makes his petition. Appealing solely to God's mercy, grace, and zeal for the honor of his name, he pleads with the LORD to fulfill his promise given through Jeremiah: to restore his city, his sanctuary, and his holy mountain (vv. 16–19).

His words are not in vain. Even as he is praying, the angel Gabriel arrives and stands before him, declaring to Daniel that God has heard his prayer and answered it. He has been sent to give Daniel "insight and understanding" about the coming restoration (vv. 20–23). In the four long verses that follow he does just that (vv. 24–27).

Are you familiar with this famous OTKP, often referred to as the prophecy of Daniel's Seventy Sevens (or Weeks)? If so, you know one thing for sure: A

whole host of commentators have been seeking insight and understanding ever since!

In my book *The High King of Heaven* I discuss and critique the three most popular interpretations of this prophecy. In chapter 15 of this book I will sketch the dispensational view and explain how it controls the dispensational interpretation of the Revelation as a whole. Here I want to limit my remarks to what I have called the Reformed Two-Advent View (RTAV). It is *Reformed* because it is rooted in the classic amillennial eschatology of the Reformation. It is *two-advent* because it finds Daniel referring both to the first and second advents of Christ. This view arose in the nineteenth century. Its chief proponents were Theodore Kliefoth and C. F. Keil. C. H. Leupold is its leading modern defender. My indebtedness to Leupold's fine *Exposition of Daniel* will soon become clear.

To my mind the RTAV is easily the most satisfying interpretation of Daniel 9. Unlike the other schemes, it harmonizes perfectly with the details of the text itself, and also with the majestic purpose and contents of Daniel's other prophecies. More than this, it abundantly confirms—and is illumined by—NT eschatology. As a result, it not only fills us with confidence as to its truth, but also gives us "one of the grandest revelations of the course and climax of Salvation History to be found in the prophetic Word." ¹

Let us now take a close look at this important OTKP. I will go through our text verse by verse, offering interpretations guided by the RTAV. The translation, with significant modifications imported from other versions, is that of the very literal *New American Standard Bible*.

The Seventy Sevens (9:24)

Seventy sevens have been decreed over your people and over your holy city, to finish (or restrain) transgression, to make an end of (or seal up) sins, and to make atonement for iniquity; to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy.

In this verse Daniel gives us the theme of the entire prophecy. It is, as it were, both a heading and a summary, of which all that follows is the detailed elaboration.

What exactly is that theme? Advocates of the RTAV would sum it up as follows: God has decreed a set period of time in which he will fully fulfill his redemptive purpose and plan, a time in which he will bestow all his redemptive

promises upon all his redeemed people. In other words, here Gabriel is saying that the prophecy to follow will give us the remainder of all Salvation History, from Daniel's day to the Parousia of Christ at the end of the present evil age. It will survey all that the LORD will do between now (539 BC) and the Consummation in order to bring his people and their world into the completed Kingdom of God.

This soul-stirring interpretation is confirmed at the very outset. Gabriel declares that seventy sevens are decreed over the people of God and their Holy City. He says nothing of years or weeks of years. Manifestly, the numbers are symbolic. But why were they chosen and what do they mean? Doubtless they *allude* to the seventy years of Israel's exile and captivity, and therefore appear here as a way of promising that in the seventy sevens ahead God will *fully* deliver his people from every form of captivity, and fully restore them to all his covenant promises.

The key word here is "fully." In the Bible the numbers seven and ten symbolize fullness, perfection, and completeness. Seventy sevens, being 7 x 7 x 10, mystically expresses perfect completeness (cf. Matt. 18:22). Speaking as he did, Gabriel was therefore saying, "God has decreed a set amount of time within which he will fulfill, perfect, and complete his redemptive purposes. I am about to tell you what will happen in that time."

Leupold expresses this idea as follows: "The seventy heptads is the period in which the divine work of greatest moment is brought to perfection." If he is correct, it means that the *terminus ad quem* of the prophecy is indeed the Parousia of Christ at the end of the age. This in turn implies that the seventy sevens are *not* calendar years (as the other views posit), and that henceforth no calculations (or "\"\"\-day years, as some dispensationalists posit) are possible or needed. What a relief!

God's decree concerns Daniel's people and his Holy City. Who and what are they? Here we must take care. The Jerusalem of verse 25a is indeed the earthly Jerusalem, and the people who rebuilt it were indeed ethnic Jews. But the City of verse 25b, which is identical with the City and Sanctuary of verses 26–27, is different. It appears *after* the coming of Messiah the Prince (v. 25b). It arises in NT times under the New Covenant. Therefore, according to the NCH, it represents Christ's Church. Happily, we know from the DNT that Daniel and all his godly OT compatriots are members thereof in excellent standing (John 10:16; Heb. 11:40).

Gabriel now unveils six redemptive blessings that God will bestow upon his "Israel" over the course of the seventy sevens (Gal. 6:16). They appear in two triads: The first three pertain to redemptive *rescue* from sin, the second three to redemptive *restoration* to eternal life. While textual peculiarities make the exact translation of some of these words difficult, the NCH enables us to uncover the essential meanings involved.

My best take is as follows: By the end of the seventy sevens—and because of the total redemptive work of Christ, both in his humiliation and exaltation—God will have completely: (1) finished (or possibly, restrained) the transgression of his people (i.e., their actual transgressing of his Law); (2) made an end of (or possibly, sealed up) their sins (i.e., stopped their actual sinning, or possibly canceled the record of their sins, with its power to condemn them); (3) made atonement for their iniquity (i.e., secured forgiveness of their sins through the substitutionary death of Christ); (4) brought in everlasting righteousness (i.e., imputed and imparted Christ's perfect righteousness to his people so that they can forever dwell with him in a perfectly righteous world, 2 Peter 3:13); (5) sealed up vision and prophecy (i.e., caused both visions and prophecies to cease, owing to the fulfillment of all his redemptive purposes and all previous visions and prophecies); and, (6) anointed the Most Holy (i.e., bestowed divine glory and perfect holiness upon his eschatological sanctuary: the Church, the glorified Body of Christ, Eph. 3:21; Rev. 21:1-22).

These are all Kingdom blessings, introduced by the New Covenant that creates the Kingdom. Therefore, since the one Kingdom enters history in two stages, there is a sense in which Christians already enjoy them; there is a sense (largely forensic) in which they have already taken possession of them. Nevertheless, the accent here clearly falls upon the *eschaton*. Commenting on the blessings of the completed Kingdom, and indicating Gabriel's purpose in declaring them to Daniel, Leupold well observes:

In these six statements we have the sum of all the good things that God promised to men, perfectly realized. With this verse we stand at the ultimate goal of the history of the Kingdom of God. What follows will unfold the successive stages by which this goal is realized, and will present the main features to be looked for and borne in mind by the people of God. We have just seen the essentials of God's program for the ages.²

The Seven Sevens and the Sixty-two Sevens (9:25)

So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there will be seven sevens; and for sixty-two sevens it will be built again with open square and moat [or wall], even in troubled times.

This verse spans the bulk of the remainder of Salvation History: sixty-nine of the seventy sevens. According to the English Standard Version (ESV), the marginal reading of the American Standard Version (ASV), and the advocates of the RTAV, it is properly divided into two distinct parts: the first seven sevens, and the sixty-two sevens that follow. The first seven sevens begin with a decree to restore and rebuild earthly Jerusalem. Most likely this was the decree issued by Cyrus in 538 BC, though the precise date is of little importance since the first seven sevens are not weeks of years, but the fulsome season of Salvation History that ends with the coming of Messiah the Prince. This is, of course, the first advent of Christ, through whose earthly work (i.e., his humiliation) all the blessings of v. 24 were purchased and will thereafter be bestowed.

Now the sixty-two sevens begin. These too symbolize an era, the era in which Christ builds his Church (Matt. 16:18). Here, however, Gabriel uses OT typological language to speak of NT realities, casting the growth of the Church in terms of the growth of the City of God. The reference to its open square (or streets) suggests *expansive growth outwards*. The reference to a moat or wall suggests *divine protection*. Pointing to the real but limited success of world evangelization during this time, Leupold therefore paraphrases, "She shall again be built extensively, yet within fixed limits." The growth shall occur "in troubled times," a phrase echoed in the Revelation, where the Spirit refers to the Era of Proclamation (and indeed to all Salvation History) as "the Great Tribulation." Yes, God has decreed the rearing up of Christ's Church, but he has also decreed considerable trouble for the saints who will build it (Acts 14:22; Rom. 5:3; 2 Cor. 1:4; 1 Thess. 3:4; Rev. 7:14). They must prepare themselves.

This division of the sixty-nine sevens into two distinct eras (an OT era and a NT era) is the distinguishing characteristic of the RTAV, since it places Christ's first advent at the end of the first seven sevens, and not at the end of the sixty-nine sevens, as in the other views. The superiority of this approach is so evident that one wonders how we could have missed it for so long. Above all, it

immediately helps us to understand why Gabriel did not simply refer to sixtynine sevens, but instead divided them into two distinct parts. Moreover, as we are about to see, once we accept this framework, it sheds an abundance of fascinating—and eschatologically vital—light on the seventieth seven, spoken of in verses 26–27. We turn to them now.

The Seventieth Seven: Desolations Are Decreed (9:26)

Then after the sixty-two sevens the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its [or his] end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are decreed.

This is the first of two verses dealing with the seventieth seven: that is, with the third and final stage of Gabriel's depiction of Salvation History. Again, it is not a season of seven literal years, as repeated exposure to dispensational claims may incline us to believe. No, it is an era of brief but uncertain duration, the era in which God will bring Salvation History to a close in final conflict, final judgment, and final redemption. This interpretation buttresses the RTAV, since it finds Daniel doing what he has previously done (Dan. 2, 7), and what we would expect him to do here: give us nothing less than the Consummation of all things: the dramatic closing scenes of God's plan for the ages.

The theme of verse 26 is the end time agony of the true spiritual Church of Christ. The close of the present evil age is near. The Great Commission is almost fulfilled. Lawlessness abounds and deep darkness covers the earth. At this point, says the angel, the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing. If the RTAV is correct, this cannot refer to his atoning death, as many interpreters argue. What, then, does it mean? Leupold suggests that the "cutting off" is best illumined by the "having nothing":

[The having nothing] implies that he shall not have that which normally might be expected to fall to his lot, such as followers, influence, and the like. If that is the case, then the preceding statement must have involved his being "cut off," in the sense of losing all the influence and prestige that he ever had before men. The season of the successful building of the City and the Sanctuary is at an end. As far as the world is concerned, Messiah shall be a dead issue. His cause will seem to have failed.⁵

At that time—amidst such widespread apostasy from the Law and Gospel of God—the world system will act. The people of the prince who is to come will destroy the City and the Sanctuary (2 Thess. 2:1–12). This prince is not Titus, as many assert, but the Antichrist: the very Antichrist whom we meet over and again in Daniel's visions (Dan. 7:8, 11, 21-22, 24-26; 11:36-45). His people are the eschatological seed of the serpent (Gen. 3:15), the "sons of the evil one" (Matt. 13:38), and the followers of the Beast (Rev. 13:1-4). Concerning the City and the Sanctuary, Leupold opines: "These represent the visible institution called the Church. These shall be destroyed, and with them the influence of the Christ that we now still know and feel to be abroad in the earth." Doubtless this destruction will involve a fresh measure of Christian martyrdom. Nevertheless, the primary meaning here is that religious freedom for faithful Christians will be universally denied, and the true spiritual Church driven underground (though an apostate "Christian" church may indeed be granted a place in the public square). Daniel has already seen this coming (Dan. 7:21, 25). It is explicitly predicted in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4. It also appears in Revelation 11:7–10, where the Spirit represents the end time Church under the image of two OT witnesses: witnesses whom the Beast kills and leaves for dead on the bloody streets of the City of Man, just as he did their Lord.

Regarding the final sentence of this verse, Leupold contends that it is the Antichrist whose end will come with a flood of divine judgment at Christ's Parousia: Like Pharaoh and his subservient armies, he will be utterly swept away (2 Thess. 2:8; Rev. 15:1–4). This could be. However, the context seems to favor the idea that the institutional presence of the true spiritual Church in the public square is again in view: Her (outward, physical) end will come with a flood of opposition and persecution (Ps. 18:4; Isa. 59:19). To the very end of the seventieth seven there will be war against the saints (Rev. 12:15, 17). Desolations—of both the true Church and her persecutors—are determined (Rev. 11:1–2).

The Seventieth Seven: The Desolator Destroyed (9:27)

And he will make a firm covenant with many for one seven, but in the middle of the seven he will put a stop to sacrifice and offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction—one that is decreed—is poured out on the desolator.

Here Gabriel further instructs Daniel about key events of the seventieth seven, this time with a concluding emphasis on the destruction of the destroyer: the Antichrist. As this long verse opens we learn that throughout the final seven he (the Antichrist) will cause a strong covenant to prevail over "the many." Leupold explains as follows:

The idea is that as he seeks to take the place of the Christ, so he shall imitate Him in some way. As the Lord made a covenant with his own to give them strong assurances as to what he would do, so Antichrist will inaugurate a covenant that will prevail; which is to say, compel the masses to accept it and abide by it. It shall not, therefore, be a gracious covenant of love, as are the Lord's covenants, but a covenant of terror, compulsion, and violence.²

C. F. Keil, an early proponent of the RTAV, concurs. Highlighting the religious dimension of the Antichrist's "agreement" with the world, he writes, "The ungodly prince shall impose upon the mass of the people a strong covenant that they should follow him and give themselves to him as their God" (Rev. 13:4). The interpretation offered by these two outstanding commentators is compelling, seeing that 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12 supplies a more or less identical picture of the purpose, character, and career of the Man of Lawlessness. We will examine it more closely in the pages ahead.

How will the global rule of the Antichrist affect the Church? In a reprise of the message of verse 26, Gabriel answers by declaring that in the middle of the last seven he will put a stop to sacrifice and offering. This means that (roughly) halfway through his hegemony the Antichrist will suddenly turn against the Church and suppress her public worship. At this point he will become "one who makes desolate": a destroyer. With destructive intent he will now come against the Church "upon the wing of abominations." That is, he will fly into global power and influence—and so to apparent victory over Christ's little flock—riding upon the persuasive force of detestable idols: a counterfeit gospel (i.e., religion, ideology) and counterfeit signs and wonders that seem to validate it (Matt. 24:23–24; 2 Thess. 2:8–12).

This will indeed be the Church's darkest hour (Matt. 24:21; Rev. 13:7). It is, however, only an hour, and an hour that her Redeemer himself has triumphantly passed through (John 13:1; 17:1; Rev. 11:8). Accordingly, it is actually an hour of great hope, for just as the Redeemer swiftly overcame and

rose to newness of life, so too shall his Church. For no sooner will the counterfeit prince launch his great war against the saints, than the glorified Christ will appear in the skies above the earth to rescue them. Then, in the Judgment that follows, he will pour out complete destruction on all who thought to destroy his own: Apollyon, the Antichrist, and "the many" who so foolishly followed them into the Last Battle (Matt. 24:29–31; 25:31–46; 1 Thess. 4:13–17; 2 Thess. 1:3–10; 2:8, 11–12; Rev. 19:20; 20:10).²

Conclusion

The prophecy of Daniel's Seventy Sevens—possibly the most difficult in the entire OT prophetic canon—is a case study in the indispensability of the NCH. Without it, the vision is a maze, a labyrinth from which there is no escape. With it, the way into the open field of truth becomes clear at last.

Here, however, we must also express gratitude for the RTAV, which has employed the NCH creatively and to maximum effect. Unlike the other views, it is true both to the text and its context: to the Book of Daniel as a whole. It harmonizes perfectly with NT eschatology, and draws richly upon it for good understanding. But best of all—to my mind at least—is the intriguing fact that the RTAV comes to us *at just the right time*. Somehow it suits the dark, difficult, and dangerous days through which we are now passing. Most fittingly does it remind us of the sufferings that God has ordained for Christ's Church, but also of the eternal glories that await her faithful sons and daughters on the other side (2 Tim. 3:1–9; 1 Peter 1:11).

In short, I think it likely that this interpretation of Daniel's Seventy Sevens is an eschatological gift from the exalted Lord himself. If so, then in the dark days ahead he will surely use it to infuse his beloved Bride with just the right mix of tough realism, evangelistic skill, and steadfast hope in the soon return of the High King of Heaven.

Jerusalem in That Day

(Zechariah 12–14)

We turn our attention now to the most prolific—and most fascinating—of the three *post-exilic* prophets: Zechariah (ca. 520 BC). Like his rough contemporaries—Haggai and Malachi—this great OT priest, seer, and martyr comforted a subjugated and much enfeebled nation with visions and prophecies of a glorious future. Over and again he spoke of the coming of the

Messiah, his mysterious rejection, the resultant ingathering of his little flock, the Last Battle, the Judgment, and the ultimate restoration of God's people, land, temple, priesthood, and Holy City: Jerusalem.

Our focus here is on Zechariah 12–14. It is the second of two lengthy oracles dealing with the coming Kingdom of God. I have titled it *Jerusalem in That Day*, since its theme is the destiny of the City of God in the Day of his two-staged Kingdom. As we shall see, this oracle gives us nine "snapshots" of key events that will take place in the Era of Fulfillment. Each snapshot stands alone. Each is related to the others *thematically*, though not necessarily *chronologically*. In Zechariah's prophesying we often take "two steps forward and one step backward." Nevertheless, the oracle does have chronological drift and momentum. Broadly, it passes from the Era of Proclamation, through the Last Battle and the Day of the Lord, into the World to Come. ¹⁰

With these few words of introduction, and with the Teacher and the NCH at our side, let us now visit *Jerusalem in That Day*.

Strong in the LORD (12:1-9)

The opening prophecy sounds the theme of the oracle as a whole: In the eschatological conflict between Israel and the nations God will be the strength of his people, leading them through much suffering to final triumph and full redemption. Observe that the phrase "in that day" recurs five times. This signals that the events in view will occur in the eschatological era: the era of the New Covenant in Christ. Accordingly, we will need the NCH to discern the meaning of the prophet's words. Since each of the nine verses is a prophetic nugget in its own right, I will comment one verse at a time.

In verse 1, Zechariah characterizes the forthcoming oracle (i.e., chapters 12–14) as "the burden of the word of the LORD concerning Israel." It is a burden because it brings heavy tidings, and also because it burdens the prophet with a sense of urgency to deliver it to God's needy people.

The oracle concerns eschatological "Israel": the Church—believing Jews and Gentiles—living and serving together as one family and one nation under Christ (Gal. 6:16; Eph. 2:15; Rev. 12:1–2). It originates from the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, the One who is sovereign over all history for the good of his people and the glory of God (Rom. 8:28; Eph. 1:11–12). Since Zechariah will speak of the Consummation toward the end of the oracle, we may safely assume that in this first snapshot his focus is largely upon the

Church's spiritual warfare throughout the entire Era of Proclamation, an era that the Holy Spirit will later refer to as (a major part of) the Great Tribulation (Rev. 7:14; see Acts 14:22).

According to verse 2, the sovereign God has purposed to make the Church—the NT City of God (Gal. 4:26; Heb. 12:22)—a cup that causes reeling in the (hostile) peoples around her. All who attack her will become drunk with God's judicial blindness, and will therefore stagger and fall beneath his judgments (Jer. 25:15–16; 2 Thess. 2:1–12). Such is the fate of those who would persecute God's Gospel prophets, of those who would touch the apple of his eye (Ps. 105:15; Zech. 2:8; Rev. 11:5). The siege will not only be against the capital city of the holy nation (i.e., church leaders and public institutions), but also against the tribal villages (i.e., the laity themselves). All who would live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution (Matt. 5:10–12; 1 Thess. 3:1–4; 2 Tim. 3:12).

In verse 3 the imagery changes but the message remains much the same. In the last days God will place his Church as a stone before all peoples. Those who build their lives on this stone (i.e., by building them upon the Christ whom the Church proclaims) will live (Matt. 7:24–27; 1 Tim. 3:15). But those who stumble over it, and those who seek to lift it out of their way by means of persecution, will be severely injured (1 Peter 2:4–8). As the Head of the Church has said, such persons will be crushed and scattered like chaff (Matt. 21:44). During the Era of Proclamation many (unbelieving) peoples will gather against the Church; at the end of the age all of them will (Zech. 14:2).

In verse 4 the Spirit uses OT martial imagery to promise that throughout that era God will continually watch over—and rise to the defense of—his latter-day "house of Judah": the redeemed tribe of his Messianic Son, the Church. This calls to mind the many occasions on which God confounded the plans of the enemies of Christ's apostles, so that they might fully proclaim the Gospel and finish their course with joy (Acts 4:1–27; 5:17–26; 12:1–19; 13:4–12; 16:16–40; 18:1–17; 19:21–41; 20:24; 2 Tim. 4:18).

Verses 5–6 depict the gladness and dynamism of the eschatological "clans of Judah"—that is, of church leaders serving in the Era of Proclamation. In verse 5 we find them reveling in the spiritual vitality, loyalty, and support of "the inhabitants of Jerusalem": the saints of Christ, the citizens of the eternal City of God (Heb. 11:10, 16; Rev. 3:12; 20:9; 21:2). Here is an OT picture of NT

pastors and teachers glorying in the gifts and graces of everyday Christian folk who are eager to serve in the cause of Christ. One thinks of the apostle Paul effusing over the prayers, outreach, and generosity of the Gentile assemblies he had founded (2 Cor. 8, 9; Eph. 4:11; Phil. 1:3–11; 4:10–20; 1 Thess. 1, 2).

Verse 6 pictures the unction and effectiveness of the latter-day Gospel warriors. Ablaze with the Spirit, they will be led in triumph in Christ, diffusing the knowledge of the Redeemer in every place (2 Cor. 2:14–17). Along the way they will meet different kinds of people. Some (i.e., those who are being saved) they will "consume on the right hand," torching their opposition to Christ and turning them into spiritual brethren: fellow citizens of the Jerusalem above (Phil. 3:20). Others (i.e., those who are perishing) they will "consume on the left hand," consigning them, through their own impenitence, to the fires of judgment (John 3:19–21; Acts 13:46). At the end of the Era of Proclamation, when the battle is over and the victory complete, all the inhabitants of Jerusalem will dwell securely in their eternal home(s), with none to frighten or attack ever again (John 14:3).

Verse 7 tells us that in the latter days God will pour a new social dynamic into his nation: None of his people will glory above the rest. Special honors will no longer be accorded to a royal family or the inhabitants of a capital city (let Rome take note). Instead, God will distribute the gifts of his Spirit in such a way as to preclude divisions in the Body of Christ, and to ensure that its members care equally for one another (1 Cor. 12:22–25). Far from seeking to exalt himself, he who is greatest will be the servant of all (Mark 9:35); each will regard his brother as more important than himself (Phil. 2:3); and all will seek glory and honor, not for themselves, but for Christ (2 Cor. 10:17; Gal. 6:14).

Verse 8 uses vivid OT imagery to declare that throughout the Era of Proclamation the LORD will defend his NT warriors and make them mighty through God for the tearing down of (spiritual) strongholds (2 Cor. 10:4–6). Though their bodies may indeed feed the flames, not a hair of their head (i.e., of their regenerate souls) will perish (Luke 21:18; John 17:11, 15; 1 Cor. 13:3). In and of themselves they are pictures of spiritual weakness and poverty; but through the Christ who strengthens them they can do all things, even to the casting of (spiritual) mountains into the depths of the sea (Zech. 4:6–7; Matt. 5:3; 21:21; 2 Cor. 12:9; Phil. 4:13). Through them God's eschatological Zerubbabel *will* build his Church (Zech. 4:1–10; Matt. 16:18).

While verse 9 is indeed fulfilled throughout the Church era, its contents and

position at the end of this snapshot suggest that here the Spirit is mainly looking ahead to the Day of the LORD, a theme to be taken up at length in chapter 14. Preliminary battles and judgments portend the Last Battle and the Last Judgment, when Christ will descend from Heaven to rescue his beleaguered Bride and destroy the enemies of God once and for all (Zech. 14:2–5; Rev. 19:11–16).

Before Strength, Tears (12:10-14)

How is it that eschatological Jerusalem will become a cup of reeling to the nations (12:2)? How is it that God will so zealously come to her aid (12:4, 9)? How is it that his people will find such great strength for the battle (12:5–7)? In the present snapshot we receive our answers: They will enjoy these blessings because in that Day *God will grant them deep*, *Spirit-wrought repentance and faith in Christ* (12:10–14).

When will this great prophecy be fulfilled? Premillennial interpreters, bound by their literalist hermeneutic, feel compelled to interpret it ethnically and futuristically. John MacArthur writes, "Israel's repentance will come because they look to Jesus—the One whom they rejected and crucified—in faith at the Second Advent." But this view is deeply problematic. How did the Jews described in 12:1–9 receive such strength and blessing from God if they were not yet converted to Christ? How shall the houses of David, Nathan, Levi, and Shimei suddenly reappear on the stage of history just prior to Christ's return? And how can Israel's national conversion be effected by the visible return of Christ when, according to pervasive NT teaching, God's pleasure and purpose in NT times is to save sinners through the "foolishness of preaching" (1 Cor. 1:21; see Matt. 28:18–28, John 17:17; Rom. 10:14–17)? No, premillennial literalism cannot uncover the meaning of this prophecy.

But the NCH can.

The prophecy will be fulfilled "in that Day." According to the NCH, "that Day" is the two-staged era of the New Covenant (12:11). Zechariah's words themselves refine our understanding: It will be fulfilled in the first stage of the New Covenant Era, the Era of Gospel Proclamation. Let us draw near to see how.

Verse 10 gives us the theme, verses 11–14 elaborate. Each phrase of verse 10 is rich with meaning and deeply affecting.

In that Day—which is a very long day—the sovereign God will pour out his

Spirit upon the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. In other words, beginning at Pentecost and continuing right up to the Consummation, God will pour out his Spirit upon his elect, both Jew and Gentile (Acts 2:1–4). They are his latter-day Israel (Gal. 6:16), his royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9), and the chosen city of his habitation (Gal. 4:26; Eph. 2:22; Rev. 21:1–4).

When the Spirit falls on them, he will be to them "a Spirit of grace and supplication." That is, he will graciously make known to them the grace of God provided in Christ, and will move them to supplicate both God and Christ for a salvation they now realize they desperately need (John 1:14; Acts 2:37; 11:18; 16:30; 20:24; Eph. 2:8–9; Titus 2:11–14).

In this process the NT saints of all generations "will look on him whom they have pierced" (John 19:37 ESV). The NT explains: When Christ is lifted up through the preaching of the cross (John 3:14–15; 12:32), the Holy Spirit will enable God's people to look upon him (Christ), behold his deity (John 1:14; 6:40; 14:9), and see that it was they themselves who nailed him to the tree. The death that he died, he died not for his own sins, but for theirs (Mark 10:45; Rom. 6:10; 1 Peter 3:18; Rev. 5:1–10). Moreover, the same Spirit will not only enable these newborn saints to look *upon* Christ as the God-Man, but also *to* him as their redeemer. The Spirit will enable them to believe in Christ, trust in Christ, and obediently walk with Christ unto the salvation of their immortal souls (John 4:14–15; 6:29, 40; Heb. 12:2).

In the end, the fruit of this spiritual rebirth will be joy unspeakable and full of glory; but the birth itself will not be without mourning and tears (Luke 15:7; John 16:21; 1 Peter 1:8). This is the theme of the rest of the prophecy. Conviction of sin—and a concomitant sorrow over all that it has cost God, Christ, one's neighbor, and one's self—will run *deep*, deep as the grieving of parents over the loss of an only son (12:10), or deep as the grieving of an entire nation over the loss of a godly and beloved king (12:11; 2 Chron. 35:20–27; Matt. 26:75; Luke 7:36–50; John 16:8–14).

This sorrow will also be *universal*: It will touch every inhabitant of the land, every marriage, every generation of every family (e.g., David and his son Nathan; Levi and his grandson Shimei), and every institution (e.g., kings, priests, people, vv. 11–14). But again, this is a good sorrow, a healing sorrow, and a godly sorrow: a sorrow that does not result in death, but in eternal salvation and joy (Acts 16:34; 2 Cor. 7:9–10).

In passing, let us note the element of truth in premillennial interpretations

of our text. Premillennarians say that this is a prophecy of the latter-day conversion of ethnic Israel. In part they are right, for whenever a Jewish man or woman is called to Christ, it is fulfilled (Rom. 11:5). Moreover, the NT assures us that it will be specially fulfilled toward the end of the Era of Proclamation, when God calls a great multitude of Jews to saving faith in Israel's firstborn son (v. 10), thereby grafting (much of) ethnic Israel back into the vine of Abraham, who is the father of all who believe (Rom. 4:1–12; 8:29; 11:11–32; Col. 1:18; Heb. 1:6; 12:23). But again, these are only *partial* fulfillments of the text. It is *fully* fulfilled neither in Jewish converts alone, nor in Gentile converts alone, but in all converts. It is fully fulfilled in the One New Man and the One New Nation that is the Spirit-filled Body of Christ, comprised of all believing Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 2:15; 1 Peter 2:9).

After Tears, Cleansing (13:1-6)

This is the third prophetic snapshot in Zechariah's oracle. The NCH enables us to discern its true meaning. In the New Covenant Era, and because of Christ's atoning sacrifice for sin, God will sanctify his Church, purging it—and ultimately the whole world—of all idolatry and false religion, and of the deceiving spirits that are behind them. God's people themselves will have a role in this purging, especially as Christian leaders exercise church discipline to maintain the spiritual purity of their assemblies. Let us examine the text itself to see how the Spirit conveys this encouraging message.

In verse 1 God unveils the basis of his work of progressive sanctification. Every phrase is rich with meaning. "In that Day" points ahead to the overall Era of Fulfillment, and especially to the Era of Gospel Proclamation. "A fountain will be opened"—at Calvary, where Christ's blood will be shed to make atonement for sin, thereby securing the regeneration, sanctification, and final glorification of God's covenant people (Mark 14:24; Rom. 3:25; 8:29–30). "For the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem"—for the Messiah's spiritual seed, and for God's spiritual City: the Church of all ages (Luke 1:32–33; John 10:11, 15; Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25). "For sin and for defilement"—not only to forgive it, but also to wash it away: to cleanse (the souls of) God's people from all inward defilement (Titus 3:5). Again, progressive sanctification is the focus of our text, a focus shared by the apostle Paul when he wrote of Christ that he "gave himself for us in order to redeem us from every lawless act, and to purify for himself a people for his own

possession, zealous for good works" (Titus 2:14; cf. 2 Cor. 7:1; Eph. 4:26–27; Col. 1:22; 1 John 1:9).

Verse 2 specifies two results of the open fountain of Christ's blood. First, God will cut off the names of the idols from the land. That is, by the regenerating and sanctifying work of the Spirit, he will remove the names of every false god from the lips of his NT saints, seeing that henceforth they will desire to call upon his name and the name of his Son alone (Ezek. 36:25; 1 Cor. 1:2; 8:1–6; 2 Tim. 2:22; 1 John 5:21). And secondly, he will remove the false prophets and the unclean spirits from the land. In other words, he will remove false prophets, false teachers, and the deceiving spirits that animate them from the Church, a people who are seated in heavenly places in Christ, and who are therefore justly referred to here as the inhabitants of Immanuel's Land (Isa. 8:8; 1 Tim. 4:1–3; 2 Tim. 3:1–9; Heb. 12:22; 2 Peter 2:1–3; 1 John 4:1–6).

Verse 3 intimates the way in which the cleansing will come about. Under the Law, false prophets who enticed Israel to serve other gods were punishable by death; and indeed, the relatives of such prophets—including their parents—were warned against hesitating to deliver them up to judgment (Deut. 13:6–11). Thus, our text is saying that in that Day eschatological Israel will, at long last, rise eagerly to the fulfillment of their duty under the Law. Zealous for the presence of the Holy One of Israel in their midst, they will be willing even to hand their own children over to death.

The NT outworking of this prophecy is not difficult to see: In the Era of Proclamation Christian parents will subject even their own children—whether physical or spiritual—to church discipline, up to and including the spiritual "death penalty," which is excommunication (Matt. 18:15–18; 1 Cor. 5:1–5; 1 John 2:19; 4:1–4; Rev. 2:2). However, they will do so in love and in hope: love for their children's souls, and hope that through such discipline they will again be restored to life among the people of God (1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 2:1–11). Thus shall the Holy Spirit—and the Holy People—preserve the spiritual purity of Immanuel's Land: the Church of Christ.

Verses 4–6 picture a Day when the Spirit-filled people of God will be so vigilant and so discerning that false prophets will dare not ply their wicked trade among them. Verse 6, which alludes to the physical self-abuse practiced by the worshipers of pagan gods (Lev. 19:28; 1 Kings 18:28), is a parable of what will take place. When eschatological Israelites confront false prophets

wearing the telltale marks of their idolatrous faith (e.g., error, immorality, confusion, division, etc.), they (the false prophets) will try, unsuccessfully, to conceal the truth with outright lies. Many NT texts—and the bloody theological battlefield of Church history—display the fulfillment of this prophecy. Always and everywhere, ravenous spiritual wolves—false brethren, false teachers, and false prophets dressed up as Christ's sheep—have sought to infiltrate the Lord's folds and win a following, only to be discovered, reproved, and expelled by the faithful undershepherds of the flock (Matt. 7:15; Acts 20:29; Gal. 2:1–5; 6:13; 2 Peter 2:1; Titus 1:10–16; 1 John 4:1–9; Jude v. 4: Rev. 2:2).

The Stricken Shepherd, the Gathered Flock (13:7-9)

We come now to Zechariah's fourth prophetic snapshot. It is transitional: Here again he traverses the entire Era of Proclamation, exults in its redemptive achievements, and then takes us into part two of the oracle, the part that deals with the final scenes of Salvation History: The Last Battle, the Judgment, and the World to Come (14:1–21).

The theme here is the redemptive efficacy of the death of the Good Shepherd of God's flock—the Lord Jesus Christ—manifested in the infallible ingathering of his flock: the Church. Also in view is the sanctification of the flock. Throughout this lengthy season the High King of Heaven will be a refiner's fire, purifying his people like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness (v. 9; Mal. 3:1–3). Let us explore these themes by probing the three rich verses that comprise our text.

As the prophecy opens (v. 7) we hear the voice of the LORD commanding a sword to awaken against his Shepherd, against the Man who is his Associate. This cryptic line anticipates whole tracts of NT theology. The sword of the LORD, emblematic of divine retribution for sin, has, in one sense, been asleep, seeing that in ages past God mercifully "passed over" the sins of his OT elect (Isa. 66:16; Jer. 50:35–37; Ezek. 21:1–17; Rom. 3:25). Now, however, by means of his all-controlling providence, the God of Justice awakens that sword on Mount Golgotha, so that it may fall—in mercy and grace—upon a Substitute, the very One whom he has appointed to be the eternal Shepherd of his people (Isa. 53:2ff; Zech. 13:1; Matt. 27:46; Mark 10:45; John 3:14–16; 12:27–33; Acts 2:23; 4:27–28).

So that the atonement may be accomplished, the Good Shepherd will stand

before God in two ways. First, says Zechariah, he will be "the Man." That is, he will be the Last Adam, the One who serves as the Head, Representative, and Substitute of his people, and who, in that capacity, will bear in his own person the just penalty for their sins (John 10:11; Rom. 3:21–26; 5:12–21; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18). But secondly, he also will be God's *Amith*. In other words, he will not simply be a man, but also a divine (and therefore holy) Peer, Friend, and Companion to the Father. As such, he will *be* in perfect tune—and *walk* in perfect step—with the Father's nature, purpose, plan, presence, and power. Therefore, he will achieve a perfect righteousness for his people: a righteousness that will later be imputed to every afflicted sheep that puts his (or her) trust in him (John 8:29, 55; Rom. 3:26; 5:1; 2 Cor. 5:21).

When God strikes his Shepherd, the sheep will be scattered. There will be two kinds of them. First, there are "the little ones": loyal but frightened and disoriented Jewish disciples of the Good Shepherd who are temporarily scattered from him, but later regathered to him (Matt. 26:31; Luke 22:31–34). But secondly, there are impenitent Jews, those who ought to have followed their Messiah but refused to do so, and who therefore will be scattered permanently by divine retribution at the hands of Rome (Matt. 8:12; 23:36–39; Luke 21:20–22). Thus, the Good Shepherd's death will indeed result in judgment, but much more in redemption, since now God will be able to lay his hand upon the little ones—the afflicted of the flock—for salvation (Zech. 11:7, 11).

Verses 8–9 speak of this very thing. Note carefully that at this juncture the prophecy enters the Era of Proclamation, in which the exalted Christ spearheads the thrust of the Gospel into the earth so that he may bring *all* his people into the Eternal Covenant (v. 9). For this reason, "all the land" (v. 8) cannot simply refer to Palestine (as premillennarians claim), but rather to what OT Palestine typified: the whole earth, an earth that is destined to become Immanuel's Land (Isa. 8:8; Zech. 2:12; 3:9; 9:16; 12:12; 13:2; Rom. 4:13). As one commentator helpfully wrote, "This is not to be taken in a literal sense, but as representing the domain covered by the Kingdom of God." 12

On this view the message of verse 8 is solemn indeed, but comforting as well: By the end of the Era of Proclamation "two parts" (i.e., the larger portion) of all who hear the Gospel will perish from "the land" through their willful disobedience to it. However, by God's sovereign grace (v. 9) one part (i.e., a smaller portion, an elect remnant, a little flock) will be gathered safely

into the Shepherd's fold and therefore remain in the land. Having safely passed through the Judgment, they will inherit eternal life in the new heavens and the new earth (Matt. 7:13–14; Luke 12:32; 1 Cor. 1:26–31; Eph. 1:6; 2:8–9; James 1:5; 1 Peter 2:4–10).

Verse 9 vindicates this line of interpretation, for now we hear God giving his people rich assurances of final salvation. First, he will bring them through the fire. That is, despite all manner of temptations and persecutions, he will preserve his elect in Christ until they safely enter the World to Come (John 10:29; 17:15; 1 Cor. 1:4–9; 10:13; Jude v. 1). And secondly, he will test and refine them, even as men test and refine silver and gold. This calls to mind the words of Peter, who taught us that God uses manifold trials as a kind of holy fire by which he purifies the faith and character of his people, so that at the revelation of Christ they themselves may receive praise, glory, and honor from him (Prov. 17:3; Isa. 43:2; John 15:2; Rom. 5:1–5; 8:35–39; Eph. 5:25–27; Heb. 12:1–11; 1 Peter 1:6–9).

Verse 9—and the prophecy as a whole—concludes with a reiteration of the great "covenant formulary." God's people will call on his name, and he will answer them. He will say, "You are my people," and they will say, "The LORD is my God."

When exactly does this happen? Doubtless it will happen throughout the entire Era of Proclamation. It will happen when, in the fires of conviction, God's people call upon Christ for salvation (Luke 18:13; Acts 2:37–41). It will happen later, when, in the fires of temptation and persecution, they call upon him for strength and deliverance (Rom. 15:30–32; Phil. 4:13; 2 Tim. 4:18). However, to judge from its position in the text, it will *especially* happen when the saints have *finished* passing through all fires, and have *finally* entered the World to Come. In other words, it will happen when—at long last—they call upon the name of the LORD in full-throated praise, thanksgiving, and adoration for the consummation of their redemption.

The Revelation certainly seems to confirm this view. When John beholds the Holy City descending to the new earth as a Bride adorned for her Husband, he also hears this triumphant declaration:

Look, the tabernacle of God is with men! And he will tabernacle with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them; and he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death and mourning and crying and pain shall be no more, for the former things have passed away! (Rev. 21:3)

Here the days of fire are over; here the everlasting Day of glory has begun!

The Last Battle (14:1–2)

Like the prophecies of Daniel and Ezekiel, Zechariah's oracle has eschatological momentum: It is constantly moving toward the *grand finale* of Salvation History. Here in chapter 14, which brings both the oracle and the book to a close, Zechariah reaches his destination: a colorful mosaic of five prophetic snapshots, all of them dealing with the Consummation.

I have titled our fifth snapshot *The Last Battle* (14:1–2). Here Zechariah takes up a theme that he first touched on in 12:1–9, and now unfolds in its fullness: The age-long warfare between the Church and the World that will culminate in a final, decisive clash between these two inveterate opponents (Gen. 3:15). As ever, this prophecy is instructive, forthright, and sobering, but also laden with hope and comfort. Indeed, in verse 1 we already hear the note of victory that runs through the entire chapter: In the end God will effect a great judicial inversion, such that the manifold "goods" maliciously taken from his people—their work, their property, their health, their honor, their right to public worship, their very lives—will be restored once and for all (Matt. 10:29–30; Luke 6:20–26; Heb. 10:34). Like Israel's heroes of old, Christ will plunder the plunderers, and will cause the humble who trust in him to inherit the land (Gen. 14:1–16; 1 Sam. 30:1–31; Ps. 37:9, 11; Matt. 5:5).

Verse 2 gives us the Last Battle itself. As elsewhere, so here: The Spirit uses images drawn from Israel's long history of international warfare to picture the final assault of a consolidated world system against the visible Church (Ps. 48; Ezek. 38–39; Rev. 20:9). God himself, through the secret workings of his providence, will bring it to pass, partly to move sinners to repentance, partly to sanctify the Bride of Christ (Ezek. 38:4; Zech. 13:9; Eph. 5:27; 2 Thess. 1:3–12; 2:3; Rev. 13:5–10). Since the events and institutions of OT history were meant to picture NT spiritual realities, we cannot assume that the specific forms of suffering mentioned here will literally come to pass (1 Cor. 15:46). The *essential* message of our text is: At the end of the age a satanically controlled world system will maliciously and effectively suppress—though not destroy—the true spiritual Church (2 Thess. 2:1–12; Rev. 13:5–10). It must be

confessed, however, that this verse accords with pervasive NT teaching, Church history, and current events, all of which remind us that God has indeed appointed his children to holy tribulation, and that the purifying fires of the Last Battle will be as intense as any the saints have ever known (Acts 14:22; 1 Thess. 3:1–5; 2 Tim. 3:12; Heb. 11:35–40; Rev. 11:7–13). Thankfully, we know that the battle will be as brief as it is intense, and immediately followed by joy unspeakable and full of glory.

The Day of the LORD (14:3-5)

According to the DNT Christ himself will bring the Last Battle to a close at his Parousia, when he arrives in power and glory in the skies above the earth to destroy his enemies, and to glorify both his people and their world (Matt. 13:36–43; 24:29–31; 1 Cor. 15:20–28; 2 Thess. 1, 2; 2 Peter 3; Rev. 11:11–19; 14:14–20; 16:17–21; 19:11–21; 20:7–15). According to the NCH, this—our sixth snapshot—is a symbolic picture of that very thing. Let us see if our text (and its context) justifies this important conclusion.

Verse 3 states that at the time of Jerusalem's eschatological agony the LORD himself will go forth and fight against her foes, even as he did on previous occasions in Israel's history (Ex. 14:1–31; 15:1–18; Isa. 36–37; Rev. 15:2–3). This will be the last of them, the great and awesome Day of the LORD (Joel 2:31). However, in the NT we learn that the Day of the LORD will in fact be the Day of the Lord Jesus Christ at his Parousia (2 Cor. 1:14; Phil. 2:16; 2 Thess. 2:2; 2 Peter 3:4, 10). The present snapshot must be interpreted accordingly.

Verse 4 pictures the LORD arriving on the scene and creating an unexpected way of escape for his people; verse 5 pictures them using it. This is God's way with all his people, both OT and New (1 Cor. 10:13). Quite intentionally, the imagery used here reminds us of Israel's miraculous deliverance at the Red Sea (Ex. 14:1–31). That fact, plus all that we have learned about OTKP, forces us to disagree with our premillennarian brothers: No, at his return Christ will not physically stand on the Mount of Olives; nor will he literally split it apart in order to create a physical valley; nor will a multitude of ethnic Jews flee from physical Jerusalem and escape to the tiny village of Azel. 13

What, then, is the true message of verses 4–5? To understand it we must first recall that many OT texts picture the God of judgment descending from Heaven and treading upon the high places of the earth, with the result that he

splits valleys and melts mountains beneath his omnipotent feet (Ps. 97:5; Isa. 64:1–2; Mic. 1:3–4; Nah. 1:5). Also, let us recall that in OT times the LORD was faithful not only to rescue his people from coming destruction, but also to provide them with cities (or other places) of refuge to which they could flee (Gen. 19:20–26; 1 Kings 17:1–7; Num. 35:9–15; 1 Sam. 24:22). By reappearing in our text, these OT motifs point us to its proper interpretation.

It is, however, the NCH that enables us fully to understand Zechariah's mysterious message. I would paraphrase it as follows: "In that Day, when the Last Battle has reached fever pitch, and when all seems lost for the City of God, the glorified Christ himself will 'go forth' from Heaven in order to rescue his people and to judge their enemies. Arriving in the skies above the earth, he will circle the globe from east to west (for the LORD likes to come to his people from the east: Isa. 63:1; Ezek. 43:4; Matt. 24:27; Rev. 7:2). By his Spirit, and through the agency of his holy angels, he will swiftly draw near to his beloved City and his Bride. As if his feet were dividing the Red Sea or splitting the Mount of Olives, he will appoint a way of escape for her (i.e., the air), thereafter commanding the angels to carry each and every saint through the air to their one true City of Refuge (Matt. 13:36-43; 1 Thess. 4:13-18). And when at last he has fully gathered his Bride to himself, then he, she, and all the holy angels will 'come' in such a way as to consign the enemies of God —both human and angelic—to the fires of God's eternal judgment (Matt. 13:42; 25:31–46; Rom. 16:20; 1 Cor. 6:2; Rev. 19:20; 20:10)." This is the end of all the former things. But, as Zechariah is about to tell us, it is the beginning of new and eternal things as well (Isa. 65:17; Matt. 24:14; 1 Peter 4:7; Rev. 21:4-5).

The World to Come (14:6-11)

Having promised and pictured eschatological Israel's victory in the Last Battle, Zechariah's oracle now transitions to the last of the last things. The remainder of the chapter gives us our final three large-scale snapshots, each of which features a series of mini-snapshots. They are: The World to Come (14:6–11), The Judgment to Come (14:12–15), and The Worship to Come (14:16–21).

The prophecy concerning the World to Come is divided into two parts. Verses 6–8 use OT imagery to describe the new heavens and the new earth; verses 9–11 use similar imagery to describe (life in) the New Jerusalem.

The first of these snapshots (vv. 6–8) points to a radical transformation of the physical heavens, a transformation that the NT says will occur at the return of Christ and the restoration of all things (Matt. 19:28; Acts 3:21; Rom. 8:21; Phil. 3:21). The Hebrew text of verses 6–7 favors the rendering of the New American Standard Bible (NASB) and the New King James Version (NKJV). We may paraphrase its message as follows: "In the (physical) World to Come there will be no natural light, for the luminaries of the former world—the sun, moon, and stars—will have passed away. The result will be a new thing altogether: a 'Day' that involves neither day nor night, but an eternal Day whose exact nature is known only to the LORD."

Happily, the NT sheds further light on this mysterious promise, teaching us that Christ himself, at his Parousia, will "diminish" (i.e., extinguish) the luminaries (Matt. 24:29; 2 Peter 3:10; Rev. 6:13); that in the World to Come the glory of God and the Lamb will illumine all things, both inwardly and outwardly (Rev. 21:11, 23; 22:5); and that this "unique" eschatological Day will stand as a perpetual testimony and reminder: The darkness of the Domain of Darkness has been dispersed forever by the Light of the World (John 8:12; 9:5; Rom. 13:12).

Verse 8 reprises the great OT theme of the eschatological River of God (Ps. 46:4; 65:9; Ezek. 47:1–12; Joel 3:18). The living waters are the life of the living God, streaming into the new creation from God the Father, through Christ the Son, at the hand of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33; Phil. 1:19). Interestingly, the prophet sees them flowing out of (New) Jerusalem: that is, out of the Church, the eternal people of God (Rev. 21:2). He also sees that this river will flow both east and west, filling the seas on either side of the City, both in summer and winter (i.e., year round). However, Rev. 21:1 tells us that there will be no seas in the World to Come; and Zechariah 14:6–7 (along with several texts in the Revelation) assures us that there will be no seasons. Thus, the language of our text is figurative, and the meaning theological: In that Day the life of God will continually replenish the creation of God, and it will do so through the people of God (Rom. 8:20–23). Even now the saints enjoy a foretaste of this life-giving ministry, building one another up through the ongoing exercise of their spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:7; Eph. 4:11-16; 1 Peter 4:10). What exactly will this look like in the World to Come? It appears we shall have to wait (eagerly) for the Day itself to find out.

The theme of the second mini-snapshot (vv. 9-11) is the eternal security of

the City of God, forever dwelling in the Land of God. The NCH opens it up richly. Verse 9 promises that in the completed Kingdom the direct, redemptive reign of the triune LORD will be universal and absolute. For this reason, his Name—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—will be the only name, since the names of all other gods will have been swept away in the Judgment. The triune God alone will be all in all (Mic. 4:5; John 17:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Cor. 8:6; 15:28; 2 Cor. 10:5; Phil. 2:9–11).

In verse 10 we learn that the exaltation of the sovereign LORD over his creation will bring with it a corresponding exaltation of his people (Matt. 13:33; 1 Cor. 3:21–23; Col. 3:4; Rev. 21:7). The details here are rich with meaning. First, the hills and mountains surrounding Zion will be leveled. That is, all that is sinfully high and lifted up will be brought low, in some cases even unto final destruction (Isa. 2:12, 17; Luke 1:52; Rev. 14:8; 17:9, 18; 18:1–8). Secondly, the territory of Judah will become a (well-watered) plain. That is, a supernaturally cleansed and transformed creation will become the inheritance of the Messiah's tribe, and will henceforth serve as the staging area for the City of God (Rom. 8:20–21; 2 Peter 3:13; Rev. 21:1–3). Thirdly, Mount Zion and the Holy City that rests upon it—will be lifted up. That is, the natural world will be glorified (thus becoming the Holy Mountain of God), and so too will the saints, who will have the new world as their eternal home (Isa. 11:9; 65:25; Rom. 8:20–23; Heb. 12:22; Rev. 21:10). Finally, the Holy City will be restored to her greatest dimensions. In other words, the dimensions of the Church's eschatological City will be the dimensions of Eden itself, and of all that God offered to mankind in Eden at the Tree of Life (Rev. 22:1–2, 14).

In passing we should note that the exaltation of Jerusalem described here speaks not only of the *consummation* of the saint's redemption, but also of the moral *inversion* that it will bring to pass. The Holy City—presently small, hidden, despised, powerless, and persecuted amidst "the Great City" that is the fallen world system—will suddenly be found unto praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:13; Rev. 11:2, 8; 17:6; 18; 21:2). As our Lord himself taught us: In that Day the poor will become rich, the hungry will be satisfied, and the sorrowful will rejoice, for the humble will inherit the earth (Matt. 5:4–6; Luke 6:20–23). Luke 6:20–23).

Verse 11 brings the prophecy to a close: Settled on the Mountain of God, secure in Christ, and redeemed from the Curse of the Law, the Holy City will experience the life of God, with God, forever (Rom. 8:1; Gal. 3:13; Rev. 22:3).

The Judgment to Come (14:12–15)

These verses give us our eighth snapshot. They reprise the battle imagery of 12:1–4 and draw heavily upon OT Law and history to depict the eschatological destruction of the enemies of Christ and his Church at the Lord's Parousia (Matt. 24:29–25:46; 1 Thess. 4:13–5:11; 2 Thess. 2:1–10; Rev. 11:7–13; Rev. 14:14–20; 19:11–21; 20:7–15). Let us draw near for a closer look.

Verse 12, a ghastly portrait of the eternal destruction of the wicked in hell, represents their torments in terms of the plagues that formerly befell God's enemies, whether in Egypt (Ex. 7–12) or at the gates of Jerusalem itself, where the Angel of the Lord struck down the Assyrian army and rescued the trembling but trusting people of God (Isa. 36–37; cf. Lev. 26:16; Deut. 28:22; 2 Thess. 1:9; Rev. 20:10, 14).

Verse 13 tells us that as in OT times, so again at the Last Battle: God will judge his enemies by confusing their thoughts, shattering their unity, and turning their hands one against another (Judg. 7:22; 1 Sam. 14:20). The final destruction of the Antichrist's kingdom will be heralded by the destructiveness of war within his kingdom (Dan. 11:36–40; Rev. 17:16–18). Conceivably, this verse also portrays the mutual hatred and conflict of the wicked in hell.

Verse 14, which enlarges upon 14:1, speaks of the eschatological plunder set to occur after the Last Battle. Judah, the royal tribe (i.e., church leaders), will fight bravely in defense of the Holy City (i.e., the Church as a whole), teaching, preaching, and encouraging its inhabitants in such a way that they will endure to the end and be saved (14:14 NASB, NIV; Matt. 10:22; Acts 14:22; 1 Thess. 3:2–3; Rev. 2:10). Accordingly, Christ, at his return, will cause the world and its wealth, now purged of sin, to pass forever into the custody of the saints (Luke 19:15–20). In that Day all things will be theirs, they will be Christ's, and Christ will be God's (1 Cor. 3:21–23).

Verse 15 declares that a similar plague will fall even upon the animals in the camps of Israel's enemies. Here again we are reminded of God's judgment upon the Assyrian attackers of Jerusalem (Isa. 37:36-38), but also of the utter destruction to which God devoted the world of Noah's day (Gen. 6:17), the city of Jericho (Josh. 6:21), and indeed any city that might rebelliously defect from the LORD (Deut.13:12-18). Here, then, we confront the all-inclusiveness of this judgment. The NT supplies the meaning: When the

iniquity of the world system is finally complete—so much so that it presumes to attack the universal Church—then God's eschatological Joshua, the Lord Jesus Christ, will return and utterly destroy the earth and its works, consigning the rebellious destroyers of the earth to a plague of unquenchable fire (2 Peter 3:10; Rev. 11:18; 20:11). Thus shall all the former things pass away, but only so that new and eternal things may spring forth (Isa. 42:9; 1 Cor. 7:31; 1 John 2:17). God himself will make all things new, and will then bestow them upon his beloved sons and daughters. Henceforth, they will be heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ in the glorious World to Come (Rom. 8:17: Gal. 4:1–2; Rev. 21:1–5, 7).

The Worship to Come (14:16-21)

Our ninth and final snapshot gives us a picture of life in that world. The prophecy is divided into two parts. The first speaks of the eschatological Feast of Booths (vv. 16–19), the second of the perfect holiness of eschatological Judah and Jerusalem (vv. 20–21). Because the World to Come is clearly in view, premillennial interpretations of this text are impossible. Thankfully, the NCH unveils the true meaning of Zechariah's mysterious words.

On the surface of things, the message of verses 16–19 is simple: In the World to Come there will be two groups of nations. At one time or another prior to the Judgment, both came up against Jerusalem (v. 16). Now, however, the first group goes up annually (and eternally), not to attack Jerusalem, but instead to worship Israel's God as King, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths in Jerusalem's holy precincts. Meanwhile, the second group, which apparently has Egypt as its head, consists of stiff-necked nations that refuse(d) to go up. These the LORD will punish with a plague of drought (vv. 17–19).

In order to understand this prophecy, we must first consider the typology of the Feast of Booths. A look at Leviticus 23:33–34 reveals that this was an especially joyful feast celebrated at harvest time, wherein Israel was to commemorate not only their great deliverance from Egypt, but also God's faithfulness and provision as he led them through the wilderness of Sinai (where they camped in tents, symbolized by booths) and on into the Promised Land.

This background information—together with the NCH—enables us to see all things clearly. Three points may be made.

First, Zechariah's eschatological Feast of Booths will indeed be a harvest feast,

since here, in the World to Come, all the saints will have been gathered into the barn of God's completed Kingdom (Matt. 13:30; John 4:38; Rev. 14:14–16). Formerly, they were enemies of God and his people. But Christ, at various times prior to the Judgment, harvested them through the preaching of the Gospel, thereby turning them into eternal friends (Matt. 9:37; Acts 26:17–18; Rom. 5:8; 1 Tim. 1:12–12; Titus 3:3f).

Secondly, this will be an *everlasting* Feast: The saints will forever go up in worship, through Christ, unto God their King (1 Peter 2:5; Rev. 7:9–10; 14:1–4).

Finally, this will be a *joyful* Feast: In his City—and *as* his City—Christ's people will forever rejoice, not only in the hour of their own personal deliverance from the Domain of Darkness, but also in the subsequent faithfulness of their Good Shepherd, who safely led his flock through the deadly wilderness of this present evil age, past the Judgment, and on into the Promised Land (John 6:38–40; Gal. 1:4; Phil. 1:6; Rev. 12:7–17; 19:11).

But what are we to make of Egypt and the families of the earth who refuse to go up? Clearly, these typify the spiritual Gentiles who refused to participate in the eschatological exodus. They refused to welcome spiritual rescue from the Domain of Darkness and spiritual transfer into the Kingdom of God's beloved Son (Col. 1:13). They refused to follow in the footsteps of Moses, who esteemed the reproach that fell upon Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt (i.e., of the fallen world system). They refused to walk with Christ through the wilderness of this world into the Promised Land (Heb. 11:26; Rev. 12:1–17).

Puzzlingly, we find these rebellious nations still living upon the earth, though far from Zion and Jerusalem, where the friends of God celebrate the Feasts of God. But in Revelation 22—which also describes the World to Come—the puzzle is fully assembled. For there we again find these nations separated from Jerusalem and outside the gates of the Holy City (Rev. 22:15). Now, however, we understand that they are actually in the Lake of Fire (Isa. 66:24; Rev. 19:20; 20:10, 14). It is, then, in the place of eternal punishment that the impenitent enemies of God will endure the plague of drought that they chose for themselves when they refused to drink from the Rock—and to follow the Rock—that God offered them in the Gospel (John 7:37; 1 Cor. 10:4; Rev. 21:6; 22:17).

Part two of this prophecy—and the grand finale of Zechariah's oracle—

celebrates the perfect, all-pervading holiness of the World to Come (vv. 20–22). In that Day the distinction between the holy and the common, the clean and the unclean, will have disappeared (Acts 10:15). The bells on the horses will be holy. The cooking pots in the LORD's house will be holy—as holy as the altar itself. Yes, even the pots in the houses of the people of Jerusalem and Judah will be holy: so holy that men may boil their sacrifices to God in them. Here the boundary between the sacred and the profane has been erased. Every act is an act of worship. Every day is the Lord's Day. Israel itself will have become the house of the LORD of hosts (v. 21; Eph. 2:22), and every Canaanite—every unregenerate, sinful man—will have been expelled from its holy precincts (v. 21; Rom. 16:17–20; 1 John 2:19; Rev. 22:15).

How have Jerusalem, Judah, and the temple of God become holy? It is because of the LORD of hosts. In particular, it is because he previously sent them the Lion of the tribe of Judah—the root and the offspring of David—who came down and fought in their behalf. By his righteous life, atoning death, resurrection, ascension, session, heavenly reign, and Second Coming to finally judge and redeem, he altogether prevailed. Therefore, his city, his tribe, and his temple are holy—even as he is holy—world without end. Amen (1 Peter 1:15–16; Rev. 5:5; 21:2; 22:11).

Conclusion

We have completed Part III of our journey. We have addressed the single most vexing issue in the GETD: The proper interpretation of OTKP. Hopefully you now sense that you have crossed the Great Divide, and therefore taken yet another giant step toward resolving the GETD.

On the one hand, we have seen that premillennial interpretations of OTKP are impossible. Far from helping us understand OTKP, the literalist hermeneutic of our premillennial brethren entangles us in a great thicket of historical and theological contradiction and confusion.

On the other hand, we have seen that the NCH richly opens up OTKP to our understanding. It makes good sense of all the texts, brings them into perfect harmony with NT eschatology, and empowers them to speak to the hearts of all God's New Covenant people in the here and now. Thus does it equip them to fight the good fight of faith, and thus does it fill them with the wisdom, courage, and confidence they need to face the future.

But our journey is not yet complete. For though we have crossed the Great Divide, another mountain now looms before us: the third underlying issue of the GETD—the Millennium. What are we to make of it? If—as we have seen —Revelation 20 cannot be speaking of a future theocratic stage of the Kingdom, of what *does* it speak?

Let us embark on Part IV of our journey, and let us ask the Teacher to show us the way.

- 1. H. C. Leupold, Exposition of Daniel (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 1969), 405.
- 2. Ibid., 409.
- 3. Ibid., 416.
- <u>4</u>. *Ibid*., 417.
- 5. Ibid., 427.
- 6. Ibid., 428.
- 7. Ibid., 432
- <u>8</u>. Cited in William E. Biederwolf, *The Second Coming Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1972), 224. Hereafter cited as SCB.
- 2 . For a thought-provoking study of the many parallels between the character and career of Antiochus Epiphanes and the Antichrist of Daniel 9:26–27, see Leupold, *Exposition of Daniel*, 437–440.
- <u>10</u>. In this it is much like Ezekiel's concluding bloc of Kingdom prophecy, found in chapters 36–48 of his book. It takes us from the Days of the Messiah (the Kingdom of the Son), through the Last Battle, and on into the everlasting World to Come (the Kingdom of the Father)
- 11. The MacArthur Study Bible (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 1880. Hereafter cited as MSB.
- 12. SCB, 303.
- 13. It is true that at Christ's ascension the angels in attendance told the troubled disciples that their Lord would return in just the same way as they watched him go up into Heaven (Acts 1:11). This does not mean, however, that he will return to the Mount of Olives, from which he ascended. Rather, it means that he will return bodily, visibly, and in clouds of glory, just as he left. Moreover, the DNT is quite clear that when Christ does return, he will return, not to the earth, but to the skies above the earth, where he himself will effect the Judgment, the destruction of the present cosmos by fire, and the final restoration of all things. We will discuss this in Part V.
- <u>14</u>. For insights into this and other portions of Zechariah, I am greatly indebted to Richard Phillips, *Reformed Expository Commentary: Zechariah* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2007).

PART IV Understanding THE MILLENNIUM

CHAPTER 10

THE REVELATION: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

elcome to Part IV of our study, the part in which we engage the third underlying issue in the GETD: the meaning of the Millennium (Rev. 20)

Does this particular issue intimidate you? I hope not, for if our journey in the previous chapters has borne good fruit you now realize that premillennial views are impossible. Why? First, because you understand that the Kingdom of God enters history in two simple stages, which means that there is no *room* for a future millennium. And second, because you understand that in OTKP the Holy Spirit used typological language to speak about the two-staged Kingdom created by Christ under the New Covenant, which means that there is no *need* for a future millennium. So then: NT teaching on the Kingdom and OTKP strongly suggests that the thousand years of Revelation 20 are exactly what amillennarians say they are: a symbolic representation of the Era of Gospel Proclamation and the key events that God has predestined to occur in it.

But does the Revelation itself support this view? Our mission in Part IV of our journey is to find out. In the present chapter I will lay a foundation for our investigation by supplying a general introduction to the Revelation, with special reference to the Millennium. In the following chapter we'll apply what we have learned to Revelation 20 itself. At the end of the day I trust you will find that by listening to the Teacher in the DNT you will have received the keys, not only to the mysteries of the Kingdom of God and the proper interpretation of OTKP, but also to the message of the Revelation and the meaning of the Millennium.

Setting

The year is around AD 95. John, in all probability the last living apostle, is now in his eighties (John 21:21–23). Because of his faithfulness in the things of the Gospel, the Roman authorities have exiled him to a penal settlement on the island of Patmos (Rev. 1:9; cf. John 21:21–23). It has been over sixty years since Christ's ascension. The Lord is tarrying, and among many believers the expectation of his Parousia is waning (2 Peter 3:1-4). The demonic emperor Nero (AD 54–68), a vicious persecutor of the Christians in Rome, has come and gone. Titus has decimated Jerusalem (AD 70). Under emperor Domitian the persecution of Christians has spread throughout the Empire and reached Asia (AD 81–96). More is looming (Rev. 2:3, 10, 13). And besides this external threat there are internal threats as well. Heretical "Christian" sects have grown in size and number. Their members are seeking to penetrate the orthodox churches and draw away disciples after themselves; some churches are even tolerating their presence and activity (Acts 20:25–35; Rev. 2:2, 6, 14–15, 20–24). Other churches are in decline: The love of certain professing believers is growing cold (Rev. 2:4; 3:1-2); some, having thus far escaped the fires of persecution, are entangled in the world and sunken into apathy and materialism (Rev. 3:14–21). The situation is dire. The faltering Church needs a word from the Lord. The Revelation of Jesus Christ is that Word.

Author

The author (or rather, the transcriber) of the Revelation is the apostle John, an historical fact stated by John himself and confirmed by several of the early Church fathers (Rev. 1:1, 4, 9, 12; 22:8). Significantly, he is now in exile (likely from his home church in Ephesus) and under persecution. In fulfillment of his Master's previous words, he has remained upon the earth for many years; and now, as promised, his Lord has come to him. However, it is not to take him home, but instead to give him a revelation and a prophecy meant for the Bride of Christ, for the entire Church of God (John 20:20–23). Like John himself, she will be in exile: not from the presence of her Lord, but from her heavenly home. Like John himself, she will (often) be under persecution (Rev. 12:6–17). And so Christ comes to him, and through him, to her. Through John, and through the Revelation, the High King of Heaven and Earth will now consummately prepare his beloved Bride for her centuries-long

pilgrimage through the howling spiritual wilderness of this present evil age (Rev. 12:6, 14).

Date

It is almost certain that John recorded the Revelation around AD 95. This is important to understand, since preterist interpreters argue for a much earlier date: sometime between AD 54 and AD 68, during the reign of Nero. An early date enables them to say that most (or all) of the "comings" and judgments described in the Revelation were fulfilled at the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. But, as indicated above, the internal evidence weighs heavily against it, for which reason the majority of scholars favor the later date. External confirmation comes from Irenaeus, the scholarly bishop of Lyons (ca.125–202). Citing earlier sources, he wrote, "John received the Revelation almost in our own time, toward the end of the reign of Domitian" (i.e., AD 81–96). During that time Pergamum was the official center of emperor worship in Asia and the city in which Antipas became a "faithful martyr" for his Lord (Rev. 2:12–13).

Intended Audience

The Revelation is a prophecy given by God *to* the universal Church, for the crucially important reason that it is *about* the universal Church. It is not, as preterists hold, about the Church in and around AD 70. Nor, as dispensationalists hold, is it (largely) about a band of 144,000 Jewish evangelists proclaiming a millennial Kingdom during a literal seven-year tribulation. No, it is about—and for—all Christians of all times and all places. It is a prophecy meant to edify, exhort, and encourage the universal Bride of Christ.

The evidence for this claim abounds.

Revelation 1:1 states that God the Father gave the Revelation to Christ in order to show it to his bond servants. That would be the universal Church.

In Revelation 2–3 we have Christ's messages to the seven churches of Asia. But the number seven, which symbolizes completeness and perfection, tells us that here we have a complete and perfect message designed to perfect the complete Church: the universal Church.

In Revelation 1:19 we hear Christ telling John: "Write down the things you have seen, the things that are, and the things that will take place soon after

them." This verse gives us one of the key structures of the book. The things that John saw—the details of Christ's self-disclosure to his apostle—are described in chapter 1. "The things that are"—the present condition of the seven churches of Asia—are described in chapters 2–3. "The things that will take place soon after them"—the things that will happen from now on until the Consummation—are described in chapters 4–22. Why does the Lord want all of his bond servants to know about these things? The answer is as clear as it is important: It is because he knows that these things will *affect* all of his bond servants. The Revelation is *for* the universal Church because it *concerns* the universal Church, and because it speaks of things that will *affect* the universal Church.

In a moment we will discuss a second way in which the Revelation is structured. It too will show that this book is for and about all Christians of all times and places.

Nature and Purpose

On six separate occasions John speaks of the Revelation as a *prophecy* (Rev. 1:3; 19:10; 22:7, 10, 18, 19). In the DNT we learn that he who prophesies speaks to men for *edification* (i.e., instruction in the faith), *exhortation* (i.e., warning, admonition), and *comfort* (i.e., encouragement with a view to the impartation of hope, 1 Cor. 14:3). This short definition wonderfully captures the deep purpose of the Revelation. All throughout the book we find the exalted Christ teaching, warning, and encouraging his beloved Bride, so that she may overcome all adversaries, finish her pilgrimage, and safely enter the completed Kingdom of God.

Here are a few examples that illustrate and illuminate each of these purposes. In the Revelation Christ *edifies* (i.e., instructs) the Church Militant by helping her understand her true place in the world and in Salvation History. In other words, through the use of richly symbolic language he strengthens her grip on the biblical worldview. In this regard, Revelation 12 is central. It is a prophetic vision of stupendous theological reach and power, a vision in which Christ teaches the Church Militant who she is, what she is about, what she can expect, and whom she can rely on as she makes her way out of eschatological Egypt, through the eschatological Wilderness of Sin, and on into the eschatological Promised Land. Fittingly, this crucial chapter stands in the *middle* of the book, since in many ways it gives us the key to the *whole* book.

Before wrestling with Revelation 20, it will repay you to study it well.

In the Revelation the Lord *exhorts* the Church by warning her about the four enemies she will encounter over and again in her long pilgrimage through the wilderness of this world.

The first is the Dragon, that serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan (Rev. 12:9). While he, through his demonic subordinates, is indeed capable of mounting a direct attack against the saints, in the Revelation he is primarily seen using three human instrumentalities as his agents of evil.

The second foe is the Beast (Rev. 13:1–4), the political or governmental face of the world system, which, when seized and energized by the Dragon, will always persecute the true spiritual Church and blasphemously attempt to supplant the sovereign God and his Christ.

The third enemy is the False Prophet, also called the Beast from the Earth (Rev. 13:11–18; 16:12–16; 19:20; 20:10). This beast symbolizes, not simply false religion, but false religion pressed into the service of the self-deifying State; false religion (or ideology) demanding that all people worship the State on penalty of persecution or death.

The fourth and final enemy is the Harlot, also called Babylon the Great and the Great City (Rev. 17:1, 3, 5, 18; 18:2). This is the commercial and cultural face of the world system. As a rule, the Harlot likes to collude with the Beast and the False Prophet, doing all she can to persecute the Church (Rev. 17:6), even as she entices saints and sinners alike with her allurements and sorceries (Rev. 18:23).

Out of deep love and concern for the Church's purity, power, and eternal welfare, the High King of Heaven exhorts his Bride to beware of her enemies and to come out from among them (Rev. 18:4).

Finally, in the Revelation the heavenly Husband speaks *comfort* to his Bride, and this in several different ways.

He comforts her with a majestic vision of his own divine nature, covenant faithfulness, and Messianic glory (Rev. 1:9–20).

He comforts her with repeated assurances of his presence in—and faithful watch-care over—all his churches, even as he manifests the tough love that he feels for each one of them (Rev. 2:1–3:22).

He comforts her with rich, symbolic representations of his heavenly mediatorial reign, the share the saints have in it, and his absolute sovereignty over all that remains of Salvation History (Rev. 4:1–5:14).

He comforts her with scenes of the spirits of departed believers safely arrived in Heaven, worshiping God in Christ, praying for divine justice, and eagerly anticipating the Lord's return and their eternal reign upon the earth (Rev. 5:6–10; 6:9–11; 20:4–6).

He comforts her with depictions of his own Parousia in power and glory at the end of the age (Rev. 6:12-17; 14:14-20; 19:11-21).

In conjunction with the above, he also comforts her with visions of ultimate justice: of final rewards for the faithful saints, and of final retribution against the persecuting and God-hating "inhabitants of the earth" (Rev. 6:9–17; 11:11–19; 15:1–4; 16:17–21; 20:7–15).

He comforts her with "sneak previews" of the glorified Church surrounding the throne of the triune God, exultantly lifting up the eternal worship that will fill the World to Come (Rev. 7:9–17; 14:1–5; 15:1-4).

And finally, he comforts her with two luminous chapters supplying mysterious, thought-provoking glimpses of the (eternal) life of the saints in the new heavens and the new earth (Rev. 21–22).

Do you think of the Revelation as a frightening book? Well, for sinners it is, and should be. But for saints who bravely venture into its depths, it is not only a prophecy that instructs and exhorts: It is also a river of comfort that never ends.

And this is true of Revelation 20 as well.

Underlying Theme

The underlying theme of the four Gospels is the *humiliation* of the Son of God: his incarnation as the Last Adam, his righteous life, his earthly ministry (as Israel's messianic prophet, priest, and king), and his atoning death, illuminated and vindicated by his resurrection from the dead.

The underlying theme of the Revelation is the *exaltation* of the Son of God: the manifold ways in which God the Father has been pleased to honor (the obedience of) his Son, so that in the end every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord: the High Prophet, Priest, and King of the universe (John 5:23; Phil. 2:5–11).

In a moment we will see how the structure and contents of the Revelation reinforce this majestic theme. Here, however, I want to highlight the many ways in which this book brings before the eyes of the worshiping Christian every facet of the one diamond that is the Lord's exaltation.

The Revelation shines its light on Christ's resurrection (Rev. 1:18), his ascension (Rev. 12:5), his session at the right hand of the Father (Rev. 5:1–10), his spiritual headship over his body (Rev. 2–3), his authority and control over all the remaining events of universal history (Rev. 5:7; 6:1), his proclamation of the Gospel to the inhabitants of the earth through the Church Militant (Rev. 6:2; 11:4–13; 14:6), his faithfulness to his persecuted people (Rev. 12:6, 13–17), his ongoing (providential) judgments against their enemies (Rev. 11:5; 16:1–21), his rich provision for the souls of his departed saints (Rev. 6:9–11; 20:4–6), his rush to the rescue of his little flock in the day of the Last Battle (Rev. 16:12–14; 19:11–16), his glorious Parousia at the end of the age (Rev. 6:12–17; 14:14–16; 19:11–16), and—at that time—the Consummation of all things. This includes the judgment of his enemies, whether human or demonic (Rev. 6:12-17; 11:11-13; 14:17-20; 19:19-20; 20:11-15), the final redemption of his Bride (Rev. 7:1-8; 11:11-12; 14:14-16; 15:2-4), and the creation of new heavens and a new earth, where he and his beloved Wife will dwell with the Father, the Spirit, and all the holy angels as the eternal family of God (Rev. 21–22).

This manifold revelation of the exalted Lord Jesus Christ is integral to the prophetic character of the book. It is in beholding and contemplating the exalted Christ in all his offices, prerogatives, judgments, and redemptive acts that the saints are instructed, admonished, and richly comforted for their arduous spiritual journey through the wilderness of this world (2 Cor. 3:18).

Does all of this help us to understand Revelation 20? Indeed it does. For if the theme of the book as a whole is the glory of the exalted Christ—reflected in the course, character, and consummation of his heavenly reign—how likely is it that the theme of Revelation 20 is the glory, vicissitudes, and final failure of his future thousand-year earthly reign?

Yes, the Revelation is a predictive prophecy that sings the glory of the High King of Heaven and Earth *through and through*. And to see *that* is to see the meaning of chapter 20 as well.

Literary Genre

The Revelation is an outstanding example of what theologians refer to as biblical apocalyptic. We may define this as follows: Biblical apocalyptic is a special kind of prophecy in which the Holy Spirit uses symbols—both images and numbers—to communicate divine truth about the course, character, and

consummation of Salvation History, whether in final judgment or final redemption.

We encounter biblical apocalyptic in both the Old and New Testaments. Chapters 24–27 of the book of Isaiah use dramatic OT imagery to speak of judgment and redemption on the Day of the LORD. The four beasts of Daniel 7 supply what is likely the single greatest OT picture of the course and character of Salvation History. The mysterious tropes of Ezekiel 38–39 give us the consummation of Salvation History at the Last Battle and the Day of the LORD. The visions and prophecies of Zechariah are apocalyptic through and through. While many portions of the NT supply important truths about Salvation History and the Consummation, it is in the Revelation alone that we find them clothed in this particular literary genre.

Our definition states that biblical apocalyptic uses *visions and symbols* to communicate truth about Salvation History. It is vital to understand, however, that in the Revelation the Holy Spirit no longer uses these instruments to *veil* the truth about things to come (as he did in the OT), but rather to *celebrate* the truth about things previously *unveiled* in the Gospels, the Acts, and the Epistles. In other words, the Revelation is not really a "mysterious" book in the technical NT sense of the word, since the DNT gives us the keys by which to understand it. To see this blessed fact is to receive fresh courage for plunging into its formidable depths.

Method of Interpretation

Being an instance of biblical apocalyptic, the Revelation is a book of signs. Therefore, we must interpret its images and numbers symbolically, rather than literally.

If you question this assertion, simply read the first verse of the book. There it is written that God "sent . . . and *signified* [the Revelation] through the angel to his bond-servant John" (Rev. 1:1). The Greek for "signify" is *semaino*, a verb etymologically related to the noun *semeion*, which means "sign." In using the verb *semaino* to describe this prophecy, the Holy Spirit is telling us at the very outset that the Revelation is *a book of signs* or *symbols*, and that it must be interpreted accordingly. We shall not go far wrong if we do.

It is true, of course, that all interpreters acknowledge the presence of symbols in the Revelation. However, while admitting that it *contains* symbols, many premillennarians do not acknowledge that it is *a book* of symbols, a book that

must be interpreted typologically and symbolically from start to finish.

The result is an inconsistent hermeneutic. For example, pressured by the obvious, the prophetic literalist will concede that the sword coming from Christ's mouth is a symbol of the Word of God (Rev. 1:16), or that the seven horns and seven eyes of the exalted Lamb symbolize the Redeemer's current omnipotence and omniscience (Rev. 5:6).

When, however, the literalist comes to the 144,000 from the tribes of the children of Israel (Rev. 7:4), or to the two witnesses who prophesy and (briefly) perish on the streets of the Great City (Rev. 11:8), or to the Church's 1,260 days in the wilderness (Rev. 12:6), or to Christ's admonition against taking the mark of the Beast (Rev. 13:16–18), or to the gathering of the kings of the whole earth at the Mountain of Megiddo (Rev. 16:14), he suddenly abandons a symbolic hermeneutic for a literal, thereby abandoning a consistent method of interpretation for an inconsistent one. Despite all the evidence that this really is a book of signs, he imports his literalist approach to OTKP into the Revelation itself, not realizing that the NCH alone can open both to our understanding.

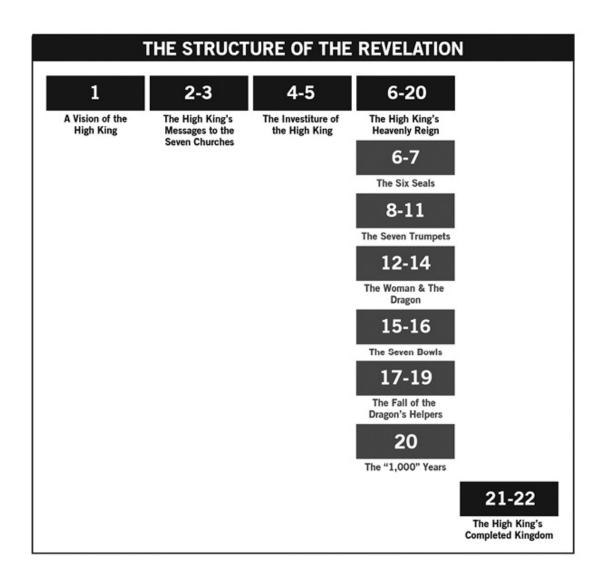
So then: We must recognize that in the Revelation the Holy Spirit is giving us the Bible's supreme manifestation of biblical apocalyptic; that it is a book of symbols through and through; and that the DNT supplies us with the key for interpreting those symbols with confidence. When we use that key, we shall soon understand the meaning of the 144,000, the two witnesses, the 1,260 days, the mark of the Beast, the Battle of Armageddon, and the thousand-year reign of Christ proclaimed in Revelation 20.

There is more to be said about the proper interpretation of the Revelation, but in order to prepare the way let us first pause to consider a matter of special importance: its structure.

Structure

At first glance the Revelation is indeed a complex and intimidating book. But when we push past our fears, enter in, and carefully survey the entire terrain, we begin to see things: recurring themes, patterns, cycles. Suddenly, perhaps after several readings, we realize that this prophecy has a structure: a structure so nuanced, complex, beautiful, and ingenious that the hand of God himself must have been behind it. Moreover, when we fully behold this structure, we see at once how to interpret the book as a whole, and chapter 20 in particular. We must, then, devote some quality time to this crucial subject.

Having considered several different views on the structure of the Revelation, I find myself returning over and again to the ideas embodied in the chart below, skillfully articulated by Bible commentator William Hendriksen.¹



As you can see, the book is readily divided into five blocs. The titles beneath each one reflect my best effort to identify the main idea of that particular bloc, while at the same time keeping in view the central theme of the book: the Person and Work of the exalted Lord Jesus Christ, the High King of Heaven.

I am repeatedly struck by the fact that the third bloc, which gives us the Investiture of the High King of Heaven (Rev. 4–5), stands midway between

the other two. This is most fitting, since that particular bloc is the theological Mount Everest of the book, from which all that precedes or succeeds it flows down. Because of his coronation as the High King of Heaven, Christ can come to John in glory (Rev. 1) and then speak through him to the seven churches with the supreme authority that belongs to the Head of the Church (Rev. 2–3). Moreover, because of that same coronation he also can rule over the universe throughout the remaining years of Salvation History (Rev. 6–20), and then, following his Parousia, usher his glorified Bride into the full and final form of the Kingdom of God (Rev. 21–22). Thus, chapters 4–5 hold the book together, making it a unified celebration of the Person and Work of the High Prophet, Priest, and King of Heaven.

For the purposes of our study, the most important—and controversial—portion of the chart is bloc four. My name for it, together with its contents, suggests that chapters 6–20 are best understood as six separate *cycles* or *recapitulations*, each of which—in its own unique way, and for its own unique purposes—describes the course, character, and consummation of the High King's heavenly reign.

Since that's a mouthful, let me break it down a little. This large bloc, Rev. 6–20, is comprised of six sub-blocs, or cycles: Rev. 6–7, 8–11, 12–14, 15–16, 17–19, and 20.² But in each of these cycles the Holy Spirit has in view the same time frame: the time between Christ's first and second advents; the time during which the exalted Christ reigns as High King of Heaven and Earth. It's as if the Holy Spirit were taking us on six guided tours of the Era of Proclamation. In each tour he points out different sights. In each tour he uses different symbols to describe the sights. But in each tour he is covering the exact same territory, showing us the earthly impacts of the High King's heavenly reign. In short, throughout this bloc of text the Spirit is recapitulating His Story: the history of the exaltation of Christ.

How do we know this is true? How do we know that the six recapitulations really do traverse the same historical ground?

While the answers are many, the most important is the way in which the cycles begin and end. In nearly every case it is quite evident that the cycle begins with a symbolic representation of Christ's session and/or the advent of his spiritual Kingdom on the Day of Pentecost. Similarly, in *several* cases it is clear that the cycle ends with a symbolic representation of the Last Battle (Rev. 11:7–10; 13:6–10; 16:12–16; 19:17–21; 20:7–10). And in *all* cases it is clear

that the cycles end with a symbolic representation of the Parousia, the Resurrection, and/or the Judgment (Rev. 6:12–17; 11:15–19; 14:14–20; 16:17–21; 19:11–21; 20:11–15). These phenomena are quite compelling, further revealing both the deep structure of the book and the proper method of its interpretation.

Implications of the Structure

If this chart really does give us the true structure of the Revelation, it carries with it three major implications for the interpretation of the entire book, including chapter 20. Let us attend to them now.

First, if the chart is correct it means that we cannot interpret Revelation 6–20 as *preterists* do. They say that here the Spirit's focus is largely, if not exclusively, on events that, for us, are already past. These events include the fall of Jerusalem, the tyrannical power of Rome, and the vicissitudes of the early Church at the hand of Jews and Romans. But if in fact the Spirit's focus is on the era between Christ's two advents, then obviously the preterist interpretation cannot be correct.

Similarly, if the chart is correct it means that we cannot interpret Revelation 6–20 as *futurists* do. They say that here the Spirit's focus is largely, if not exclusively, on events that will occur toward (or at) the very end of the age. Yes, there are some differences among these interpreters. Moderate futurists, like George Ladd, say these events will befall the Church. Dispensational futurists, like John MacArthur, say they will befall latter-day Jews during a seven-year tribulation that will begin after Christ has secretly returned and taken the (largely Gentile) Church to Heaven. But again, all futurists agree that chapters 6–20 are largely, if not entirely, fulfilled in the days just prior to the Parousia and the Millennium that follows it. However, if these chapters are actually speaking of the entire Era of Gospel Proclamation, then obviously the futurist views cannot be correct either.

This brings us to a second and closely related implication. If the chart is correct it means that when the Holy Spirit uses a particular symbol to speak to God's people he is not (usually) referring to a concrete historical entity, whether a person, place, thing, or event. If our chart is correct he cannot be. Rather, he must be referring to a *kind* of historical entity that *all* the saints will encounter over and again in their journey through the Era of Proclamation.

Let's consider an example. Some preterists say that when the Spirit speaks of

the Beast (Rev. 13:1–4) he is referring to that arch-persecutor of the early Church, the emperor Nero. Meanwhile, most futurists say that when the Spirit speaks of the Beast, he is referring to a personal Antichrist who will arise just prior to Christ's return, whether to persecute the Church or ethnic Israel. If, however, we embrace the cyclical view, we immediately realize that it mandates a broader and richer approach: an approach that can affirm the elements of truth in both the preterist and futurist views. For now we see that in speaking about the Beast, the Spirit is speaking about a particular kind of historical phenomenon: in this case, the political or governmental face of Satan's fallen world system, whenever and wherever it pops up in Salvation History. It is a face that could be embodied in Nero, Domitian, Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, Mao, Ceausescu, Pol Pot, this or that ayatollah, the Antichrist, or any of the persecuting institutions that these people represent. And what is true of the Beast is also true of the False Prophet and the Harlot: Though their faces change from generation to generation, they are ever present in the world, and ever to be watched for by the Church.

We find, then, that the cyclical view of Revelation 6–20 generates a particular hermeneutic: a particular way of understanding and applying the symbols found in the book as a whole. Theologians refer to this as an *idealist* hermeneutic. On this view, the symbols in the Revelation do not stand for unique historical persons or events, but rather for general ideas or principles that will manifest themselves over and again throughout the Era of Proclamation, *and therefore in any number of historical persons, places, things, or events.* William Hendriksen, an enthusiastic advocate of this approach, applies it as follows:

The seals, trumpets, bowls of wrath, and similar symbols do not refer to specific events, particular happenings, or details of history, but to principles of human conduct and of divine moral government that are operating throughout the history of the world, especially throughout the new (Christian) dispensation.³

Now, while this approach is extremely helpful, I would join with Hendriksen in issuing two caveats.

First, the Revelation can and does speak about specific times and events in Salvation History. Yes, when speaking of the course and character of Christ's heavenly reign it uses its symbols to address all Christians of all times.

However, in speaking of events set to occur at the very end of the age, it uses its symbols to speak of historical occurrences in which a small minority of Christians will be involved. All Christians should be aware of these events, but not all will experience them. A brief look at Revelation 11:3–19 will illustrate my point.

In Revelation 11:3–6 we learn about the spiritual career of two witnesses. Described in imagery highly reminiscent of Moses and Elijah—but also of the disciples whom Jesus sent out two by two to proclaim the Gospel to Israel—they represent the witnessing Church. God calls them to prophesy (i.e., to preach the Gospel) for 1,260 days, a number that symbolizes the entire Era of Proclamation as a season of exile, persecution, and divine provision (see 1 Kings 17:1–7). So then: All Christians of all times can see themselves in these two witnesses.

When, however, we reach verses 7–13, the focus narrows. Now the Spirit is speaking concretely about the last generation of witnessing Christians. This generation will see the completion of the Great Commission (11:7). It will see the Beast—hitherto restrained from thwarting the Church's mission—rise up out the abyss (Rev. 20:1–3), wage war against them, overcome them, and "kill" them (i.e., thoroughly suppress their public worship and witness) (11:7–10). But this is also the generation that will see the return of Christ in glory, the Resurrection of the Dead, and the Judgment (11:11–19). Here, then, the symbols do indeed point to unique events set to occur in a unique portion of Salvation History. Here the universal Church cannot see herself (much as she might like to), but only that portion of the Church that will live and serve Christ during the days of the Last Battle.

This brings us to our second caveat. While it is true that the six cycles of Revelation 6–20 traverse the same historical ground, it is also true that there are notable differences between them. In particular, the further we progress through the cycles, the more we learn about the Satanic powers operating behind the scenes of the great clash of the kingdoms, and about the human instruments they use to persecute the Church. Or again, the further we progress through the cycles, the more we receive dramatic visions of the Last Battle, the Parousia, the Resurrection, the Judgment, and the World to Come. Referring to this phenomenon as *progressive parallelism*, Hendriksen writes:

Although all the sections of the Apocalypse run parallel and span the

period between the first and second comings of Christ . . . yet there is also a degree of progress. The closer we approach the end of the book the more our attention is directed to the final judgment and that which lies beyond it. The (several) sections are arranged, as it were, in an ascending, climactic order. . . . The final judgment is first announced, then introduced, then finally described. Similarly, the new heavens and earth are described more fully in the final section than in those that precede it. . . . The book reveals a gradual progress in eschatological emphasis. 4

So again: All six cycles of Revelation 6–20 give us the course, character, and consummation of the spiritual reign of the High King of Heaven and Earth. But they do not all have precisely the same contents or emphases. Also, while all the contents of the cycles are meant for all Christians, not all the events symbolized in the cycles will befall all Christians. By keeping these caveats in mind, we shall be able to use the idealistic method of interpretation with great profit.

The third and final implication of our chart takes us right to the heart of the GETD. If indeed chapter 20 properly falls into bloc four of the Revelation—if indeed, like the previous five cycles, it too describes the course and character of the High King's heavenly reign—then obviously it cannot be speaking of a future earthly reign that is destined to appear *after* the heavenly. In short, if our chart really does give us the true structure of the Revelation, then the Revelation itself rules out Premillennialism once and for all.

Ancillary Purpose: The Grand Finale of All Scripture

Think for a moment about your favorite symphony. Now think about its final movement. What is it that turns the final movement into the symphony's *grand finale*? Speaking personally, three simple answers come to mind.

First, it appears at the end of the symphony. There is no more music to come. Accordingly, this is the composer's last opportunity to sum up his message and get it across with a final burst of artistic power and panache.

Secondly, it reprises all or most of the themes heard in the previous movements. However, when it does, it does so "grandly." That is, the composer skillfully and majestically weaves together all his earlier motifs in such a way that we not only hear them again, but also hear them afresh, and therefore

with fresh power. We hear them in new, startling, and beautiful relations with one another. We hear them in such a way that the *whole* symphony is somehow poured into the last *part* of the symphony.

And thirdly, because it is a *grand finale*, it does not typically introduce a new musical theme. Instead, the composer devotes himself more or less exclusively to creative, inspiring, and deeply impressive recapitulations of the old.

All three of these observations apply to the Revelation, and in a way that helps us understand it to its depths.

Like a *grand finale*, the Revelation appears at the end of the great symphony of biblical revelation. By God's wise decree, it is the last book of the Bible. What's more, its contents positively cry out that it *should* be the last book, since it is so thoroughly taken up with the Last Things: the course and character of the Last Days, the Last Battle, the Last Resurrection, and the Last Judgment—the last two of which occur at the Last Coming of the Last Adam. The claims of Church history's false prophets notwithstanding, Spirit-taught Christians find it unthinkable that God, having given us a book like this, would ever give us any more. And indeed, this is the testimony of the Revelation itself (Rev. 22:18–19). The Revelation is the Book of the End; therefore, it rightly appears at the end of the Book (Rev. 1:8; 2:26; 21:6; 22:13).

Like a grand finale, the Revelation also incorporates and artistically weaves together ideas, images, and texts from the preceding movements of Holy Scripture, whether the Old Testament or the New. Here, biblical allusions abound: to the Garden of Eden, Moses, the Exodus, Elijah, Mount Zion, the Temple, the birth of Jesus, the murderous cruelty of Herod, the preaching of the disciples two by two, Christ's resurrection, ascension, session, heavenly reign, and Parousia. Westcott and Hort counted nearly 400 references to the OT in the Revelation. Many commentators say there are more. In Revelation 12 alone we find quotes from, or allusions to, Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Psalms, Song of Solomon, Isaiah, Hosea, Micah, Daniel, Zechariah, Matthew, Luke, John, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, 1 Peter, 1 John, and Jude. Clearly, the Revelation is not simply historical narrative, law, poetry, Gospel, or epistle. No, it is something altogether new under the biblical sun: a final prophetic word to the universal Church, clothed in raiment that weaves together all that has gone before. As such, it is not *only* a prophetic word, but *also* the Grand Finale of All Scripture.

If so, the implications are important. If the Revelation really is the Grand Finale of All Scripture, we should not expect it to introduce new themes (i.e., new doctrines). It is not the purpose of a *grand finale* to introduce new themes; its purpose is to creatively recapitulate the old. And when we examine the Revelation we find that this is indeed the case. Here there is nothing new, nothing other than what Christ and the apostles have already taught us in the DNT. There is nothing new about the Holy Trinity, the creation, the fall, the Eternal Covenant, the nature and structure of the Kingdom, or the Consummation of all things at Christ's coming again. Rather, we simply find the Holy Spirit speaking *over and again* about these old, well-established truths. However, when he does so, it is in new and amazing ways: in beautiful, powerful, and supremely inspiring visions and symbols. Here he weaves together all that has gone before in Holy Scripture, even as he celebrates, one final time, the exaltation of the One who is the grand theme of Holy Scripture: the High King of Heaven and Earth.

The application for our study is not far to see. If the Revelation really is the Grand Finale of All Scripture, is it likely that just a few measures prior to its conclusion (i.e., in chapter 20) God would suddenly introduce a completely new eschatological theme (i.e., a future earthly millennium)? Moreover, what if that theme had not previously appeared in the Revelation itself? What if it had not appeared in the OT? What if it could not be harmonized with the Revelation itself, the DNT, and OTKP? And what if it threatened to destroy the perfect harmony that previously existed between all of the above?

In short, is it likely that God would destroy the Grand Finale of All Scripture by using Revelation 20 to introduce a new movement about a future millennial stage of the Kingdom of God? Let every good Berean search the Scriptures, look to the Teacher, and answer this probing question for himself.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have offered a short introduction to the Revelation as a whole so that we might better understand the Millennium of chapter 20. With special reference to that chapter, let me sum up what we have learned so far.

The apostle John wrote the Revelation when he was in exile and under persecution. Since he was a founding elder of the Church—and indeed an emblem of the Church—it should not surprise us if Revelation 20 speaks of

the Church in exile and under persecution.

John wrote the book around AD 95. Therefore, contrary to preterist views, Revelation 20 cannot be speaking exclusively about events surrounding the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70.

The intended audience of the book is the universal Church; the purpose of the book is the edification, exhortation, and comfort of the universal Church; and the theme of the book is the exaltation of the King who now rules over the cosmos for the good of the universal Church. It should not surprise us, then, if Revelation 20 addresses the Church, prophesies to the Church, and speaks of the destiny of Church during the days of the High King's reign.

As to its literary genre, the Revelation is a unique instance of biblical apocalyptic. Like all apocalyptic, it uses visions and symbols to portray the course and character of Salvation History. Unlike all other apocalyptic, the meaning of its symbols is not hidden, but rather disclosed in the DNT. It should not surprise us, then, if the message of Revelation 20 is couched in Old and New Testament symbols that are readily decoded by a skillful use of the NCH.

The structure of Revelation 6–20 is such that it gives us six cycles or recapitulations of the heavenly reign of Christ. Since each of the first five cycles begins by alluding to events surrounding his session, and concludes by referencing events surrounding his Parousia, it should not surprise us if the sixth cycle, Revelation 20, does the same.

Also, since the book as a whole gives us a *progressive* revelation of the High King's reign throughout the Era of Proclamation, it should not surprise us if the last cycle in this bloc (i.e., Revelation 20) focuses on the *last* of the last things: the Last Battle and the Last Judgment of men and angels.

Finally, since the Revelation is not part of the DNT, but is instead the Grand Finale of All Scripture, it should not surprise us if Revelation 20 does not introduce new eschatological truth about a future millennium, but simply draws on OT and NT Scripture to speak again of its one great theme: the heavenly reign of the exalted Lord Jesus Christ.

In short, there is much in and about the Revelation as a whole that appears to rule out premillennial interpretations of chapter 20. But if Revelation 20 does not speak of a future earthly millennial reign of Christ, of what *does* it speak?

Let us journey on with the Teacher and see if we can find out!

- 1. William Hendriksen, More than Conquerors (Grand Rapids: MI: Baker Book House, 1967), 22–23.
- 2. In this chart I have included Revelation 7 in the bloc titled The Six Seals. Though that chapter appears to stand alone, it is in fact part of the first sub-bloc, bringing it to an apt conclusion. Verses 1–8 of chapter 7 cast a backward glance at the same ground covered in chapter 6, giving us a vision of the sealing (i.e., ingathering) of "the Israel of God" throughout the Era of Proclamation (and before, all the way back to the beginning of Salvation History). Verses 9–17 look ahead, giving us the happy fruit of that sealing, as well as the Revelation's first sneak peek at life in the new heavens and the new earth. Sandwiched as it is between John's description of the first six seals (Rev. 6) and the seventh (Rev. 8:1), chapter 7 must not be reckoned as an isolated vision of its own, but as the natural (and happy) conclusion of the one that preceded it.
- <u>3</u>. Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 43.
- <u>4</u>. *Ibid*., 35–36.

CHAPTER 11

REVELATION 20: THE MEANING OF THE MILLENNIUM

any Christians view Revelation 20 as a well-fortified city: Its true meaning seems utterly impervious to penetration. But there is good news: The Teacher has placed some major siege works at our disposal. He has shown us the nature and structure of the Kingdom. He has taught us how to interpret OTKP. And if this NT scribe is hearing his voice correctly, he has disclosed to us the true audience, purpose, theme, structure, and literary genre of the entire book. Yes, all the siege works are in place, and already the Forbidden City is raising a white flag. Indeed, she is suddenly eager to open her gates, welcome us into her precincts, and deliver up her vast treasures to the victor. Amillennialism has captured the Forbidden City for the truth!

But what exactly is the amillennial interpretation of this chapter? Is there good evidence to support it? And what about premillennial interpretations, arguments, and evidences? How do amillennarians respond to all these, and are their responses convincing?

My goal in this chapter is to reply. Thoroughly!

We'll begin with a brief overview of Revelation 20. Then we'll take a closer look at the four sections that comprise the chapter. In each case I will cite the text itself, offer a short amillennial interpretation, and then address key flashpoints of controversy between amillennarians and premillennarians. Finally, I will summarize all that we've learned in order to set the stage for the fifth major leg of our journey, the leg in which we scale the highest eschatological mountain of all: the Consummation of all things at the Parousia of Christ.

Overview of Revelation 20

Revelation 20 falls nicely into four sections of roughly equal length, each one containing a mini-vision that is closely related to the others. The unifying theme, mentioned repeatedly, is the one thousand years. The first section

speaks of the binding and imprisonment of Satan for one thousand years (Rev. 20:1–3). The second speaks of the First Resurrection and the blessings of those who reign with Christ during the one thousand years. It also speaks of the Second Death of persons who did not attain the First Resurrection or the millennial reign of Christ (Rev. 20:4–6). The third speaks of the Last Battle and the judgment of Satan at the end of the one thousand years (Rev. 20:7–10). The fourth and final section speaks of the Judgment of all mankind at the Great White Throne, which also occurs at the end of the one thousand years (Rev. 20:11–15).

With these few words of introduction, let us now turn to the chapter itself for a closer look.

1. The Binding and Imprisonment of Satan for One Thousand Years

(Revelation 20:1–3)

¹Then I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, holding in his hand a great chain and the key to the abyss. ²And he seized the dragon—the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan—and bound him for 1,000 years,³ throwing him into the abyss, and locking and sealing it over him, so that he could no longer deceive the nations, not until the 1,000 years had come to an end. After that, he must be released for a little while.

An Amillennial Interpretation

Amillennarians bring two basic assumptions to this text. First, they assume that here the Holy Spirit is again taking us back to the beginning of the Era of Proclamation: to the Day of Pentecost. And secondly, knowing that the Revelation is a unique instance of biblical apocalyptic, they also assume that the Holy Spirit is using types and symbols to convey his message to the Church.

Based on these assumptions, my amillennial interpretation is as follows:

In verse 1 John sees an angel coming down from Heaven, having the key to the abyss and a great chain in his hand. The imagery is apocalyptic and therefore symbolic. The angel symbolizes divine agency, the chain symbolizes divine power to restrain (2 Thess. 2:6), and the key symbolizes divine authority to act (Rev. 1:18; 14:6–7). The forthcoming binding and imprisonment of the Dragon certainly could involve the activity of angels, and there are suggestions

in the Revelation that it does (Rev. 12:7–12). Nevertheless, in the end we are dealing here with a ministry of the Heaven-sent Spirit of God, whose mission on the earth is to exalt Christ and gather in his flock through the preaching of the Gospel by the Church (Rev. 5:6–7; 6:1–2; John 16:5–8, 14; Acts 2:33).

Verses 2–3 take us to the heart of this section: the temporary binding and imprisonment of Satan. Drawing upon imagery found in Isaiah 24:21–23, and illuminating its meaning, the Holy Spirit depicts the angel as laying hold of Satan, tying him up with a chain, throwing him into the abyss, and locking and sealing it over him, so that for one thousand years he can no longer deceive the nations.

Using apocalyptic imagery, these verses convey three basic messages.

First, Satan is *bound*. Something has happened—something powerful and decisive—such that now he feels himself to be restrained and confined. Having thus been bound, the ruler of the world system is no longer free to rule it as he previously did (John 12:31; 16:11).

Secondly, Satan is bound for a specific purpose. Quite explicitly our text tells us what it is: He is bound so that he can no longer deceive the nations. The amillennial interpretation, defended below, is that this binding is with a view to two specific goals. First, he can no longer deceive the nations in such a way as to keep God's elect from coming to the true and living God through faith in Christ. And secondly, he cannot deceive the (unregenerate) nations in such a way as to unite them under the Antichrist, bring them against the worldwide Church, crush her public worship, and suppress her evangelistic outreach. In other words, he is restrained from deceiving the nations into fomenting the Last Battle (Rev. 20:7–10).

Finally, Satan is bound and imprisoned *for a specific season*. That season is cast as one thousand years. As we shall see, the number symbolizes the Era of Proclamation and tells us two things about it. First, this era will be lengthy, longer than most Christians expect. But secondly, it will also be fruitful, for during this lengthy season the triune God (symbolized by 3) will fully complete (symbolized by 10) the application of the redemption that was accomplished by Christ ($10 \times 10 \times 10$).

Verse 3 concludes on an ominous note: At the close of the one thousand years, Heaven itself, for wise reasons, will release the Dragon from his bonds and his prison. That is, God will remove the spiritual restraints presently laid upon Satan and his demonic hosts, so that once again they will be free to

deceive the nations. Sections three and four of Revelation 20 will give us the results.

Flashpoints of Controversy

On three crucial points our premillennarian brothers differ sharply with this interpretation of Revelation 20:1–3. With the aid of some detailed questions, let us address each one.

1. Chronologically speaking, where are we in this text? Are we dealing with events that take place after the Parousia described in Revelation 19:11–21, as premillennarians hold; or are we back at the beginning of the Era of Proclamation, as amillennarians hold?

For several reasons the amillennial view is greatly to be preferred.

First, a close reading of Revelation 19:11–21 makes it quite clear that the judgment depicted there is *not* partial, but rather *universal*. The Lord will smite *all* the nations, shattering them with a rod of iron and treading them down in the winepress of the wrath of God (Ps. 2:7–9; Rev. 2:27). The birds in the sky above will feast on the flesh of *all* men, both free and slave, small and great. It is impossible to imagine language better suited to communicate the idea of universality. Note also that this text says not a word about children or converted Jews being spared so as to enter a future millennial stage of the Kingdom. Nor does any other text in the DNT. The burden of proof weighs heavily upon the premillennarian to show that Revelation 19:11–21 gives us anything other than the one general judgment of God's enemies anticipated by classic Protestant theology.

Secondly, we have seen that the first five depictions of the reign of Christ found in bloc four of the Revelation (i.e., chapters 6–20) all begin at the beginning of the Era of Proclamation and end with the Judgment. Is it not reasonable to expect that after the solemn judgment described in Revelation 19:11–21, the Spirit would once again take us back to the beginning of the High King's heavenly reign?

Thirdly, consider how counterintuitive it would be for the Holy Spirit to give us only *five* cycles depicting the Era of Proclamation, rather than *six*. Six reminds us of the six days of God's creative work, after which, on the seventh, he rested. Analogously, six depictions of the Era of Proclamation would speak of Christ's redemptive work in history, after which, on an eternal seventh day

(described in Rev. 21–22), he and his Church would rest (Heb. 4:1–13). Biblical numerology strongly favors the 6–1 structure of Amillennialism over the 5–1–1 structure of Premillennialism.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we have much evidence found in the text itself, evidence that repeatedly takes us to parallel passages, both in the Revelation and the DNT. This evidence shows beyond any reasonable doubt that Revelation 20 does indeed traverse the same familiar ground: the Era of Proclamation. In the questions ahead we will examine that evidence in detail.

2. What is the Binding and Imprisonment of Satan?

With insufficient regard for the symbolic character of the book, premillennarians interpret the binding and imprisonment of Satan essentially literally: A literal angel will literally throw Satan into the literal abyss, thereby *removing* him from the earth so that he will be unable to deceive men or nations for a literal one thousand years.

It is easy to see, however, that this approach has problems of its own. Yes, there is such a place as the abyss (Luke 8:31), just as there are also such things as chains and keys. But do we really want to say that the chain is an actual object, rather than a symbol of divine power; or that the key is an actual object, rather than a symbol of divine authority? Also, how exactly would an angel lock and seal the abyss over the devil's head? What materials would he use? Clearly, we are dealing here with a spiritual event involving spiritual beings; therefore, we must try to discern the spiritual meaning behind the physical imagery used to convey it. Moreover, we must do so consistently. If the chain is a symbol and the key is a symbol, then hermeneutical consistency requires us to ask whether the Holy Spirit is using Satan himself as a symbol (i.e., of Satan and the other fallen angels now at work in the world), or the abyss itself as a symbol (i.e., of deep spiritual restraint and confinement), or the one thousand years as a symbol (i.e., of the Era of Proclamation, during which time Satan is restrained as never before).

Importantly, the figurative approach is well supported by the world in which Christians now live, and also by the history of that world. On the one hand, it is a world in which Satan is present and active, sometimes painfully so (1 Peter 5:8; Rev. 2:13). But on the other, it is a world in which God has been restraining Satan for over two thousand years. God has restrained him from keeping his elect from coming to Christ (Matt. 16:18; 24:14; Luke 4:4–6; Rev.

20:3), and God has also restrained him from fomenting the Last Battle that is set to occur at the end of the age (2 Thess. 2:6; Rev. 9:14; 16:12; 20:7). The amillennial interpretation accords with the real-world experience of the Church.

The figurative approach is also favored by other passages in the Revelation that depict the *result* of the binding of Satan: the infallible worldwide spread of the Gospel throughout the Era of Proclamation. Here are a few:

Even now the Rider upon his white horse is going forth into the earth in the cause of Gospel truth, conquering and bent on conquest; and he has been doing so from the beginning [i.e., the Day of Pentecost] (Ps. 45:3–5; Rev. 6:2).

Even now God is holding back the four winds of the Judgment until all his servants are sealed upon their foreheads; and he has been doing so from the beginning (Rev. 7:1–8).

Even now the two witnesses, who are measured for spiritual protection, continue to prophesy the Gospel to the nations; and they have been doing so from the beginning (Rev. 11:1–6).

Each of these texts depicts the infallible progress of the Gospel in the Era of Proclamation. And why is that progress so certain? *Because even now Satan is bound from deceiving the nations; and he has been from the beginning.*

In this connection we also do well to consider Revelation 12, a crucially important chapter that runs closely parallel to our text at many points.

It opens by alluding to the birth, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Male Child who will judge the nations, all of which occurred at the beginning of the Era of Proclamation (Rev. 12:1–6).

Next, we read of a great spiritual war that immediately ensued, a war in which Satan—who is explicitly styled as the deceiver of the whole world—is cast down to the earth (Rev. 12:7–9). These verses depict the progressive collapse of Satan's worldwide Kingdom throughout the Era of Proclamation. Formerly, the whole Gentile world was his kingdom (Luke 4:6). But no longer. Now, because of the worldwide preaching of the Gospel, his kingdom is in free fall. In the case of God's elect, his deceptions no longer deceive. This great truth is confirmed in Revelation 12:10–12, where we hear a heavenly voice triumphantly proclaiming the advance of the Kingdom of God because of the faithful testimony of the saints.

Observe also from Rev. 12:14–17 the many ways in which the Spirit restrains Satan from destroying the Woman (i.e., the Church) and hindering

her fruitfulness in begetting children for her Husband: He gives her the wings of the Great Eagle (Rev. 12:14), he nourishes her in the wilderness (Rev. 12:14), and he opens up the earth in order to swallow the floods of ungodliness that pour forth from the Dragon's mouth (Rev. 12:15–16; 16:13). Thus, in Revelation 12 we have nothing less than an inspired commentary on Revelation 20:1–3, a commentary that richly illumines the binding of Satan.

In *The High King of Heaven* I discuss a number of other NT texts that run closely parallel to Revelation 20:1–3, and that pour rich theological content into the images found there. These include Matthew 12:22–29, Luke 10:17–19, John 12:20–33, 1 Corinthians 15:20–28, 2 Corinthians 10:1–5, Ephesians 1:19–23, and Colossians 2:8–15. Considered together, they show that God's purpose in sending Christ was to mount a lethal attack on Satan's kingdom; that through the Savior's righteous life, atoning death, and vindicating resurrection, he has made the attack possible; and that through the worldwide preaching of the Church he is successfully carrying it out. Henceforth, and right up till the end, God is busy transferring his worldwide elect from the Domain of Darkness into the Kingdom of his beloved Son (Col. 1:13). How can he do this? He can do it because—through the Person and Work of the High King of Heaven—he has bound Satan from deceiving the nations any longer.

3. What is the meaning of the one thousand years?

Amillennarians contend that in Revelation 20 the Holy Spirit uses the number one thousand symbolically to convey two important truths about the Era of Proclamation: first, that it is a *lengthy* season, and secondly, that it is a *fulsome* season, a season during which the triune God will fulfill all of his redemptive and judicial purposes for the world.

Let us briefly explore both meanings, and in so doing consider some of the numerology found in the Revelation.

In both the Old and New Testaments the Holy Spirit frequently uses the number one thouand to convey the idea of *magnitude* (Gen. 24:60; Ex. 20:6; Deut. 1:11; 32:30; 33:2; Ps. 68:17; Dan. 7:10; Heb. 12:22; Jude v. 14). The same is true in the Revelation. In chapter 5, John describes the vast host of holy angels as "thousands of thousands" (Rev. 5:11). In chapter 7, he equates the 144,000 eschatological Israelites with "a great throng that no one could number" (Rev. 7:4, 9). In chapter 14, he states that at the Judgment blood

reaching up to the horses' bridles will pour out of the winepress of God's wrath to a distance of 1,600 stadia; that is, to the ends of the earth $(4 \times 4 \times 1,000;$ Rev. 14:20).

In light of these precedents the message of Revelation 20 becomes clear: The Era of Proclamation will last a long time—longer than first-century Christians expected, and longer than Christians of most any generation might expect. The number therefore stands as a warning to the saints: They should not interpret "the beginning of the birth pains"—the tokens of divine judgment scattered all along the corridor of NT history—as signs that the Lord's Parousia is imminent (Matt. 24:6–8). Nor, if he tarries, should they allow themselves to be disheartened by scoffers; for in the Lord's sight a thousand years is as a single day (2 Peter 3:1–8). Rather, the saints must persevere in worship, prayer, and Spirit-led service, trusting that Christ will delay his return no longer than the demands of his own redemptive purposes require (Luke 18:1–8; 2 Peter 3:15).

In addition to magnitude, the number one thousand also symbolizes *divine* fullness or completeness. Fittingly, it is reached by a work of multiplication. The number three represents the Holy Trinity. The number ten represents fullness or completeness. Thus, in Revelation 20 the message of the number one thousand is that the Era of Proclamation will be a lengthy season in which the Holy Trinity (3) will be at work to complete (10) the redemption of his people (10 x 10 x 10). The Millennium is the season of Salvation History in which God the Father, through the preaching of his Church and the regenerating work of the Spirit, gathers in all his children, casts out all evil, and heads up all (redeemed) things in and under his beloved Son (Eph. 1:10, 22; Col. 2:10).

Is there further evidence to support this symbolic interpretation of the one thousand years? Yes, and not a little.

First, there is the reasonable assumption that Revelation 20 is the sixth and final recapitulation of the course and character of the High King's heavenly reign. If so, the one thousand years *must* symbolize the total duration of that reign, which is now over two thousand literal years old.

Secondly, there is the literary genre of the Revelation (i.e., biblical apocalyptic), in which both images *and numbers* are used symbolically. We see this throughout the book. For example, two is used to symbolize the witnessing Church (Rev. 11:4–14). Four, and certain permutations of four, are used to symbolize the whole earth (Rev. 7:1; 14:20). Six, joined together

thrice, is used to symbolize man blasphemously pretending to be deity (Rev. 13:18). Seven and ten are used to symbolize perfection and completeness (Rev. 1:4, 16; 2:10; 5:1; 8:2; 12:3; 17:3, 12). Twelve, and various permutations of 12, are used to symbolize (the fullness of) God's people (Rev. 7:1–8; 12:1; 21:14, 21; 22:2). In view of these phenomena, can there be any reasonable doubt that the number one thousand is used symbolically as well?

Thirdly, we have the numerological evidence found in Revelation 12–14, a cycle that we know runs closely parallel to Revelation 20. In Revelation 12 the Holy Spirit designates the Era of Proclamation as 1,260 days (Rev. 12:6; cf. Rev. 11:2; 13:5), and also as "a time, times, and half a time" (Rev. 12:14). These numbers—which recall Elijah's three and a half years in the wilderness beside the Brook Cherith (1 Kings 17:1–7)—are meant to characterize this era as a time of exile and tribulation, but also as a time in which the Lord will faithfully provide for his own. Here we see that in the Revelation the Holy Spirit used *several* different numbers to speak of the Era of Proclamation. Could not the number one thouand be one of them?

The final line of evidence consists of passages speaking about the Last Battle. These include Revelation 11:7–10, 16:12–16, and 19:19–21. In each of these texts we are clearly dealing with a great battle, a battle that will take place *prior* to the Parousia. But Revelation 20:7–10 also gives us a battle. Moreover, when it does, it uses OT language and imagery to depict it, just as its three predecessors did. Note also that Revelation 20:8 speaks of the battle as "the war" (emphasis added), as if to say that here we are dealing with the very same war spoken of earlier in the book. In light of all this, is it not reasonable to assume that "the war" of Revelation 20:7–10 is the same as all the others, and is the Last Battle itself? But if that is the case, then again: The one thousand years must be symbolic. They must represent the season between the binding of Satan at Christ's first advent and the loosing of Satan just prior to his second.

For all these reasons we conclude that the evidence weighs very heavily in favor of the view that the one thousand years of Revelation 20 symbolize the entire Era of Gospel Proclamation and Probation: the era of the spiritual reign of the High King of Heaven.

II. The First Resurrection and the Reign of the Saints with Christ for One Thousand Years

(Revelation 20:4–6)

⁴Then I saw thrones, and they were seated upon them; and authority to judge had been given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony concerning Jesus, and because of the word of God. And I saw those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead or on their hand. And they all came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. ⁵ (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years had come to an end.) This is the first resurrection. ⁶Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection: Over these the second death holds no sway, but they will be priests of God and of Christ; and they will reign with him (throughout) the thousand years.

An Amillennial Interpretation

Having opened the chapter with a revelation of the binding and imprisonment of Satan, the Holy Spirit now addresses a question that will naturally arise in the minds of every believer. One thousand years bespeaks a long time. What will happen to the saints who die during that season? Our text supplies the answer. The amillennial interpretation is as follows:

Those whom John sees seated on thrones are *souls*: the souls of the saints who remained faithful to Christ throughout their portion of the Era of Proclamation and then died and entered Heaven (v. 4). In partial fulfillment of Daniel 7:9, at the moment of their death authority to judge was given to them; that is, God authorized them to participate with Christ in the Judgment (v. 4).

Some of these saints died as martyrs, but all were loyal to the Word of God (v. 4). All refused to worship the Beast (i.e., the self-deifying, anti-Christian State); all refused to worship the image of the Beast (i.e., to participate in the religious cultus of the anti-Christian State) (v. 4); and all refused to take the mark of the Beast upon their forehead or their hand (i.e., to identify themselves, in thought and deed, as loyal followers of the Beast).

As a result of their covenant loyalty to the Lord, these saints "came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years" (v. 4). That is, at the moment of their death God raised their souls to spiritual perfection for life in Heaven with Christ throughout the (remainder of the) Intermediate State. The Holy Spirit identifies this spiritual coming to life as "the first resurrection." Later on, at the end of the one thousand years, this spiritual coming to life will be followed by a physical coming to life; the first (spiritual) resurrection will be consummated by a second (bodily) resurrection that will equip the saints for the fullness of

human life in the new heavens and the new earth (v. 5).

In speaking of these things, and by way of a warning to all, the Holy Spirit also mentions here the destiny of unbelievers. They too will "come to life," but only at the end of the one thousand years, when their souls, previously in Hades, are joined to resurrection bodies, and then subjected to "the second death," which is the Lake of Fire (vv. 5, 14).

Our passage concludes with John identifying three blessings that God has prepared for the saints who attain the first resurrection.

First, the second death now holds no sway [lit. has no authority] over them. Having triumphantly passed their probation on the earth, they are eternally secure from all possibility of apostasy and perdition. Henceforth, admonitions and warnings to remain faithful will neither be needed nor heard.

Secondly, they will be priests of God and Christ. Spiritually, they will enter fully upon their eternal ministry of worship and service to the triune God (1 Peter 2:9–10).

And thirdly, they will reign with Christ during the one thousand years. That is, having attained to the fullness of eternal life through the entrance of their spirits into Heaven, they, like Christ, will reign victoriously over every deadly spiritual enemy that previously opposed them during their time on earth.

Flashpoints of Controversy

The above interpretation, or something quite close to it, is the standard amillennial view of Revelation 20:4–6. Alas, our premillennarian brothers are not enthused. Indeed, they would challenge it at no less than five different points. Let us briefly consider their objections and arguments, and then see where the weight of the biblical evidence leads.

1. Who are these saints?

According to most premillennarians, John is speaking here about Old and New Testament saints who have been *physically* raised by Christ at his Second Coming, saints who will reign with him in his forthcoming millennial kingdom. However, the text itself rules out this interpretation.

Note first from verse 4 that the Spirit speaks not a word about a bodily resurrection. If, then, we were restricted to verses 4–6 alone to discover the identity of the occupants of the above-mentioned thrones, we would have to conclude that they are *souls*: souls that have proven faithful during their life upon the earth, some even to the point of death by martyrdom (Rev. 2:13; 7:3;

9:4; 14:1; 22:4). Surely, then, it is at least reasonable to conclude that we are dealing here with the souls of Christians who have entered Heaven, henceforth to enjoy the blessings of the Intermediate State, just as many other NT texts richly promise (Luke 16:19–31; 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:21–24; Heb. 12:22–24).

Observe also that this is not the only promise of the Intermediate State to be found in the Revelation. Revelation 6:9–10 pictures the souls of the martyrs dwelling safely in Heaven, albeit crying out to God for justice and vindication. Similarly, in Revelation 14:13 we hear the Spirit saying, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from this time forth . . . that they may rest from all their toil, for their works follow after them." Amillennarians believe that verse 4 of our text is meant to depict this very blessedness. It is meant to give tested and tempted saints of all generations a soul-strengthening peek at the rich rewards awaiting them in Heaven should the Lord tarry and they die after persevering in the faith to the end.

2. Where are they living?

Most premillennarians assert that the saints depicted in verses 3–6 are living on the earth in their new glorified bodies. However, some disagree. The latter are honest enough to admit that the text says nothing at all about an earthly reign, and that the commingling of the glorified Christ and his glorified saints with mere natural men is highly unlikely, if not impossible (1 Cor. 15:50). Accordingly, these interpreters say that the resurrected saints will reign with Christ from Heaven. However, this view is even more problematic, since the vast majority of OTKPs, literally interpreted, clearly require the Messiah and his people to dwell upon the earth.

Happily, the text itself points the way to a better interpretation.

Observe again that John beholds *souls*. But where would he behold disembodied, triumphant Christian souls, if not in Heaven?

Note also that he sees them seated on *thrones*. This word occurs forty-seven times in the Revelation. On three occasions it refers to the throne of Satan and the Beast (Rev. 2:13; 13:2; 16:10). On four occasions it refers to the throne of God, situated in the new earth (Rev. 21:3, 5; 22:1, 3). On the other forty occasions it refers exclusively to heavenly thrones, whether of God, Christ, or the twenty-four elders. *And whenever the saints are mentioned in these texts, the thrones are heavenly* (Rev. 3:21; 4:4; 11:16).¹

Therefore, we conclude that our text itself, parallel texts in the Revelation,

and texts in the DNT dealing with the Intermediate State, all confirm that the saints of verses 4–6 are living in Heaven with Christ during the season of his mediatorial reign.

3. What does the Spirit mean when he says that the souls of the millennial saints "came to life" and experienced "the first resurrection"?

The amillennial reply is that this "coming to life" is strictly spiritual: At the moment of their death the spirits of the saints who have persevered in the faith enter Heaven, where they come to the fullness and perfection of eternal life. The Holy Spirit identifies this special coming to life as "the first resurrection" because it is analogous to, and guarantees, a second resurrection (i.e., of the body) at the Lord's return at the end of the age.

But again, our premillennarian brethren cannot agree. They say that this coming to life is physical: At the Lord's premillennial return he will join the departed souls of faithful Old and New Testament saints to their new resurrection bodies, in which they will sit upon thrones and reign with him for one thousand years. This is called "the first resurrection" because it is the first of two bodily resurrections. The second will occur at the end of the Millennium when God raises the unrighteous and unbelieving for the last judgment.

Premillennarians defend this view by citing the parenthetical remark found in verse 5. It reads, "The rest of the dead did not come to life [ezesan] until the thousand years had come to an end." All interpreters agree that "the rest of the dead" are the souls presently in Hades, souls that will come to life at the resurrection of their bodies. "But," say the premillennarians, "if the Holy Spirit used the same Greek word (ezesan) to describe both the first (v. 4) and second resurrections (v. 5), how can you possibly assert that the first is spiritual, but the second physical?"

At first blush this argument seems to be compelling. But what if there was solid evidence to show that the Spirit, for wise reasons, intentionally used the same word in two different senses? What if there was evidence to show that the two "comings to life" differ not only in timing, but also in nature? Needless to say, amillennarians are convinced that such evidence does indeed exist.

But let us begin at the beginning: with the various evidences favorable to the amillennial view.

First, we have just seen from verse 4 that the entire scene is heavenly. John

has explicitly referenced souls, and Revelation 6:9 strongly suggests that they are in Heaven. He has explicitly mentioned thrones, and in the Revelation they are always situated in Heaven when associated with the saints. Moreover, he says not a word about the bodily resurrection of these saints.

Secondly, the parenthetical remark found in verse 5 actually supports the amillennial interpretation. John writes, "The rest of the dead did not come to life until the one thousand years had come to an end." The premillennial reading is: "The dead referred to in verses 4–5 come to life bodily at the beginning of the Millennium and reign with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead will not come to life bodily until the thousand years are over." The amillennial reading is: "The dead are divisible into two groups: the dead whose souls John is seeing in Heaven, and the rest of the dead whose souls are still in Hades. The former come to life spiritually at the moment of their death, but not yet bodily (Rev. 20:13). The latter will never come to life spiritually, but will indeed come to life bodily, but only to be thrown into the Lake of Fire." The evidences previously cited, together with the eschatology of the DNT, strongly favor the amillennial view.

Thirdly, we have John's remark found in verse 6: "Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection: over these the second death holds no sway." This is a glorious promise, given to conscientious saints struggling to pass all tests and resist all temptations so that they may complete their earthly pilgrimage victoriously. But if, as premillennarians assert, the first resurrection is bodily, then this promise, far from being a blessing, opens a door to all manner of doubts and fears. Henceforth, premillennarians are left to wonder: "When I die and my soul enters Heaven, will it still be in danger? Must I still take tests and wrestle with temptations? Might I yet apostatize? Do I really have to wait until the Lord's return and the resurrection of my body before I can rest assured that the second death holds no sway over me?"

"God forbid!" cries the amillennarian. "The first resurrection is not bodily, but spiritual. It is the holy moment when you transition from earthly life to the Intermediate State. It is the triumphant conclusion of your Gospel probation upon the earth. Henceforth you will be perfectly holy in spirit. Henceforth you can never fall away from God. Henceforth the second death has no authority over you, as indeed it would if, while still living upon the earth, you fell into temptation and denied your Lord (2 Tim. 2:12), (which, according to the NT, is something that the Good Shepherd will never allow his

true sheep to do, John 10:27-29).

We find, then, that verse 6 powerfully illumines the true meaning of the saints' "coming to life" and "the first resurrection." These picturesque expressions speak of their souls' victorious entrance upon the glories of the Intermediate State.²

It remains to ask, however, why the Holy Spirit would use the same Greek word (*ezesan*) to describe two different kinds of coming to life: two different kinds of resurrection. The answer, I believe, is found in the progress of biblical revelation concerning the Intermediate State, and in the prophetic purpose of the Revelation.

Think back to the days of the early Church. Having been well taught by the apostles, most Christians would have understood that "soon" all (deceased) human beings will come to life in a single bodily resurrection of the dead (Luke 20:27–40; John 5:26–29; Acts 24:15, 21; 1 Cor. 15:50–58; 1 Thess. 4:13–18). However, as the Lord tarried, and as some of the saints began to die, surviving believers would naturally be concerned about the condition of departed loved ones after their death but *prior* to the bodily resurrection. The apostles understood this and addressed their concern by teaching them about the Intermediate State (2 Cor. 5:1–10; Phil. 1:21–24; 1 Thess. 4:13–17; Heb. 12:22–24). However, as the NT canon neared completion, it pleased the High Prophet of Heaven to do so one final time.

Accordingly, here in Revelation 20 he gives the Church Militant a climactic word of instruction, exhortation, and encouragement concerning the Intermediate State. I would paraphrase it as follows: "Yes, in the general resurrection all people will come to life bodily. However, should I tarry, always remember that for those who believe, overcome, and die in the faith there awaits a first resurrection of their spirit that supplies a foretaste and guarantee of the final resurrection of their body. There awaits a first coming to life in Heaven that supplies a foretaste and guarantee of a final coming to life in the World to Come. And there awaits a first reigning with me in Heaven that supplies a foretaste and guarantee of a final reigning with me and my Father in the new heavens and the new earth. So then: Armed with these glorious promises, see to it that you overcome!" (2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 3:21; 5:10; 22:5).

We find, then, that the Lord used the same word to describe two different "comings to life" because the two comings to life—*much like the two stages of the one Kingdom of God*—share the same fundamental nature: the first is unto

spiritual perfection, and lasts a little while; the second is unto spiritual and physical perfection, and lasts forever. Thus did it please the High Prophet of Heaven to further illuminate the glories of the Intermediate State, thereby giving his people fresh hope and moving them to covenant faithfulness throughout the remainder of their difficult pilgrimage upon the earth (John 11:26; Rev. 20:6).

4. What does the Spirit mean when he says that the millennial saints "reigned with Christ a thousand years" (20:4b, 6)?

Premillennarians view the millennial reign of the saints through the (narrow) lens of verse 4a: To reign with Christ is to receive from him the right to rule and judge the nations during the future millennial stage of the Kingdom. But again, premillennarians disagree among themselves as to *where* they will reign. Some say from Heaven, but most say upon the earth. John Walvoord, seeking to reconcile quarrelling brethren, argues that the commingling of glorified saints with natural men on earth "seems to be limited to a few specific functions, while the primary activity of the resurrected saints will be in the new and heavenly City [above the earth]." All agree, however, that their reign is ongoing, governmental, and judicial. The resurrected and glorified saints will rule over the nations as high princes of the High King, issuing commands and administering judgments at his word.

The great difficulty with this view is that the DNT does not support it at all. In *The High King of Heaven* I discuss a number of NT texts cited by premillennarians to argue that in a future millennium the saints will govern with Christ (Matt. 19:28; 1 Cor. 6:2; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:26–27; 5:9–10). However, in each case it can easily be shown that the text refers either to the saints' role in the Last Judgment or to their reigning with Christ in the World to Come.

But if the reign of the saints in our passage has nothing to do with governing and judging the nations in a future millennium, what in fact is it all about? While the Revelation itself supplies some important clues, I judge that on this score Romans 5:17 is our single most helpful NT text. It reads:

For if by the transgression of the one [i.e., the first Adam], death reigned through the one, how much more will those who receive the riches of God's grace and his gift of righteousness reign in life through the One: Jesus Christ [i.e., the Last Adam]!

Here the apostle is contrasting the bad fruits of the work of the first Adam with the good fruits of the work of the Last. Note his emphasis upon the future. Through the work of Christ, the saints will one day reign *in life* over the sin and death that the first Adam introduced into the world. But when exactly will this take place? The DNT supplies a simple twofold answer: First it will happen spiritually in the Intermediate State, then it will happen spiritually and physically in the World to Come.

Verses 4 and 6 of Revelation 20 affirm this very thing. When an overcomer dies and his spirit enters Heaven he will receive, as it were, his first share in Christ's absolute victory over sin and death. Like Christ, and with Christ, he will reign in life in Heaven over sin and *spiritual* death, and will forever after be blessed and holy. Then, following his bodily resurrection from the dead, he will reign in life over *physical* death as well.

Several other texts in the Revelation support this line of interpretation. Revelation 11:15 associates the reign of God and Christ, not with the government of nations, but with final victory over the forces of evil. Similarly, Revelation 22:5 associates the reign of the saints, not with rulership over their human brethren, but with final rescue from the curse and final restoration to the light and life of God (Rev. 22:1–5).

Again, all these texts seem clearly to illuminate the true meaning of Revelation 20:4–6. If so, the message of the latter is this: Just as there are two different but closely related "comings to life," so also there are two different but closely related "reignings with Christ." The first is spiritual only. It begins when the believer's spirit enters Heaven and partakes of Christ's victory over all spiritual evil, suffering, and death; and it ends at the Lord's Parousia. The second "reigning with Christ" is spiritual and physical. It begins at the Parousia with the bodily Resurrection of the Dead, the Judgment, and the creation World to Come. And it never ends. In that day the saints will finally partake of Christ's complete victory over all evil, suffering, and death. Blessed is he who attains to the first "reigning in life," for when he does it is certain and sure that he will attain to the second as well!

5. What does the Spirit mean when he says that authority to judge had been given to the saints?

Translated quite literally, our text reads: "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them" (v. 4a). Again, premillennarians

say this means that Christ will give the resurrected saints the prerogative to govern and judge during his earthly millennial reign. We have seen, however, that the text does not support this view; that whatever this judgment is, it does not belong to resurrected saints living *after* the return of Christ, but to the souls of those who die in the Lord and enter Heaven *before* his return. What, then, might this judgment be?

Our answer is found in Daniel 7, to which the Holy Spirit here alludes. An angel appears to Daniel, giving him a vision. He sees the Ancient of Days taking his seat for the Judgment. But just before that, "thrones were set up" (Dan. 7:9). A little later, the angel will again speak to Daniel about the Judgment, telling him that in that Day "the court will sit," the rule of the Antichrist will be destroyed forever, and dominion over every kingdom under the whole of Heaven will be given to the saints of the Most High (Dan. 7:26–27). Note carefully that the angel says nothing about a thousand years. The dominion of God and the saints will last *forever*.

What light does Daniel 7 shed upon Revelation 20:4a?

Returning to our text, John sees the souls of the departed saints seated on thrones. In the Revelation thrones symbolize authority. The message is: The saints who enter Heaven during the Intermediate State will be given authority. But authority to do what? John himself tells us: *to judge*. But to judge what? Just here, Daniel fills in the blanks. These saints will be part of "the court." They will sit as members of the heavenly tribunal that, together with the Ancient of Days, will judge the world in righteousness, after which the Kingdom of God will come in all its fullness.

Other passages in the Revelation confirm this idea. It is particularly clear in Revelation 2:26–27, where the Lord promises the overcomers in Thyatira that they will have a share in the Judgment. We also find it in a closely parallel text, Revelation 19:11–15, where we see the armies of Heaven, clothed in fine linen, following the glorified Christ as he returns to the earth, at which time both he and his armies will be to the nations like a shepherd wielding a rod of iron. From their attire we can be sure that these armies are (or at least include) the saints (Rev. 19:8). And again, we also have the straightforward teaching of the DNT to the effect that believers will have a role in the administration of judgment at Christ's Parousia (Rom. 16:20; 1 Cor. 6:1–3).

We conclude, then, that the meaning of verse 4a is as follows: At the moment of their death (the souls of) the persevering saints enter Heaven,

thereby securing not only their eternal salvation, but also their privileged role as co-executors of the Judgment set to occur at Christ's return. Yes, for a little while they must patiently wait for final justice, even as the High King gathers in his elect, and as their brethren suffer on the earth below (2 Peter 3:15; Rev. 6:9–11). But now they can rest assured that final justice will be done, and that they themselves will have a role in administering it. Now Christ has seated them on thrones. Now he has appointed them to be to the nations as a shepherd with a rod of iron. Now he has given them authority to judge. And when at last they wield that authority, the entire world will see that the Ancient of Days has indeed given judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High (Dan. 7:21–22; Col. 3:1–4; Rev. 20:12, 15).

III. The Last Battle and the Judgment of Satan at the End of the One Thousand Years

(Revelation 20:7–10)

⁷Now when the thousand years have come to an end, Satan will be released from his prison. ⁸ And he will go out to deceive the nations that dwell in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—and to gather them together for the war; and their number is like the sands of the seashore. ⁹ And they went up onto the broad plain of the earth, and they surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city; but fire came down from heaven and consumed them. ¹⁰ Then the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and burning sulfur, there to join the beast and the false prophet. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

An Amillennial Interpretation

In Revelation 20:3 John told us that at the end of the one thousand years Satan must be released for a little while. This section of our chapter tells us what he will do when that happens. The amillennial interpretation is as follows:

Verse 7 reads, "Now when the thousand years have come to an end, Satan will be released from his prison." All throughout the Era of Proclamation the Holy Spirit has been restraining Satan and his host of evil spirits from deceiving the nations: from keeping souls from Christ and from fomenting the Last Battle. Now, at the end of the one thousand years, the Church has completed her evangelistic mission. Now the Spirit of God, for wise reasons, restrains no longer.

Verse 8 gives us the result: "And he will go out to deceive the nations that dwell in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—and to gather them together for the war; and their number is like the sands of the seashore."

"He" stands for Satan, and Satan stands for Satan and his entire army of evil angels that, unlike the spirits in Hades, still occupy "the air" and "the heavenly places" of this fallen world (Eph. 2:2; 6:12). Might some of the spirits in Hades be released as well? Revelation 9:1–6 suggests that it is possible.

Their prey is not some, but all nations: all who dwell in the four corners of the earth. Scripture assures us that "the holy nation"—the Church—will be impervious to their deceptions and temptations (Matt. 24:24; 1 Peter 2:9–10). But the nations of Gospel-rejecting men and women will swiftly fall into their snares.

Their goal is to gather those nations together for "the war." This is the war waged by the Beast who arises out of the bottomless pit and overcomes the two witnesses (Rev. 11:7–10). It is the Battle of Har-Magedon (Rev. 16:12–16). It is the war from which the Heavenly Rider will deliver his beleaguered people at his Parousia (Rev. 19:19–21). It is the war humanly initiated by the Antichrist and spoken of in Daniel 7, 9, and 11, and 2 Thessalonians 2. It is the Last Battle: the battle in which the consolidated, satanically controlled world system will seek to destroy the true spiritual Church once and for all.

Satan's forces are vast, as vast as the sands of the seashore. The implications are clear: At this point in Salvation History few if any new believers will be added to Christ's Church. She will have finished her testimony, and all or most of God's elect will have been gathered in (Rev. 11:7). In that day the situation will be much as it was at the beginning of the Era of Proclamation: Apart from Christ's little flock, the whole world system will again lie in the power of the evil one (1 John 5:19; cf. Luke 4:6).

Satan's method for achieving his goal is *deception*. Again, the Revelation has already spoken of this. By God's decree Satan will put lying spirits in the mouth of the Beast and the False Prophet, in order that he (Satan) might gather the kings of the whole earth together for the war of the great Day of God: the mighty Ruler over all (Rev. 13:11-18, 16:12–16). 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12 supplies the historical details standing behind this imagery. We will discuss that important text in chapter 13.

Parenthetically, John refers to the vast satanically controlled army as Gog and Magog. Here the Spirit is telling us that Ezekiel's great OT prophecy will

be fulfilled in the Last Battle. Just as that ancient prophet had foretold, Gog (the Antichrist) and Magog (his subservient confederacy of nations) will launch a suicidal attack against the Church: the eschatological Israel of God (Ezek. 38–39; Gal. 6:16).

Verse 9 gives us the Revelation's final depiction of the Last Battle: "And they went up onto the broad plain of the earth, and they surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city; but fire came down from heaven and consumed them" (cf. Rev. 11:7–10; 16:12–16; 19:19–21).

John begins by saying, "They went up onto the broad plain of the earth." Under the leadership of the Antichrist the nations will persecute Christian people and institutions wherever they are found in the world.

In speaking of this attack the apostle again draws upon OT imagery: The enemies of the Church will surround "the camp of the saints" and "the beloved city." In the Last Battle the nations will surround the Church just as Amalek surrounded the camp of the Israelites in the wilderness of Sin (Ex. 17:8). Or again, they will surround the Church just as Assyria surrounded Jerusalem—the Beloved City—in the days of Hezekiah and Isaiah (Isa. 36–37). The mixed metaphor warns against interpreting the prophecy literally. The Church is the encampment of God in the wilderness of the world; the Church is the City of God, the beloved apple of his eye (Zech. 2:8; Rev. 12:6; 21:2).

John concludes his description of the Last Battle by again drawing from Ezekiel's prophecy: "But fire came down and consumed them" (Ezek. 38:22; 39:6). To bring an end to the Last Battle, Christ will return and judge the enemies. There is not a little in the NT to suggest that his judgment will indeed be by fire (Luke 17:29; 2 Thess. 1:6–10; Heb. 10:27; 12:29; 2 Peter 3:7; Jude v. 7). Importantly, this final reference to the Last Battle is rendered in a single phrase, as if to underscore its brevity. Satan will be released for a *very* little while (Rev. 20:3), seeing that the Lord's redemptive response will be *very* swift and *very* terrible.

Verse 10 reads, "Then the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and burning sulfur, there to join the beast and the false prophet. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."

Here the Revelation reaches a kind of dark climax. The devil—the arch evil spirit who has been the great deceiver of men and nations from the dawn of human history right down to its very end—is finally judged: consigned to eternal punishment in the Lake of Fire. So too are his leading human

instrumentalities: the Beast and the False Prophet. According to the DNT this will be accomplished at the hand of Christ, the holy angels, and the Church herself when the Lord comes again in glory to judge the whole earth (Gen. 3:15; Ps. 96:13; 98:9; Matt. 13:39; Acts 17:31; Rom. 16:20).

Flashpoints of Controversy

We have seen that Revelation 20:7–10 is readily interpreted along amillennial lines. It remains, however, to address three challenging questions, the final two of which provide some rough sledding for our premillennial brethren.

1. Does Revelation 20:10 assume that the Beast and the False Prophet were cast into the Lake of Fire one thousand years prior to the devil himself?

Premillennarians cite Rev. 20:10 as proof of a literal one-thousand-year hiatus between the judgment of the Beast and the False Prophet on the one hand, and the judgment of Satan (and his evil angels) on the other. John Walvoord writes:

As Revelation 20 makes plain, Satan is to be loosed at the conclusion of the Millennium, at which time he will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, into which the beast and the false prophet had been previously cast at the beginning of the Millennium (Rev. 20:10). The final judgment of the wicked angels apparently occurs at the same time as Satan's final judgment, when he is cast into the lake of fire and brimstone.⁴

Walvoord's reading is possible. But is it the only possible reading, or the best? Let us inquire.

As for the Greek text itself, the relevant phrase has no verb at all. Literally, it reads, "And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where also the beast and the false prophet; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever." Clearly the emphasis is not on when these satanic agents will be thrown into the Lake of Fire, but on the comforting fact that they also will be in the Lake of Fire with their master, the devil. For this reason, the NASB translates as follows: "... where the beast and the false prophet are (no italics) also." Indeed, one could just as well write,

"Where the beast and the false prophet also *were thrown*." Walvoord claims to deduce Premillennialism from this text, when in fact he is reading Premillennialism into it.

Yes, the question remains as to which reading is best. But all the evidence favors the amillennial. For example, in chapters 6–19 the Revelation gives us five different depictions of a single judgment at the end of the age. Surely in Revelation 20:10–15 we are given a sixth. Also, the premillennial view cannot be reconciled with the DNT, which consistently looks for a single universal judgment of men and angels at the Parousia of Christ (Matt. 11:22; 12:36, 41–42; 25:31–46; Acts 17:30–31; Rom. 2:3–11; 2 Thess. 1:3–12; 2 Peter 3:7; Jude v. 6). Along these lines, Romans 16:20 is of special importance. Paul tells us that Christ, at his Parousia, will "crush" Satan. That is, he will *finally* and *completely* judge him (Gen. 3:15 NIV). Similarly, we have 1 Corinthians 15:24, where Paul says that Christ, at his Parousia, will "abolish all rule, authority, and power." How then shall Christ crush Satan's head and abolish his rule, authority, and power *a second time* at the end of a future millennium?

We conclude that the theological sense of Revelation 20:10 is as follows: "And the devil who deceived them will be thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet also will join him. And together they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."

2. Assuming that Premillennialism is true, how could the thousandyear reign of Christ and his saints prove so ineffectual that it ends in near universal apostasy?

This question should be deeply troubling for all premillennial interpreters. The whole premise of their system is that OTKPs will be fulfilled literally in a future millennium under a modified form of the New Covenant. If so, we may reasonably assume that during the Millennium God will pour out his Spirit upon all flesh; that he will circumcise (nearly) all human hearts, both Jewish and Gentile (Isa. 19:24–25; 32:15; Jer. 31:33–34; Ezek. 36:26; Joel 2:28–32). How, then, at the close of such a richly spiritual reign, shall "as many as the sand of the seashore" fall away, especially when Jeremiah foretold that the saints living under the New Covenant *cannot* fall away (Jer. 31:33)? Does the Millennium take us back to the Old Covenant after all? Also, how shall the Father allow his Son's visible reign upon the earth to come to such an inglorious end (John 5:20–24)?

In response to these criticisms some premillennarians assert that only the nations that have not heard about Christ will rebel: only those living in "the four corners of the earth," at a great distance from Jerusalem (Rev. 20:8). But this solution raises more questions than it answers. Why would Christ leave these nations untouched by the Gospel, seeing that they are so densely populated? What will the believing nations—and the glorified saints living upon the earth—be doing when multitudes of these far-flung infidels arrive at Jerusalem to attack the camp of the saints? And how can premillennarians square all this with OTKP itself, which says that in the days of the (allegedly millennial) Kingdom, God will gather *all* nations and tongues to behold Christ's glory (Is 2:2–4; 66:18–23); that *all* the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord; and that *all* the families of the nations will worship before him (Ps. 22:27)?

3. Assuming that Premillennialism is true, why does the Bible give us two attacks of Gog and Magog?

It is obvious that Revelation 20:8 refers to Ezekiel 38–39. However, nearly all premillennarians say that Ezekiel's prophecy is fulfilled at the end of the Era of Proclamation, while John's is fulfilled at the end of the Millennium. John MacArthur writes, "The battle depicted in verses 8–9 is *like* the one in Ezekiel 38–39; it is best to see this one as taking place at the end of the Millennium." ⁵

But surely it is simpler—and far more reasonable—to say that both texts refer to the same battle: the one Last Battle. On this view, the Spirit mentions Gog and Magog quite intentionally. It is as if he were saying to Christians, "Here in the Revelation I have spoken of 'the war' on three previous occasions (Rev. 11:7–10; 16:12–16; 19:19–21). In the DNT Christ and the apostles have spoken of it as well (Matt. 24:9–30; 2 Thess. 2:3–12). What I want you to understand is that this is the same battle of which Ezekiel and the other OT prophets spoke (Ezek. 38–39; Dan. 7; 9:26–27; 11:36–12:13; Joel 3:1–17; Mic. 4:11–5:1; Zech. 14:1–3). It will indeed bring great tribulation, the likes of which the world has not seen since the beginning, and never will again (Matt. 24:21). But there is only one such battle, and your High King, in his covenant-keeping love, will surely bring you through."

4. The Judgment of All Mankind at the End of the One Thousand Years

(Revelation 20:11–15)

¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and the One seated upon it, from whose face the earth and the sky fled for safety; but no such place was found for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, both the great and the small, standing before the throne. Then scrolls were opened; and another scroll was opened, which is the Scroll of Life. And the dead were judged based on the things written in the scrolls, that is, according to their deeds. ¹³ And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them; and they all were judged, each according to his deeds. ¹⁴ Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death: the lake of fire. ¹⁵ And if anyone's name was not found written in the Scroll of Life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

An Amillennial Interpretation

Having spoken of the judgment of Satan and his leading instrumentalities at the Coming of Christ, Revelation 20 concludes by depicting the Judgment of all mankind before the throne of Christ in the skies above the earth. My amillennial interpretation is as follows:

Verse 11 gives us the Judge upon his throne. The imagery is drawn from the judgment scene of Daniel 7. There, the divine Personage upon the throne is clearly God the Father, the Ancient of Days (Rev. 4:2). Here, however, according to the DNT, it is God the Father living in, and acting through, God the Son, the divinely appointed executor of the Judgment (Rev. 1:8, 11; 19:11–16; 21:6; cf. Matt. 3:12; 13:41–43; 25:1–13; John 5:27; Acts 17:31; Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10). Will Christ actually sit on a visible throne suspended in the vacancy of space, as depicted here? It is entirely possible (Matt. 25:31; 2 Cor. 5:10). Nevertheless, at its heart the white throne is an emblem of Christ's sovereignty and holiness: of his God-given authority and power to judge, and of the perfect holiness and righteousness with which he will do so (Rev. 14:14).

This verse also tells us that the earth and the sky will flee for safety from his face, but will be unable to hide. The language is apocalyptic, affirming once again the earlier message of the DNT: The earth and its works—groaning under the curse and profoundly corrupted by man's sin—will perish at the hand of Christ in the final conflagration, but only in order to make way for new heavens and a new earth in which perfect righteousness dwells (Rev. 6:12—

17; 11:11–13; 16:17–21; 22:3; cf. Rom. 8:21; 2 Peter 3:10–13).

In verse 12a John sees the dead, both great and small, standing before the throne of Christ. They are all the human beings who have ever lived and died, or who were transformed in the twinkling of an eye at the Lord's appearing (1 Cor. 15:50–57). Having just been raised and/or transformed at the word of Christ, they now stand before him for judgment (John 5:28–29; Rev. 20:13). Revelation 11:18 teaches the universality of this judgment by stating that "the dead" include the prophets, the saints, and all who fear God's name. Contrary to most premillennarians, this judgment is *not* confined to the unrighteous.

In verse 12b John sees many scrolls being opened, as well as a single scroll: the Scroll of Life. The judgment described in this verse is based on the contents of the many scrolls. There is one such scroll for each person standing before him. This scroll is not a physical thing, but a spiritual symbol. It represents the record of the person's "deeds" (i.e., of the things he thought, said, or did during his days upon the earth), a record that is lodged in his own memory and the memory of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). All the dead, including the saints, will be judged according to the contents of their scroll (Rom. 2:6). In the case of the saints, their evil deeds will have been blotted out. Because of his work on the cross, Christ no longer remembers their sins against them (Isa. 43:25; Jer. 31:34; 50:20; Mic. 7:19). For this reason the saints themselves will no longer remember them, though they may indeed "suffer loss" (of reward) due to postconversion failures (1 Cor. 3:15; Phil. 3:13; Jude vv. 24-25; Rev. 21:4). They will, however, be enabled to recall their good deeds: the deeds that were done in Christ. And for these they will receive a reward (Rom. 15:17–19; 1 Cor. 3:10–15). In the case of sinners, the record and memory of their evil deeds remains, and will therefore elicit the just judgment of God and Christ (Luke 12:47).

Verse 13 backtracks a little, giving us the general resurrection of the dead, which leads to the general judgment of the dead (John 5:25–29). The thrust of this verse is to say that *all* will be raised and *all* will be judged, saints and sinners alike. The note of universality is evident: The sea—which certainly holds the physical remains of saints and sinners alike—will give up its dead. So too will Death and Hades. With respect to these, the focus here appears to be exclusively on the unrighteous. In the Revelation, Death and Hades are often juxtaposed and always viewed as a menace to sinners (Rev. 1:18; 6:8; 20:14). Accordingly, Death and Hades must have something in common. Here

"Death" is likely the spiritual *condition* of sinners who are separated from God and under punishment in the Intermediate State; Hades is the *place* where they have been experiencing that condition. If so, John is saying that at the Resurrection, Hades, which holds the souls of the unrighteous in a condition of Death, will give up all its dead. So again: This verse tells us that at the Parousia both the righteous and the unrighteous will rise and be judged according to their deeds.

Verse 14 gives us, as it were, the death of Death and Hades, for now these last enemies are thrown into the Lake of Fire. The Lake of Fire, whose location is not revealed in Scripture, is the biblical equivalent of Gehenna (traditionally, Hell), and is the place of the eternal punishment of the resurrected unrighteous (Matt. 5:22–30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33). Note carefully that John does not say "the dead" were thrown into the Lake of Fire, for some of the dead are now alive forevermore and will soon inherit the World to Come (Rev. 1:5; 11:18; 14:13; 20:12). What, then, does he mean? Once again, Death is the *condition* of the unrighteous in the Intermediate State, and Hades is the *place* of their souls in the Intermediate State. Thus, John is telling us that at the Judgment the Intermediate State of the unrighteous will be brought to an end. The "first death" of their souls in Hades will be swallowed up and abolished by "the second death" of their souls and their resurrected bodies in the Lake of Fire.

Verse 15 discloses the basis of salvation and eternal life. John writes, "If anyone's name was not found written in the Scroll of Life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." The DNT supplies the meaning. If eternal life was based on the things written in one's own scroll—on the deeds done in the body—all would perish, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23; Gal. 2:16; Rev. 5:3–4). But to the saint's everlasting joy, it was not. It was based on the righteous life and atoning death of the triumphant Lion of the tribe of Judah, and on simple faith in him and his finished work (John 3:16; 19:30; Rev. 5:5, 9). Throughout the Era of Proclamation, the Church proclaimed this way of salvation (Rev. 11:3; 14:6). If anyone believed her report, his name was written in the Lamb's Scroll of Life (Isa. 53:1; John 3:36; 6:47). Or rather, if anyone believed her report, he eventually saw that the sovereign God had written his name in the Lamb's Scroll of Life before the founding of the world; that God had ordained him to eternal life (1 Thess. 5:9; Rev. 13:8; 17:8). He (the believer) saw that in order to fully inherit that life he, just like Christ, had to *overcome*: to continue in the faith all the way to the end

(Matt. 24:13; John 15:6; Rom. 11:22; Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5). And, to his great joy, he also saw that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit had eternally purposed that he should do so (John 6:37–40; 17:15; Rom. 8:28-39; Jude v. 1).

Here, then, in Revelation 20:15, we have all such believers—and all the rest of mankind—appearing in their resurrection bodies before the Judgment Seat of Christ, who makes, as it were, a final inquiry into each man's standing before God (Rev. 3:10). If that man believed, overcame, died in the faith, and attained to the first resurrection—or if he was found alive and faithful at the Lord's return—then his name appeared in the Lamb's Scroll of Life, and he inherited the fullness of eternal life in the World to Come (Rev. 21:1–8). If not, he was thrown into the Lake of Fire.

It is certainly not easy to preach the Gospel from this unspeakably weighty text. However, amidst the increasing lawlessness of these last days, it may be more necessary than ever.

Flashpoints of Controversy

Disagreements over this section of our text center around two main questions. Let us pause to consider them both.

1. Are "the dead" of Revelation 20:12 the same as "the rest of the dead" in Revelation 20:5: the unrighteous only? Or are "the dead" all human beings who have ever lived and died?

With rare exceptions, premillennarians agree with NT theologian George Ladd, who wrote, "This statement [i.e., verse 12] clearly implies, if it does not explicitly affirm, the resurrection of 'the rest of the dead' (v. 5) who did not experience the first [bodily] resurrection."

It is easy to see why this identification is so important to premillennarians. If "the dead" of verse 12 include the saints, then verses 11–15 are giving us a general bodily resurrection and a general judgment. But if that is the case, then "the first resurrection" of verse 5 *must* be spiritual only, and the premillennial interpretation of this chapter is ruled out. We need, then, to consider this question with some care.

Summing up the arguments of many premillennial commentators, William Biederwolf offers three reasons for believing that our text refers to the unrighteous dead alone. I will cite and briefly respond to each one.²

First, he asserts that in the Revelation the phrase "the dead" always refers to the unrighteous alone. As proof of this he cites Revelation 11:18 and 20:5. However, it is not at all evident that in Revelation 11:18 "the dead" are the unrighteous alone. On the contrary, the exact words of Revelation 11:18, which appears to be the seed text out of which Revelation 20:11–15 grows, argue forcefully that *all* the dead—including bond servants, prophets, and saints—are in view.

As for Revelation 20:5, we recall that it reads, "The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years had come to an end." Here amillennarians and premillennarians agree: This text refers to the souls of the unbelieving dead in Hades, souls that will "come to life" in the bodily resurrection of the Last Day. But again, this verse proves the exact opposite of what Biederwolf asserts, for it clearly presupposes that *some* of "the dead" are saints (i.e., those who have attained the first resurrection), while the *rest* of the dead are unbelieving sinners. Also, elsewhere in the Revelation we find John using this expression not only to refer to the saints who die in the Lord (Rev. 14:13), but also to the risen Christ himself (Rev. 1:5)! We conclude, then, that the phrase "the dead" can indeed refer both to saints and sinners, *and that it usually does*. Amillennarians say that Revelation 20:11–15 is no exception.

Secondly, Biederwolf appeals to John 5:24, which states that the believer in Christ does not come into judgment but has passed from death to life. His argument is: If believers do not come into judgment, how can they be in view in Revelation 20:11–15, which is certainly a judgment scene?

The answer to this question involves a crucial distinction, one that appears throughout the DNT: The believer in Christ does not come into judgment *for his sins*, since he has savingly believed on the One who paid for them all (Rom. 8:1–2). However, he *does* come into judgment *for the quantity and quality of his works*, since it will please God to reward him for the things he did through Christ during his life on earth (Rom. 2:6; 2 Cor. 5:10). Revelation 20:11–15 includes the latter. Accordingly, John 5:24 does not rule out the presence of the saints in our text.

Thirdly, Biederwolf observes that, "The judgment takes place according to what is written in 'the scrolls,' and 'the scrolls' are expressly distinguished from 'the Scroll of Life." This is a true statement. But Biederwolf is operating on a false assumption, with the result that he draws a false conclusion. He assumes that the judgment based on "the scrolls" is made with a view to determining

one's salvation. But one's salvation is *not* based on "the scrolls." It is based on the presence or absence of his name in the Scroll of Life, *which in turn is based on the presence or absence of faith in Christ.* The judgment that is based on "the scrolls" is meant only to determine degrees of reward or punishment for deeds done (or left undone) in the body. In the case of the saints, no punishment is involved, since Christ received the punishment for their sins on the cross. Accordingly, for them this judgment is simply an evaluation of their works with a view to determining the kind and/or measure of their reward. Contrary to Biederwolf, there is no biblical problem with the saints being judged out of "the scrolls."

We conclude then that "the dead" of Revelation 20:12 are *not* exclusively the unbelieving sinners of Revelation 20:5, but rather all who have ever lived and died: saints and sinners alike. Therefore, a sound interpretation of this text does not support Premillennialism, but instead favors the classic amillennial eschatology of the Reformation.

2. If Revelation 20:11–15 speaks only of the resurrection and judgment of unbelieving sinners, when will the saints who live and die during the Millennium be raised and judged for their works?

As is clear from the marked differences of opinion among them, this question greatly troubles premillennarians, suggesting that their entire scheme is without a sound biblical foundation.

Some interpreters suggest that the millennial saints will be raised and glorified throughout the Millennium, each at the moment of his or her death. Such a procedure is barely imaginable and utterly incredible. More importantly, there is not a shred of biblical evidence to support it, and much to speak against it, since the DNT consistently teaches a single general resurrection at the Parousia of Christ.

Others say that the millennial saints will be raised near the end of the Millennium, just prior to the resurrection and judgment of the unrighteous (allegedly) described in 20:11–15. If those who hold this view are historic premillennarians, they are effectively positing *three* separate resurrections: one at the Parousia and two at the end of the Millennium. If they are Dispensationalists, they are effectively positing *four* resurrections: the three of Historic Premillennialism, plus an additional one at the Rapture. Here again we see how Premillennialism shatters the unity and simplicity of the

Consummation, even as it breeds unwarranted speculation and a needless multiplication of eschatological acts and events. Far better to follow the DNT in looking for a single general resurrection, and to let this premise shape our interpretation of Revelation 20.

Finally, some premillennarians concede that the saints who die during the Millennium will indeed be raised and "judged" (i.e., rewarded) at the same time as the unrighteous (i.e., at the end of the Millennium). They insist that Revelation 20:11–15 says nothing at all about these saints but focuses exclusively on the unbelieving wicked. We have seen, however, that the text itself readily accommodates the idea of a general resurrection and judgment, that other passages in the Revelation do the same, and that this is the teaching of the DNT. Why, then, should we look for anything else?

Conclusion

We have completed our study of the third underlying issue in the GETD: the meaning of the Millennium. Let us briefly summarize our findings.

In chapter 10 we looked at the Revelation as a whole. We saw that its intended audience (the Church), (prophetic) nature and purpose, underlying theme (the exaltation of Christ), literary genre (biblical apocalyptic), structure (progressive parallelism), proper method of interpretation (idealist), and ancillary purpose (that it should be the Grand Finale of All Scripture) all work hand in glove to lead us to an amillennial interpretation of this beautiful, powerful, complicated, and challenging book.

Here in chapter 11 we looked at Revelation 20 and saw that an amillennial interpretation is not only possible, but also far superior to the premillennial, not least of all because in it we can now hear the Lord speaking a vital message to his pilgrim people, the Church.

It tells us that the Era of Proclamation will be long (one thousand years), but no longer than is necessary for the triune God to fully complete his judicial and redemptive plans ($10 \times 10 \times 10 = 1,000$).

It tells us that during this time Satan will be bound: restrained from deceiving the nations in such a way as to keep God's elect from salvation or to foment the Last Battle against the true spiritual Church.

It tells us that during this time all who die in the faith will come to life in the First Resurrection. That is, they will enter Heaven as perfected spirits, there to reign in life with Christ over sin and death, and also to receive from him authority to participate in the Judgment at his return.

It tells us that at the end of this time Satan will be released from his restraints and allowed to gather the nations against the true spiritual Church for the Last Battle; but also that Christ, at his Parousia, will swiftly intervene to rescue his Bride and deal out fiery retribution to his enemies.

And finally, it tells us that on that Day, following a general resurrection of the dead, all who have ever lived will stand before the throne of Christ for final judgment. Those who believed in him for salvation will find their names written in the Lamb's Scroll of Life, and will be rewarded for deeds done in the power of Christ. Those who disbelieved and disobeyed will go away into eternal punishment in the Lake of Fire.

We conclude, then, that the Revelation as a whole, and chapter 20 in particular, both confirm the amillennial understanding of Salvation History. The Millennium is identical with the Kingdom of the Son and the Era of Gospel Proclamation and Probation. If we are born-again citizens of that Kingdom we are living in the Millennium now, eagerly awaiting the Parousia of the High King of Heaven, the Resurrection, the Judgment, and the advent of the World to Come.



But what of the Consummation? Yes, our study of the Kingdom has taught us to look for a two-staged reign of God, separated by a single Consummation at the return of Christ. So too has our study of OTKP and the Millennium. But what exactly does the DNT have to say on this crucial subject? Does it explicitly teach a unitary Consummation at the Parousia, or does it leave room for a future millennium? In short, does the DNT really support the traditional amillennial view of the Consummation?

Such questions cannot be ignored. Therefore, we must continue our journey. We must ask the Teacher to guide is to the topmost peak of biblical eschatology, where, at long last, we can behold the one true Blessed Hope of the Church: the Consummation of all things at the Parousia of Christ.

^{1.} See the article titled *Thrones in Revelation*, by Sam Storms:

http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/2009/10/07/thrones-in-revelation/.

- 2. Again, my remarks in this section are not meant to deny the very biblical doctrine of the eternal security of the true believer in Christ. Many NT texts clearly affirm this (John 6:35–40; 10:27–30; 17:11–15; Rom. 5:8–10; 8:29–39). It is undeniable, however, that other NT texts exhort the saints to perseverance and warn against apostasy (Matt. 7:24–25; Luke 8:15; John 15:1–6; Phil. 3:7–11; Heb. 6:1–8; 2 Peter 1:5–11). The biblically balanced position, therefore, is that until a Christian soul enters into Heaven and the Intermediate Sate, it is indeed possible for him to fall away, but also that the sovereign, covenant-keeping God will never allow this to happen. In short, true saints must and will persevere in the faith until that happy day when the Second Death no longer has any authority to threaten them. See Dean Davis, *In Search of the Golden Strand: Living Together Well with the Doctrines of Grace* (Redemption Press, 2021), chapter 7.
- 3. John Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Findlay, OH: Dunham Publishing, 1959), 329.
- 4. John Walvoord, The Millennial Kingdom (Findlay, OH: Dunham Publishing, 1959), 294.
- 5 MSB, s.v. Revelation 20, 2741.
- <u>6</u>. George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1972), 272.
- Z. SCB, 694–703.

PART V UNDERSTANDING THE CONSUMMATION

CHAPTER 12

THE PURPOSE, STRUCTURE, AND UNITY OF THE CONSUMMATION

ELCOME to Part V of our study, the part in which we listen to the Teacher on the fourth and final underlying issue in the GETD: the Consummation.

The journey ahead will be as follows:

Here in chapter 12 we'll examine the DNT on the purpose, structure, and unity of the Consummation.

In chapter 13 we'll take a close look at several key NT texts dealing directly with the Consummation. My goal there—in addition to addressing premillennial interpretations—is to show that in each case the text teaches, assumes, or supports the traditional amillennial view of the Consummation.

Finally, in chapter 14 I will offer a biblically based scenario of the Consummation, making a special effort to highlight the many ways in which Amillennialism gives us a Blessed Hope that is blessed indeed.

The Purpose of the Consummation

The Bible speaks to us about "the end" (Matt. 24:14; 1 Peter 4:7). Theologians refer to this great eschatological event as the Consummation. What exactly does this term mean? I would define it as follows: The Consummation is the complex of judicial and redemptive acts by which the triune God—for the fullest possible manifestation of his glory, and for the eternal welfare and worship of his saints—will bring Salvation History to a close, thereby fulfilling his eternal purpose for himself, his people, and his world.

With this broad definition serving as our guide, let us turn to the Scriptures themselves and examine some of the main purposes and characteristics of the Consummation.

First, at the Consummation God will fulfill his original plan for the universe, life, and man. Cosmic history was never meant to be open-ended. In the beginning, God commanded the family of man to subdue and fill the

earth; after they had done so, he intended to glorify his creation and fill it with his presence as never before (Gen. 1:28; Isa. 4:5; Hab. 2:14; Rom. 8:18; Rev. 21:11, 23). The fall of man and the onset of Salvation History did not alter this intention. God's original purpose for the cosmos could not be thwarted. There must be an end to Salvation History so that the age of eternal glory may begin. But first the Era of Proclamation must run its course. First the Church must take the Gospel to the ends of the earth so that all can hear, consider, believe, obey, and receive eternal life; so that God can gather his elect out of every tribe, tongue, people, and nation (Rev. 5:6). Then the end will come (Matt. 24:14). Thus, by hastening to fulfill the Great Commission, the Church hastens the coming of the Day of LORD, the advent of his eternal glory, and the fulfillment of his original purpose for the world (Ps. 72:19; Isa. 4:5; 40:3–5; Ezek. 43:1–5; Hab. 2:14; Matt. 28:18–20; 2 Peter 3:12).

Secondly, at the Consummation God purposes to vindicate the truth about God, Christ, and the Gospel. Currently he is testing the nations. Through the Church's proclamation of the Gospel he challenges all who hear to seek and find the one true worldview and the one true God. At the Consummation the test will end and the truth will be vindicated. When Christ appears in glory all unbelief, idolatry, deception, skepticism, arrogance, mockery, persecution, and every other high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God will wither away before the blazing light of the Truth himself (Rev. 1:7). In that Day, all who ever lived will know and confess that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ—is the one true living God (Rom. 3:4; Phil. 2:11).

Thirdly, at the Consummation God purposes a final administration of justice. When mankind fell in Adam a great inversion occurred, an inversion that has scandalized the conscience of the godly ever since. Day after day justice is turned back and righteousness stands far off; truth has fallen in the streets, and uprightness cannot enter in (Isa. 59:14). The godly are hungry, mournful, hated, ostracized, insulted, spurned, and sometimes even murdered, while the worldly are often fat, happy, and lauded by all men (Luke 6:20–26). Multitudes call evil good and good evil (Isa. 5:20). While the God of justice seems to sleep, the wicked and the ruthless march on, crushing the innocent and prospering in their own evil ways (Ps. 73; Isa. 5:20).

But at the Consummation the High Judge of Heaven will invert the inversion. Placing the cosmos itself in a perfectly just balance, he will scatter

the proud in the imagination of their hearts, bring down rulers from their thrones, and send away the rich empty-handed. Then he will exalt the humble, fill them with good things, and cause them to inherit the earth forever (1 Sam. 2; Matt. 5:3–12; Luke 1:46–55). In that Day the saints will exult: "Yes, Lord God—the mighty ruler over all—your judgments are righteous and true!" (Rev. 16:7).

Finally, at the Consummation God purposes a climactic administration of the redemption that is in Christ. At his Parousia the High King of Heaven will complete, cap, and crown all that he *accomplished* in the days of his humiliation, and all that he *applied* during the years of his heavenly reign. In particular, he will raise, transform, glorify, and eternally reward his beloved Bride, even as he delivers the creation itself from its bondage to futility, and lifts it up into the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Rom. 8:18–25; 2 Peter 3:1–13). The rescue and restoration of his people will be complete. Of the redemption of the universe, life, and man, it will be said, "It is done!" (Rev. 21:6).

All these things are part and parcel of God's purpose in the Consummation. But within these purposes there are higher purposes still.

The Glory of God

The Bible teaches that one of God's highest purposes in the Consummation is a full, final, visible, and universal manifestation of his glory: that is, of his divine nature and attributes. This is especially clear from Romans 9:19–24, a passage in which we find the apostle Paul defending the sovereignty of God in salvation.

Notably, he opens his discussion by citing the Exodus event, at which time God chose to judicially harden Pharaoh's heart, but to shower his mercy and grace on the family of Israel. Pressing home his point, Paul concludes by saying: "So then: He has mercy on whom he wills to have mercy, and whom he wills to harden, he hardens" (Rom. 9:17–18).

But the apostle is not done. Anticipating objections that he had doubtless encountered many times during his ministry, he continues:

You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who has ever withstood his will?" But on the contrary, who are you, O man, to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who

formed it, "Why have you made me like this?" Hasn't the potter a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? What if God, desiring to display his wrath and make his power known, endured with great patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And what if he did so in order to make known the riches of his glory on vessels of mercy that he had prepared beforehand for glory—including us, whom he also called, not only from among the Jews, but also from among the Gentiles?

Here we see that Paul views the Exodus as a *type*: a picture of eternal redemption in Christ. Accordingly, it is also a picture of the Consummation, at which time redemption will be made complete. For just as Moses led his willing followers out of plague-stricken Egypt, through the Red Sea, and safely to its far shore, so too Christ, at the end of the age, will lead his believing people out of the plague-stricken Domain of Darkness, through the Red Sea of the Judgment, and safely to the far shore of the World to Come.

But to what great purpose was the Exodus? And to what great purpose is its antitype: redemption through faith in Christ and final redemption at his return? In part we discover our answer in the Song of Moses, sung by Moses himself and all the sons of Israel. Standing on the other side of the Red Sea, they gratefully praised God for his show of wrath, justice, judgment, and power toward his enemies, but more especially for his show of mercy, grace, and covenant love toward his chosen people (Ex. 15:1–21). In short, the final fruit of the Exodus was the worship of the sovereign LORD God of Israel.

Paul has seen this and now completes the picture. He tells us that God's great purpose in redemption is the display of his glory with a view to the saints' eternal worship of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And yes, having called a believing people out of the Domain of Darkness into the spiritual Kingdom of his beloved Son, God has already ignited this worship; indeed, the whole world can hear the song of the saints as they make their pilgrim way through the wilderness of this present evil age to the Promised Land.

But there is more. Much more. For at the Consummation, when faith has been turned to sight, God will so thoroughly show forth his glory through the prism of his final judicial and redemptive acts that the flickering flame of the saints' worship will explode into a veritable furnace of praise and adoration, all because of the mercy, grace, and love shown to them in Christ Jesus their Lord

(Eph. 1:6, 12, 14). As it is written, Christ will come again so that there may be glory to God in the Church and in Christ Jesus, throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen (Eph. 3:20–21; Rev. 5:14; 15:1–4).

The Glory of Christ

It is written that the Father loves the Son and desires all men to honor the Son, even as they honor the Father (John 5:23). Accordingly, it is also written that the Father has granted many precious prerogatives to his Son, so that he might have the preeminence in all things. The deity of Christ plus the prerogatives of Christ equals the glory of Christ.

Though the world is largely blind to this glory, all who have trusted in the Son of God are learning to see it. They see, for example, that in the beginning he was with God (the Father) and was God (the Son); that all things were created through him (John 1:1–5; Heb. 1:1–2) and for him (Col. 1:15); that he holds all things together (Col. 1:17); that he guides all things to their appointed destinies (Matt. 28:18; Rev. 5:1–5); and that in the divine treasure chest that is Jesus Christ beloved sinners will find all they could ever need or desire: forgiveness, righteousness, reconciliation, adoption, peace, life, wholeness, purpose, power, wisdom, and eternal joy (Col. 1:15–20). Christ has become all things to all who believe so that all might honor the Son, even as they honor the Father (1 Cor. 1:30–31). The purpose of God in Salvation History is the glory of Christ.

It should hardly surprise us, then, that God has structured the Consummation with a view to the glory of Christ. But how exactly has he done so? The DNT answers very fulsomely: He has done so by granting at least four more special prerogatives to his beloved Son.

First, he has ordained that Christ himself should execute *all* the eschatological acts constituting the Consummation of all things. We will discuss them in a moment.

Secondly, he has ordained that Christ should execute all these acts *all at once*. God has no wish to effect the Consummation piecemeal. He will not divide it into stages or spread it out over decades, centuries, or millennia. No, he means to cluster the several elements of the Consummation around a single radiant center: the Person of his Son at his coming. The returning Lord of glory will himself execute all the final eschatological acts "thoroughly and quickly," thereby receiving greater glory in the sight of man, and giving greater glory to

his God and Father (Rom. 9:28; Phil. 2:9-11).

Thirdly, God has ordained that Christ should effect the Consummation *visibly*. Hitherto the Father has veiled the glory of his Son. Whether in the few days of his flesh, or in the many days since Pentecost, the glory of Christ may indeed be seen, but only through the window of God's Word, and through the Church's testimony as to the character, teaching, and works of the Lord. This veiling is purposeful. It facilitates a divine "trial by light." It makes it possible for God to test mankind's love of God, truth, and righteousness through the preaching of the Gospel (John 3:16–20). But when the days of divine testing are over, the veil will be removed. Christ will descend from Heaven bodily, in power and great glory. Every eye will see him, just as he is (1 John 3:2; Rev. 1:7). The glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all flesh will see it together (Isa. 40:5; 1 Tim. 6:15; 2 Tim. 1:10; 4:1–8; Titus 2:13; 1 Peter 1:7, 13; 4:13).

Finally, God has ordained that Christ should effect the Consummation *universally*. When the Lord Jesus comes again, he will lay his divine hand—both in final judgment and final redemption—upon *all* men, *all* angels, and *all* creation: the heavens, the earth, the seas, and all that is—or ever was—in them (Rom. 8:18–24; 2 Cor. 5:10; Phil. 3:21; Col. 1:20; Rev. 20:13). The Father has ordained that his Son should be the destroyer of the old universe and the recreator of the new (1 Peter 4:7; Rev. 21:5).

And what is the upshot of all this? What does it mean that Christ will execute all of God's eschatological acts, all at once, in the sight of all men and all angels, with an eternal impact upon all creation? Simply this: All sentient beings—whether angels or demons, saints or sinners—will indeed honor the Son just as they honor (or should honor) the Father. Willingly or not—whether in glad adoration or abject surrender—every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:11). At the Consummation God's eternal design for the maximum possible glory of his Son will be fully fulfilled.

The Structure of the Consummation

The Consummation is structured according to its purpose: the glory of Christ. In order to see this still more clearly, let us review the *elements* of the Consummation once again.

The Elements of the Consummation

First, there is *the Last Battle*, the final historical clash between God and Satan, Christ and the Antichrist, the Church and the World. Technically this is not a part of the Consummation, since, unlike the other elements, Christ does not bring it to pass at his Parousia, but rather through the ordinary exercise of his all-controlling providence. Nevertheless, I include it here because the Bible repeatedly cites this as the single most important sign of the imminence of Christ's appearing. It is a unique historical event that, in effect, triggers the Consummation proper. We will discuss this further in chapter 14.

Secondly, there is *the Parousia*: the coming again of the Lord Jesus Christ in power and glory to the skies above the earth. This the living heart of the Consummation, since here God the Father brings onto the stage of cosmic history the Alpha and the Omega, the Creator and the Consummator, the One whom he delights to honor by making him the Agent of all the final eschatological acts and events (Est. 6:6; Rev. 1:8; 21:6).

Thirdly, there is *the Resurrection of the Dead*. This is a single (or general) resurrection of the dead bodies of all human beings who have ever lived and died. Closely associated with this event is the instantaneous glorification of the living saints: that privileged group of believers who will never taste death but live to see the glorified Christ coming with the clouds of Heaven, and their own bodies conformed to his in "the twinkling of an eye" (Mark 14:62; 1 Cor. 15:51–57; Phil. 3:21; 1 Thess. 4:15–18; 1 John 3:2). Also associated with the Resurrection is the Catching Up of *all resurrected* (or transformed) saints and sinners into the skies above the earth, where they will appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Fourthly, there is *the Judgment*. As opposed to the many local and providential judgments of world history, this judgment is supernatural in character and universal in scope, falling upon the entire cosmos. For the realm of men and angels, it consists essentially of a final separation through which Christ welcomes the saints and holy angels into the World to Come, but sends disobedient sinners and evil angels (demons) to eternal punishment in Gehenna, also referred to as the Lake of Fire. For the realm of nature, it consists of the destruction of the present heavens and earth by fire (2 Peter 3:1–7).

Fifthly, there is *the Regeneration*, also referred to as *the Restoration of All Things* (Matt. 19:28; Acts 3:21). Negatively, this involves the lifting of the curse that fell upon nature because of Adam's sin in Eden. Positively, it involves

a fresh infusion of divine life into the building blocks of nature, and, as a consequence of this, a complete reordering of the natural world. Just as God created the original heavens and earth for the family of the first Adam, so in the Regeneration will he create new heavens and a new earth for the Bride and Family of the Last. And most fittingly, it is *through* the Last that he will do it!

Finally, there is *the Handing Over of the Kingdom*. As a reward for accomplishing the redemption of God's people through his life, death, and resurrection, the Father gave his Son all authority in Heaven and on earth for the primary purpose of spearheading the advance of the Kingdom in the earth (Ps. 2). When the last saint has been gathered in, the High King will have fulfilled his commission. Accordingly, at that time he will hand over the fruits of his heavenly reign—his glorified Bride and the glorified world in which she is to live—to the One who handed them over to him. Then, in an ultimate transfer of divine authority, he will submit himself afresh to his Father, so that he (the Father) may be all in all in the eternal World to Come (1 Cor. 15:24–28). We may justly think of this ineffable event as the consummation of the Consummation.

Here, then, are the six central elements of the Consummation, along with some of their key components. In a moment, we will further examine the nature and unity of each one. But first, let us turn our attention to the structure by which they are held together.

The Structure of the Consummation

We have seen that one of God's highest purposes in the Consummation is the glory of his Son. We have also seen that in large part God will accomplish this purpose by making the Consummation a profoundly *Christ-centered* event. Christ-centeredness is the essence of the structure of the Consummation. In order to underscore this point, let us consider afresh the three main ways in which this Christ-centeredness will appear.

First, God has centered the Consummation around Christ *dynamically*. That is, he has decreed that Christ, in an exercise of his own omnipotence, will be the divine Agent who executes each element of the Consummation (John 5:20; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16).

Secondly, God has centered the Consummation around Christ *temporally*. The Parousia is, as it were, the first domino to fall, after which all the rest fall in rapid succession. This too fulfills the Father's purpose and pleasure. By

concentrating all the great eschatological acts and events around the Parousia, the glory of the One who accomplishes them will shine all the brighter. Does Premillennialism needlessly multiply eschatological acts and events? Does it spread them out over various stretches of time? To the extent that it does, it denies, mars, and beclouds the temporal Christ-centeredness of the Consummation and the glory of Christ.

Finally, God has centered the Consummation around Christ *spatially*. Modern cosmological views notwithstanding, the Bible clearly teaches that the Earth is the center of the universe. There is good reason for this: The earth is the apple of God's eye, the home of his most cherished creation, the stage upon which the great drama of Salvation History is played out, and his own future dwelling place. And if the earth lies at the center of God's interest, affection, purposes, and plans, it only stands to reason that it should lie at the center of his cosmos as well.

But at the Consummation God will effect a dramatic cosmological change. In that Day Christ will not only destroy the earth, but also the sun, moon, planets, and stars—all of which formerly served as luminaries for the earth's inhabitants. And then where will the center be? The answer is as clear as it is breathtaking: Christ himself will be the center, seated upon his throne amidst a vast sea of men and angels, all gathered before him for the Judgment. In other words, at the Consummation, Jesus Christ—the final Judge and Redeemer—will become the physical center of the universe, just as even now he is the spiritual center of the Father's heart, purpose, and plans. It is difficult indeed to imagine how God could more dramatically accomplish the glorification of his Son.¹

The Unity of the Consummation

The Consummation displays a multifaceted unity that contributes powerfully to the glory of Christ. On the one hand, the various elements are marked by unity, since there is only one of each. On the other hand, all the elements are marked by unity, since all are dynamically, temporally, and spatially centered on Christ at his Second Coming.

Each of the Elements

To understand this better, let us begin by focusing our attention on the four cardinal elements of the Consummation, and by observing how richly the

DNT affirms the unity of each one, thereby refuting all premillennial scenarios.

1. The One Second Coming

This is the heart of the Consummation: the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The DNT usually refers to it as the Coming (*parousia*) of Christ, but also as the Revelation (*apocalypsis*) and the Appearing (*epiphaneia*) of Christ. These Greek words carry different shades of meaning, but all three describe the same momentous eschatological event.² Three outstanding NT passages confirm this important assertion.

First, we have Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians, in which he encourages persecuted believers to wait for justice and relief on the Day when Christ is *revealed* (*apocalupto*) from Heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels (2 Thess. 1:7). Shortly thereafter, he fleshes out his thought by reminding them that when Christ returns he will destroy the Man of Lawlessness (i.e., the Antichrist) "by the appearance (*epiphaneia*) of his coming (*parousia*)" (2 Thess. 2:8). Thus, the apostle uses all three words to describe the same eschatological event.

Then we have the two letters of the apostle Peter, in which he directs believers' hopes to the Coming of Christ (2 Peter 3:4), the Revelation of Christ (1 Peter 1:7, 13; 4:13), and the Appearing of Christ (1 Peter 5:4). We look in vain for him to make any technical distinction between these three terms.

Finally, we have John's second epistle, in which he urges believers to abide in Christ so that when he appears (*phanerao*) they might have confidence at his coming (*parousia*) (1 John 2:28).

We find, then, that the apostles use all three words more or less interchangeably to describe the one Second Coming of Christ.

We also observe the unity of the Second Coming in the copious NT use of the definite article before each of the words used to describe it. Thrice in his Olivet Discourse our Lord himself speaks of "the coming of the Son of Man" (Matt. 24:27, 37, 39). In his letters to the Thessalonians Paul speaks repeatedly about the coming of Christ (1 Thess. 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:1). James urges believers to be patient, since "the coming of the Lord is at hand" (James 5:7–8). The apostles also refer to Christ's return as "his coming," clearly assuming that there is just one of them (1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thess. 2:19; 2 Thess. 2:8; 1 John 2:28). As for the other Greek words, the pattern is identical. Over

and again the apostles speak of *the* revelation (*apokalupsis*) of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:7; 2 Thess. 1:7; 1 Peter 1:7, 13; 4:13), and of *the* (or *his*) appearing (*epiphaneia*) (2 Thess. 2:8; 1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 1:10; 4:1, 8; Titus 2:13). The definite article turns these three Greek words into an eschatological trinity: They are three, yet they are also one, since all three speak of the one Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, albeit from slightly different angles.

In this connection we must pause to consider Hebrews 9:27–28, an especially powerful text dealing with the Parousia. It reads:

And just as it is appointed for men to die once and then face judgment, so too Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to bring full salvation to those who eagerly wait for him.

The presuppositions of the writer are evident: Just as it was appointed for Christ to die *once* in order to bear the sins of many, so too it is appointed for him to appear *once more* to consummate the salvation of all who await his return. Note also that our text says Christ will appear *a* second time. As the indefinite article indicates, the Lord's appearing is the second of two, and two only. The writer to the Hebrews is looking for *one* appearing of Christ and *one* Consummation of all things.

I would invite my premillennarian brothers to ponder these texts carefully. In every case the reference is to a single, visible, bodily return of Christ in glory. In so speaking the writers were only passing along what the Lord himself had taught them: "For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes all the way to the west, so *the* coming of the Son of Man will be" (Matt. 24:27). Note also that their expectation was confirmed by the two angels who spoke to the Lord's disciples at the time of his ascension: "You men of Galilee, why are you standing here, staring up into the sky? This same Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will return just as you saw him depart" (Acts 1:11).

Yes, the Blessed Hope of the apostles was a single, visible, bodily return of Christ in glory. Should it not be ours as well?

2. The One Resurrection

Immediately following the Lord's Parousia comes the Resurrection. Here again, Scripture affirms that there is only one of them. On this score, John 5:28–29 is especially compelling:

Don't be amazed at this; for an hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth: those who did what is good to a resurrection of life; and those who practiced what is evil to a resurrection of condemnation.

Since it occurs in a single "hour" (i.e., over a very brief span of time), there is but *one* such resurrection. When it occurs, *all* who are in the tombs will hear the voice of Christ. It is one *general* resurrection. And when it occurs, it will lead immediately to reward or retribution: It is one general resurrection leading to one general judgment. When he comes again at the end of the age the Lord himself will accomplish a single, brief, general resurrection leading to a single last general judgment.

Other NT texts confirm this view. Speaking before the Roman governor Felix, the apostle Paul declared that he had a hope in God which his Jewish opponents also cherished; namely, "that there will indeed be *a* resurrection, both of the righteous and the unrighteous" (Acts 24:15). Likewise, we have seen that Revelation 20:11–15 anticipates a single general resurrection of the saved and the unsaved, leading to a single judgment.

In the OT the unity of the Resurrection is especially clear from Daniel 12:2 (NIV): "Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt." The DNT explains: The "multitudes" are all people of all times and places, of whom there are a great many. In one general resurrection all will rise to one general judgment, at which time all will be sent to one of two possible destinations. Knowing all this, all must prepare themselves now.

As in the case of the Parousia, so in the case of the Resurrection: The definite article is prominent and instructive. Christ, the apostles, and the Jews of Jesus's day all spoke of *the* Resurrection, assuming that there is only one of them, set to occur at the end of the present evil age (Matt. 22:28–32; Luke 14:14; John 11:24–25; Acts 17:18, 32; 24:21; 1 Cor. 15:21, 42; Phil. 3:11; 2 Tim. 2:18). True, a close study of these texts reveals that in most cases the author's focus is on the resurrection of the believing righteous. However, that does not entail, or even imply, as some premillennarians assert, that the resurrection of the unrighteous occurs one thousand years later. The texts we have already looked at preclude that view. Rather, it simply means that Christ and his apostles used the phrase "the resurrection" as shorthand for "the resurrection of all who are

righteous by faith in the Righteous One" (Acts 3:14, 7:52, 22:14; Rom. 5:15-21). They used it to set before believers the one Blessed Hope toward which they should faithfully strive day and night (Acts 26:6–8; Phil. 3:11).

3. The One Judgment

Just as there is a single general resurrection, so too there is a single general judgment (John 5:28–29). It includes not only all human beings, but also all the angels and the entire physical creation. It is cosmic in scope because it is consummate in purpose.

Once again we find that the use of the definite article is prominent and significant. Our Lord, for example, often warned of "the judgment" (Matt. 5:21–22; 12:41–42). Drawing upon OT prophecies of the Day of the Lord, he also spoke of "the Day of Judgment" (Matt. 10:15; 11:22, 24; 12:36). Peter and John did the same (2 Peter 2:9; 3:7; 1 John 4:17). Paul, preaching to the Athenian philosophers, declared that God "has fixed a day on which he intends to judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, giving proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:31). Later, addressing the Roman governor Felix, he discoursed about "the judgment to come" (Acts 24:25). In his letter to the Roman Christians, Paul wrote of "the day when God judges the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel" (Rom. 2:16). Meanwhile, Jude, in a manner reminiscent of the OT prophets, thundered about "the judgment of the Great Day" (Jude v. 6; cf. Joel 2:31; Mal. 4:5). And in the Revelation John speaks of "the great day of God, the mighty ruler over all" (Rev. 16:14). In all these varied expressions—and especially in the use of the definite article preceding them—we see the Christ-centered unity of the Judgment shining forth with clarity and power.

The DNT gives us many passages that deal at length with the Judgment. These include Matthew 25:31–46, Romans 2:3–16, 2 Thessalonians 1:3–12, and 2 Peter 3:1–13. I would encourage you to study them. When you do, please keep three questions in mind: (1) Is the author/speaker looking for a single judgment? (2) Is he looking for a single universal judgment? (3) Is he looking for a single universal judgment accomplished by Christ at his coming? I trust that this exercise will swiftly rule out all premillennial scenarios, since Premillennialism always divides the one Judgment into several lesser judgments, thereby separating what both the Lord and the Scriptures have

joined together once and for all (Matt. 19:6).

4. The One Cosmic Regeneration

Following the one judgment—which includes the destruction of the present heavens and earth by fire (2 Peter 3; Rev. 20:11)—there is a single Regeneration (or Restoration) of All Things. Here Christ himself lifts the curse that God formerly laid upon the natural world, and then creates new heavens and a new earth, the eternal home of the Bride of Christ and the family of God.

The expression "the Regeneration" occurs only once in the DNT, in Matthew 19:28. The text reads, "So Jesus said to them, 'I tell you the truth: In the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." These cryptic words are amenable to two related interpretations.

On the one hand, the Lord may have had in view the Judgment (Matt. 25:31–46). If so, he means that immediately following the resurrection/transformation of the Israel of God (i.e., the Church, Gal. 6:16), his twelve faithful apostles will join with him in awarding to the saints their unique positions, privileges, and responsibilities in the completed Kingdom. This interpretation views the Regeneration as a discrete eschatological *event* associated with the Resurrection and the Judgment.

On the other hand, the Lord may have had in mind the *eternal state* that the discreet event will introduce. On this view, he would be saying that in the World to Come—where the curse has been lifted and all things are made new—the twelve faithful apostles will become, as it were, the patriarchs of the Israel of God, enjoying a privileged role in the administration of the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ (Rev. 11:15). This view is in harmony with the promise of Revelation 3:21, which looks, not to a millennial stage of the Kingdom, but to the eternal World to Come. It also aligns with Revelation 21:14, a text that may likewise hint at the special prerogatives of the twelve apostles in the completed Kingdom.

Which interpretation is best? While I lean toward the second, both meanings may be in view.

Though the term itself occurs only once in the DNT, the *idea* of a single, sudden, cosmic regeneration appears repeatedly. Preaching to his Jewish brethren, Peter urges them to trust in Christ, whom "heaven must receive . . .

until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets" (Acts 3:21 NIV). More literally translated, this text reads "the times of (the) restoration of all things." However, in view of Peter's teaching in 2 Peter 3:1–13, it is clear that the NIV gives the true sense: At the Parousia, Christ will restore each thing (the sleeping saints, the living saints, the realm of nature) in its proper sequence and at its proper time. The one Restoration of All Things will be accomplished at the one time of Christ's Parousia.

As for Paul, he tells us that at the Resurrection the whole creation will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Rom. 8:18–25). In other words, the one Resurrection leads immediately to the one cosmic Regeneration. In Philippians 3:20–21 he says much the same thing: When Christ returns from Heaven, he will exercise his mighty power to raise the dead. But at that time he will also use it "to subject *all* things to himself." The same idea is present in 1 Corinthians 15, where Paul says that at the Parousia Christ will place *all* his enemies beneath his feet. And this includes death itself, which is the supreme emblem of the one curse that had previously fallen upon all things (1 Cor. 15:25–27).

Finally, and quite dramatically, we have the testimony of Hebrews 12:25–29. Addressing wavering Christians who were tempted to depart from the faith, the writer solemnly admonishes them as follows:

See to it that you do not reject him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they rejected him who warned them on earth, how much less will we escape if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? At that time his voice shook the earth; but now he has forewarned us all, saying, "Yet once more will I shake, not only the earth, but heaven as well." Now this expression—"yet once more"—indicates the complete removal of the things that are shaken (that is, of created things), so that only the things which cannot be shaken will remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that can never be shaken, let us have grace, through which we may offer to God an acceptable service of worship, with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.

Here the unity of the Regeneration shines forth like the sun in its strength. Following Haggai (Hag. 2:6–7), the writer affirms that God will shake the

earth *once* more, and with it the heavens as well. The shaking is obviously universal in extent. But in case there are any doubts, he explains further: This shaking will involve the removal of *all* that can be shaken. As verse 29 indicates, he has in mind the destruction of the present cosmos by fire, a destruction that Peter fulsomely describes in his second epistle (2 Peter 3:10–12). However, the cosmic transformation will have a creative side as well, for it will also involve the appearance of "things that cannot be shaken." In other words, at Christ's return God will create new heavens and a new earth: an unshakable Kingdom that will never again be cursed or destroyed (2 Peter 3:13; Rev. 21:1). Thus, the writer to the Hebrews clearly anticipates a single cosmic Restoration of all (redeemed) things, just as the OT prophets had promised.

Premillennarians teach that at his Parousia Christ will *partially* restore all things, and then, at the end of the Millennium, *fully* destroy and *finally* restore all things. However, the NT texts we have just considered do not agree. Rather, with one voice they look for a single cosmic Restoration at the one Parousia of Christ. And this is the teaching of the Revelation as well (Rev. 2–3, 7, 14, 20–21).

Summing up, we have seen that the DNT clearly and repeatedly teaches the unity of each element of the Consummation. There is one Second Coming of Christ, one general Resurrection, one general Judgment, and one universal Restoration. And if this is true, then surely the various premillennial scenarios are not.

All of the Elements

In addition to the unity of each element of the Consummation we also have the unity of the Consummation as a whole. We may think of it as a wheel whose spokes converge in a central hub: Its several elements are temporally, spatially, and dynamically centered on the Parousia of the glorified Lord Jesus Christ. The following table is designed to illustrate this unity. Let us take a few moments to consider some of the important truths it conveys.

New Testament Texts: The Christ-Centered Unity of the Consummation										
NT Texts: Consummation	Return			Resurrection			Judgment MEN & COSMIC ANGELS DESTRUCTION		COSMIC RESTOR- ATION	DELIVERY OF THE KINGDOM
Mt. 13:37-43	1			(4)	(4)	1	4	1	(4)	(4)
Mt. 24-25 Mark 13, LK. 21	1			(4)	(1)	1	1	1	(1)	(4)
Luke 17:22-36	(4)					(4)	1	1		
John 5:21-9	(4)			1			✓			
Acts 3:19-24	1								1	
Rom. 2:1-16		1					\			
Rom. 8:18-25			1	1	(4)	1			1	
1 Cor. 15:20-8 50-58	1		 	1	1		\	1	(1)	1
2 Cor. 5:1-10	(4)			1	(1)		✓		1	
Phil. 3:20-21	1			1	1				1	
1 Thess. 4:13- 5:11	1			1	1	1	7			
2 Thess. 1:3-12	1	1				1	✓		(4)	
2 Thess. 2:1-12	1		1			1	1			
1 Pet. 4:7-19		1					1	1		
2 Pet. 3:3-13	1					i	1	1	1	

Our table lists the fifteen most important texts in the DNT dealing with the Consummation. A simple check in the row beside a text indicates that it *explicitly* mentions the element of the Consummation featured in that column. A check enclosed in parentheses indicates that the text *strongly* implies the presence of the element so featured. For example, John 5:25–29 explicitly states that Christ himself will accomplish the Resurrection and the Judgment. It strongly implies that he will do so at his Parousia; that is, on what he later refers to as "the Last Day" (John 6:39, 40, 44, 54; 12:48).

Note also from the headings above the columns that I have broken down the Consummation into five basic elements: The Return, the Resurrection, the

Judgment, the Cosmic Restoration, and the Handing Over of the Kingdom. In the case of the Resurrection there are three sub-elements: the Resurrection of the Dead, the Transformation of the Living, and the Catching Up of those so raised (or transformed) to the throne of Christ. In the case of the Judgment there are two sub-elements: the Judgment of men and angels before the throne of Christ, and the Destruction of the present heavens and earth by fire (Cosmic Destruction). Please recall from our earlier discussion that the Coming, the Revelation, and the Appearing of Christ are *not* different elements or phases of his return. Rather, they are simply different terms used to describe the one Second Coming from slightly different angles.

Let us now consider three ways in which this table highlights the unity of the Christ-centered Consummation.

First, we notice that except for Romans 8:18–25 *all* the texts refer to the Second Coming of Christ: in a few cases implicitly, but in most cases explicitly. This immediately creates a strong presumption that all the other elements of the Consummation occur at the Second Coming, and that Christ is the Agent who will accomplish them. In other words, the table exalts Christ as the dynamic center of the Consummation, and his Parousia as its spatial and temporal center.

Secondly, our table guides us to some *outstandingly* important eschatological texts. These explicitly refer to all or most of the elements of the Consummation, and therefore depict the Consummation as a single event set to occur at the Parousia of Christ.

For example, the table reveals that the Lord's Parable of the Wheat and Tares is one of the premier eschatological passages in the DNT. Though short and a bit cryptic, it nevertheless refers or alludes to every element of the Consummation (Matt. 13:24–30, 36–43). So too does the much longer Olivet Discourse, found in all three of the synoptic Gospels (Matt. 24–25; Mark 13; Luke 21). Observe also that 1 Corinthians 15, commonly thought to teach more or less exclusively on the Resurrection, actually gives us a startlingly comprehensive picture of the entire Consummation. Again, these three texts are of special importance since they display the Consummation as a single mega-event centered on Christ at his Coming.

Along these lines we must not fail to mention the three long eschatological texts found in 1 and 2 Thessalonians. While it is true that none of them gives us the Consummation as a whole, it is equally true that *between them all* we

have what is arguably the single most comprehensive picture of the Consummation to be found in the DNT. If, then, a good Berean wanted swiftly to get a feel for the Pauline eschatology, he could do no better than to read these three texts and then follow up with a close study of 1 Corinthians 15. In so doing he would arrive swiftly and inescapably at the conclusion that the great apostle looked for a single consummation set to occur at the one Parousia of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thirdly, our table enables us to see that all the NT authors, in all their eschatological statements, did indeed presuppose a single unified Consummation. To understand this point, please take a moment to scan the table once again. With the possible exception of 1 Corinthians 15, you will see that there is not a single text that *explicitly* shows Christ administering all the elements of the Consummation at his Parousia. Nevertheless, the table forces us to conclude that there is—and must be—a single consummation. Why? *Because shared references to one or more elements of the Consummation force us to fill in all the blanks in any given row, with the result that we wind up filling in the whole table!*

Since that's a mouthful, let's consider some examples that will clarify my meaning.

In John 5:25–29 the Lord speaks of his Coming, the Resurrection, and the Judgment. In 1 Corinthians 15 the apostle Paul does the same, but also associates those elements of the Consummation with cosmic destruction, cosmic restoration, and the handing over of the Kingdom. Additionally, a glance at the rows for the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (Matt. 13:37–43), the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24–25), and 1 Thessalonians 4 enables us to see that the Catching Up of saints (and sinners) at the Lord's Parousia is also associated with these events. So now we can place checks in every field of the row for John 5:21–29. And as a result of that, we now can know exactly what the Lord had in mind when he spoke as he did.

Again, consider Romans 8:18–25. Here Paul associates the glorification of nature with the resurrection (and transformation) of the saints. However, he says nothing about who will accomplish these things, when they will happen, and what else will occur when they do. Such a text, standing alone, could therefore lead to eschatological confusion. But our table, drawing richly upon the DNT, averts such confusion by again requiring us to put checks in *all* the empty fields. For consider: The table tells us that in 1 Corinthians 15 Paul

associates many other elements of the Consummation with the Resurrection. In particular, he tells us that Christ himself will raise the dead at his Parousia, and that when he does, he will also glorify the living saints, judge the world in righteousness, root all evil out of his creation, and deliver up the completed Kingdom to God the Father. So again: 1 Corinthians 15 enables us to fill in all the empty fields in the row for Romans 8. It enables us to see that when Paul wrote Romans 8, he too was presupposing *a single Christ-centered Consummation* set to occur at the Lord's Second Coming.

Finally, note how Peter's eschatology, so fulsomely set out in 1 Peter 4:7–19 and 2 Peter 3:1–13, enables us to see what was in his mind when he preached the sermon recorded in Acts 3:19–24. In that sermon he only associated the Lord's return with cosmic restoration; but in his letters he clearly associates it with a good deal besides.

The message of our table is clear: These fifteen texts are *parallel*. All of them—and all of the writers who wrote them—have in mind the same Momentous Event. How do we know this? In part we know it because none of the writers ever breathed a single word about multiple comings, resurrections, judgments, etc. But beyond that, we also know it from the way in which their statements overlap. We know it because shared references to one or more elements of the Consummation positively force us to place a check in every field of our table. We know it because the DNT forces us to conclude that Christ and the apostles did indeed presuppose a single Christ-centered consummation at the Second Coming of the High King of Heaven.

Conclusion

Our theme in this chapter has been the purpose, structure, and unity of the Consummation. Let us review our findings.

We began by defining the Consummation as the goal or wrap-up of Salvation History: the cosmic hinge upon which the universe swings out of the present evil age and into the World to Come.

Next, we explored the manifold purposes of the Consummation, suggesting that in this Momentous Event God means to: (1) fulfill his original plan for the universe, life, and man (2) vindicate the truth of God, Christ, and the Gospel, (3) secure a perfect administration of justice through the final judgment of all men and all (evil) angels, (4) complete the redemption of all who are in Christ, (5) fully manifest his glory with a view to the eternal

worship of the saints, and (6) bestow the maximum possible glory upon his beloved Son.

Concerning the glorification of his Son, we saw that God means to accomplish this by making Christ the living center of the Consummation. It is Christ, at his Parousia, who will administer all the final eschatological acts, all at once, in the sight of all men and all angels, and with an eternal impact upon all creation. The Consummation will be dynamically, temporally, and spatially centered on him whom the Father delights to honor: the High King of Heaven at his return (Est. 6:9, 11; John 5:23).

Concerning the unity of the Consummation, we have seen that it is manifold: *Each* of its elements is marked by unity, and *all* of its elements are marked by unity, since all of its elements, like the spokes of a wheel, emanate from a central hub, who is Christ at his Second Coming. And we saw that the fifteen most important eschatological texts of the DNT confirm this great eschatological truth.



But what about the controversial texts I mentioned earlier? What about the Olivet Discourse, to which our preterist brethren appeal in support of their views? What about 1 Thessalonians 4 and 5, to which our dispensational brothers appeal in support of theirs? And what about those other texts that seem to support Premillennialism or cast a shadow of doubt over the truth of Amillennialism?

Desiring *fully* to resolve the Great End Time Debate, I cannot dodge these questions. Therefore, please join me in the next chapter where, with the Teacher at our side, we will confront them face to face.

^{1.} For further discussion of biblical cosmology and cosmic geocentrism see Dean Davis, *In Search of the Beginning: A Seeker's Journey to the Origin of the Universe, Life, and Man* (Enumclaw, WA: Redemption Press, 2018). The extensive notes and bibliography in that book will carry you to other important sources on this fascinating subject.

^{2.} In the pages ahead I will frequently refer to the Consummation as the Momentous Event. I first ran across this expression in one of the most helpful introductions to amillennial eschatology: *The Momentous Event*, by Wm. J. Grier (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Publishing, 1945). Highly

recommended for newcomers to the GETD.

CHAPTER 13

CRUCIAL NEW TESTAMENT TEXTS DEALING WITH THE CONSUMMATION

Consummation. In our last chapter we considered a table that spotlights the top fifteen. In this chapter we'll take a close look at five of them. Think of these as "the most important of the most important." I have chosen these texts because they shed crucial light on the Consummation, and because premillennarians and preterists frequently appeal to them. Accordingly, in the pages ahead I will cite (but not reproduce) the texts, offer an extended amillennial interpretation of each one, and then interact with the claims and arguments of dissenting interpreters. At the end of the day I trust you'll find, as I have, that the amillennial approach alone enables us to behold the truth, and to enjoy the beauty, of these precious eschatological gems.

1. The Olivet Discourse

(Matthew 24-25; Mark 13; Luke 21:5-36)

Shortly before his passion, the Lord Jesus sat with his disciples on the Mount of Olives and taught them about the Consummation. All agree that his lengthy discourse, recounted in three of the four Gospels, is the single most important dominical teaching on this subject. It is also the most difficult and controversial. If, however, our grip on biblical eschatology is firm, and our understanding of prophetic diction clear, the difficulties are readily surmounted and the controversies easily laid to rest.

My approach to our text will be as follows: First we'll work our way through the discourse itself, examining each section in amillennial perspective. Secondly, we'll address three questions that have troubled and divided interpreters. Finally, we'll summarize our findings and show how richly the discourse supports the amillennial view of the Consummation.

The Disciples' Question (Matthew 24:1-3)

In his final confrontation with the scribes and Pharisees the Lord has just predicted—and lamented over—the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the desolation of the house of Israel (Matt. 23:37–39). As he leaves the temple area his disciples comment on the grandeur of the buildings. In reply, he urges a second look, telling them that not one of these stones will be left upon another. Having previously heard their Master teach about his future coming to judge the world, and having now learned that this judgment involves the destruction of the temple and the city, they quickly gather around him on the Mount of Olives, eager to know more. Accordingly, they ask him a two-part question: "When will these things happen? And what will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?" (v. 3).

The Olivet Discourse is Jesus's answer to that question. But in asking, the disciples have one thing in mind, while in answering, Jesus has another. Like John the Baptizer a few years earlier, the disciples are thinking of a *single* coming in the near future, when Jesus, acting in God's power, will bring the present evil age to a close and usher in a global theocratic Kingdom (Matt. 3:11–12). But with the benefit of biblical hindsight we now know better: Jesus is actually thinking of *two* comings, separated by at least two millennia, yet united by a common character and purpose. The first will be a *providential* coming at the hand of the Roman general Titus: a coming that will destroy Jerusalem and seal the abolition of the Jewish theocracy (Mark 11:12–14). The second will be a *supernatural* coming at the hand of the glorified Christ, the holy angels, and the resurrected saints of God: a coming that will destroy the evil world system once and for all, and bring in the eternal World to Come.

Knowing all this, and knowing that his disciples are not yet able to understand it, the Lord must carefully frame his reply in such a way as to meet the needs of *all* his followers of all times: the needs of those who will live through the destruction of Jerusalem, the needs of those who will experience the sundry tribulations of the Era of Proclamation, and the very special needs of those who will live through "the Greatest Tribulation," set to occur just prior to the return of Christ and the advent of the new heavens and the new earth.

He had to do this, and he did. The result was yet another OTKP characterized by *prophetic blending*. We spoke of this earlier. Prophetic blending occurs when, in a single prophecy, the Holy Spirit refers to two, or

even three, distinct historical events: events that are widely separated in time yet blended together in a common prophecy because they share a common character. This pattern is especially prominent in certain OT prophecies of the Day of the LORD, where the prophets spoke not only of an imminent local judgment and/or redemption (whether upon Israel or the neighboring nations), but also of a final eschatological judgment and/or redemption upon the whole world (Isa. 2:5–22; 13:1–22; Joel 2:1–20; Zeph. 1).

Such is the case here. In the Olivet Discourse the Lord blends predictions of an imminent, local, and providential coming of Christ in AD 70 with predictions of an eschatological, universal, and supernatural coming at the end of the present evil age. Recognizing this truth, commentator C. E. B. Cranfield well says, "Neither an exclusively historical nor an exclusively eschatological interpretation is satisfactory. We must allow for a double reference, for a mingling of historical and eschatological."

Keeping this principle in mind, we are well able to understand the Olivet Discourse. In what follows I will comment on Matthew's version, which is the most extensive, but will also reference Mark's and Luke's where appropriate.

The Signs of His (Twofold) Coming (Matthew 24:4–28)

Verses 4–28 of chapter 24 give us the *signs* of the Lord's twofold coming: His coming to Israel in historical and providential judgment, but also his coming to the whole earth in eschatological judgment and redemption.

In this bloc of text there is a notable progression, a progression controlled by the metaphor of pregnancy, labor, and birth (cf. Rev. 12:1–5). The metaphor is introduced in verse 8, where the Lord speaks of "the beginning of the birth pains." These pains will occur throughout the entire Era of Proclamation. They include the advent of false christs (v. 5), wars and rumors of wars (v. 6), famines, earthquakes (v. 7), and pestilence (cf. Luke 21:11).

Again, these pains are *signs*: signs that a painful judgment is soon to occur, but also that a new world is sure be born when at last the pains are done. They are signs that the Church must interpret to the world, warning the nations, but also giving them hope.

Very importantly, the Lord stresses that these particular pains, standing alone, do not signify that the end (or the birth) is near, right at the door (Matt. 24:33). On the contrary, they signify that the end is indeed coming, but that it is *not yet near* (Mark 13:7). Accordingly, when the saints see these signs, they

must not be deceived, discouraged, or distracted. Rather they must occupy until the end *does* come.

In verses 9–14 the eschatological labor pains intensify. Yes, in most cases these signs were fulfilled among first-century Christians living in Palestine. However, in this section the accent begins to fall upon the middle and later portions of the Era of Proclamation. The signs mentioned here include persecution, martyrdom (v. 9), apostasy (v. 10), more (and more deceptive) false prophets (v. 11), increasing lawlessness, lukewarmness among professing believers (v. 12), and—on a happier note—the completion of the global proclamation of the Gospel, which will itself usher in the Consummation (v. 14). Blessed is the saint who endures to the end (v. 13).

In verses 15–28 we reach transition. Now the labor is most intense. Now there is great tribulation. Now the Coming, the Consummation, and the birth are indeed at the door. By and large, these predictions have a double fulfillment. The near-term fulfillment, emphasized by Luke (Luke 21:20–24), is at the coming of Titus and the judgment of the Israelite nation, epitomized in the destruction of their city and temple. The far-term fulfillment, emphasized by Matthew and Mark, is at the Parousia and the Judgment, both of which bring the destruction of the City of Man (i.e., the fallen world system) and its counterfeit temple (i.e., the man-made and man-centered religion(s) of the world system). As one commentator aptly writes, "The destruction of Jerusalem was a foretaste of the Judgment, and so is a sign of the coming wrath." Note carefully that all three versions of the Olivet Discourse refer or allude to both comings and both judgments. Contrary to the claims of our preterist brethren, not one of them confines its attention to the providential coming of Christ in AD 70.

The particulars in this final section are sometimes difficult to interpret, but the overall picture is clear. The Lord begins by telling his disciples to watch for "the abomination that causes desolation . . . standing in the holy place" (v. 15). Using terms drawn from the prophecies of Daniel, he is indeed referring to Titus's desecration of the temple in AD 70, but also (and especially) to the career of the Antichrist, who will attempt to suppress and usurp the universal worship that properly belongs to God (Dan. 11:31; 12:11; 2 Thess. 2:1–12). Next, he warns the disciples to flee swiftly at the sight of these things (vv. 16–17). The Jewish Christians of Jesus's generation obeyed him implicitly, with many escaping to the city of Pella. At the rise of the Antichrist many latter-day

Christians will likely be led to do much the same. In verses 19–20 the Lord pronounces a woe upon women who are pregnant or nursing babies in those days, and he also urges his followers to pray that their flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath. While these warnings seem largely to apply to the siege of Jerusalem, we can easily imagine analogues applicable to the dark days of the Last Battle.

In the remainder of this section (vv. 21–28) the accent falls upon events that will occur at the end of the age. In verses 21–22 the Lord warns his Church of what I have called "the Greatest Tribulation," a tribulation more severe than any the world has ever known or ever will. The siege of Jerusalem, dire as it was, was only a picture and microcosm of this final tribulation. Here the Lord primarily has in mind the manifold judgments that will fall upon nature and society in the last of the last days: judgments designed to warn the sinful world-system that consummate wrath is shortly to fall upon it (Rev. 18). However, he also has in mind a severe global persecution that will befall his people: a last battle waged against the Church of the last of the last days (v. 9). Happily, because of his love for the elect, God will cut those days short (v. 22).

With the Greatest Tribulation especially in view, the Lord now issues solemn warnings to all his followers (vv. 23–26). Do not be taken in by false christs or false prophets, even if they can perform miracles (vv. 24–25). If anyone claims that the Christ is already on the earth, do not believe him (vv. 23, 26). Always remember that the true Christ will descend from Heaven, illuminating earth and sky like a lightning bolt on a stormy night (v. 27). When this happens, divine judgment—in part at the hand of the holy angels—will fall upon the spiritually dead in every place, even as eagles fall upon dead bodies wherever they may lie (v. 28; Ezek. 39:4; Matt. 13:41-42; Luke 17:34-37; Rev. 19:17, 21). Let no saint be found among them.

The Parousia (Matthew 24:29–31)

These three verses are the summit of the Olivet Discourse: All that precedes leads up to them, all that follows flows down from them. Since they do not (yet) reference the Resurrection or the Judgment (Matt. 25:31–40), they do not give us the Consummation as a whole. But they do give us the Agent of the whole Consummation: The High King of Heaven at his Parousia.

As in his discourse on the mysteries of the Kingdom, so here: The Lord represents his Parousia as cosmic in scope and climactic in its impact on man and nature (Matt. 13:51). This is the absolute end of the former things and the absolute beginning of the new (Isa. 65:17). Accordingly, just prior to his appearing the breakup of the old cosmos will begin. In the heavens there will be terrifying signs; upon the earth there will be dismay among nations, and great perplexity at the roaring of the sea and its waves. Men's hearts will be failing them for fear, and for the expectation of the things that are coming upon the earth (Luke 21:25–28). Then, perhaps quite suddenly, God will extinguish the luminaries so that darkest night falls upon the cosmos. At that point, all will be in readiness for the glorious appearing of the one true Light of the World (v. 29; John 8:12).

Verses 30–31 give us the Parousia itself, while Matthew 25:31–46 gives us the Judgment that will shortly ensue. In probing this text, I will draw upon parallel NT passages in an effort to show all that the Lord had in mind when he spoke these powerful words.

First, "the sign of the Son of Man" appears in the sky above. Likely this is the brightness of the glory clouds that attend him; if not, its exact nature remains undisclosed (v. 30). Next, Christ himself appears, proceeding steadily toward the earth on "clouds" (i.e., visible manifestations) of the Father's power and glory (v. 30). All the holy angels are in his train (Matt. 16:27; 25:31: Rev. 19:14). So too are the souls of the saints: the spirits of righteous men made perfect (1 Thess. 3:13; Heb. 12:23; Rev. 19:14). As he draws near there is a cry of command, the voice of the archangel, and the sound of a great trumpet (v. 31; Ex. 19:16, 19; 20:18; 1 Thess. 4:16). At this, all who have ever lived and died rise from the dead and come forth from the graves (John 5:28–29; 1 Thess. 4:13–17; Rev. 20:13). The living saints are changed in the twinkling of an eye (1 Cor. 15:50-54; 1 Thess. 4:17). So too, perhaps, are the living unrighteous (or is it that they first are slain and then immediately raised? Luke 19:29; 2 Thess. 2:8; Rev. 19:21). Henceforth every eye is beholding him: the saints of all ages, who marvel and rejoice, and the unbelieving and disobedient of all ages, who mourn and recoil in terror (v. 30; Matt. 26:64; 2 Thess. 1:10; Rev. 1:7; 6:16).

As all stand in awe, the holy angels now fly to their appointed task of harvesting the earth. First, they gather in God's elect, lifting them into the air and bringing them safely to Christ's right hand (v. 31; Matt. 24:40–41; 1 Thess. 4:13–17; Rev. 11:12; 14:14–20). Then they gather the unrighteous, possibly casting them at once into the (newly created) Lake of Fire (Matt.

13:41–42), but probably bringing them first to the left hand of the Judgment Seat of Christ (Matt. 25:33; Rev. 14:14–20). Down below, the earth and its works are being consumed with fire (2 Peter 3:8–13; Rev. 20:9–11). Now Christ is enthroned in glory at the center of the universe (Matt. 25:31–33; Rev. 20:11–15). Now all men and angels are assembled before him (2 Cor. 5:10). Now the Judgment of the Great Day begins (Jude v. 6).

The Lesson of the Fig Tree (Matthew 24:32–35)

In a moment the Lord will complete his revelation of the Consummation by describing the Judgment (Matt. 25:31–46). However, before doing so, he desires to draw out some applications of the truths he has spoken so far.

He begins by admonishing his disciples—*all of them*—to watch for the signs of his Coming. To this end, he bids them learn a lesson from the fig tree: When they see it put forth its leaves, they know that summer is near. Likewise, when they see "all these things"—all the signs he has just spoken of—they can know that his Parousia (vv. 29–31) and the end of the present evil age (vv. 32–33) are at hand.

But how do we know that he is speaking (primarily) of his eschatological Coming (vv. 29–31), and not of his providential coming in AD 70? We know it because "all these things" (i.e., signs) include events that did not occur prior to AD 70: the global proclamation of the gospel (v. 14), the universal hatred of Christians (v. 9), the appearing of the eschatological Abomination that Causes Desolation (i.e., the Antichrist; v.15), unprecedented and unparalleled tribulation (v. 21), false messiahs and prophets working deceptive signs and wonders (v. 24), and dreadful portents in the sky and sea (v. 29; Luke 21:25–26). The saints must watch for all these things, and must lift up their heads when they see them, for in those days the Parousia, the Consummation, and their eternal redemption will be near, even at the door (v. 33; Luke 21:28)!

Having thus outlined the remaining years of Salvation History, the Lord now solemnly pledges: "I tell you the truth: This generation will by no means pass away till all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away" (Matt. 24:34–35). These verses are quite difficult, and have therefore generated a host of interpretations, some of which I will touch on before briefly sharing my present view.⁴

Note first his preface: "I tell you the truth." This strong affirmation fits hand in glove with verse 35, where he states that heaven and earth will pass away,

but his words never will. His message? "My words—my predictions, warnings, and promises—come straight from the divine Creator of heaven and earth. They are eternal, true, and trustworthy. In the face of all events, temptations, and persecutions you can take them to the bank."

In much the same spirit, Jesus then says, "This generation will by no means pass away till all these things have taken place." What did he mean by "this generation"? We cannot answer with confidence until we know what he meant by "all these things"? Now in light of verse 33, it is possible that he meant the various signs previously mentioned, excluding the Parousia itself.⁵ Here, however, the expression seems to be all-inclusive. His solemn "I tell you the truth," plus his reference to the passing of the (present) heaven and earth (v. 35), both suggest that in addition to the signs he also had in mind his Parousia, the Consummation, and the advent of the new cosmos.

What, then, did he mean by "this generation"? The Greek is *genea*. Undeniably, the Lord customarily used this word to refer to his contemporaries: the Jewish men and women of his own generation (Matt. 11:16; 12:30, 38–42; 16:4; 17:17, etc.). Insisting that he was doing so here, theological liberals, abandoning a divine Christ and an inerrant Bible, assert that he was simply wrong. We dare not follow them.

Others—our preterist brethren—agree that Jesus was referring to his own generation, but assert that in speaking of the signs of his Coming (vv. 3–28), and of his Coming itself (vv. 29–31), he was largely using figurative, apocalyptic language to describe the events of AD 33–70, culminating in Titus's destruction of Jerusalem. But this "mystical" interpretation cannot possibly be correct, since it is obvious that throughout his discourse the Lord was making *straightforward historical predictions* about his providential coming on the one hand, and his supernatural and cosmological Coming on the other. The former has come to pass; the latter has not. And so we watch.

Still other interpreters, noting that *genea* can sometimes mean *race*, believe that the Lord was referring to the Jews (cf. Matt. 13:15; 15:8, Luke 21:23), whether as an obdurate people who will remain under God's wrath until the Judgment (Hoekema), or as a beloved remnant which God, in his mercy and grace, will continue to save down to the very end (Hendriksen). Seeing, however, that the thrust of the discourse is to prepare the whole Church—both Jew and Gentile—for her age-long pilgrimage to the World to Come, this ethnic interpretation seems too narrow, and therefore unlikely.

Given, then, the vast historical scope of the discourse, my view is that Jesus was using the word *genea* in its widest possible sense: as referring to the entire sinful, guilty, judgeable, but also beloved and eminently redeemable generation of Adam and Eve; as referring to Jews and Gentiles, saints and sinners, of all times and all places; as referring to the people of his own generation, the people of the last generation, and the people of all the generations in between.

Admittedly, such usage is rare, but it is not unprecedented. For example, Jesus said, "In their dealings with their own kind (Greek: *genea*) the sons of this age are wiser than the sons of light" (Luke 16:8; cf. 29:34–35). Similarly, the apostle Paul identifies God's saints as those who shine like lights amidst a crooked and perverse generation (Phil. 2:15). In both texts the word *genea* is used to describe huge blocs of certain kinds of people who, since the fall of man, have always been with us, and always will be.

So again, may it not be that in speaking as he did, the Lord was assuring his disciples that "this generation"—this fallen but beloved seed of Adam and Eve (and also, perhaps, this present evil age in which multitudes of them are continually being redeemed)—will not pass away until he himself (the divine Creator, Judge, and Redeemer of Heaven and Earth) fulfills all the words he has so solemnly, graciously, and comfortingly spoken to the world in his great Olivet Discourse?

A Day Unknown and Unexpected (Matthew 24:36–44; cf. Luke 17:26–27)

Now the exhortations begin. In essence they come to this: Stay awake (24:36–25:13) and stay busy (25:14–30). Here in verses 36–44 the emphasis is on staying awake. Why must the disciples be on the alert? Jesus gives two main reasons. First, no one—not even the Son himself (at least not in the state of his humiliation)—knows the day or hour of his Parousia (v. 36). By God's wise decree the saints do not know the exact time of his coming, so that they may be ready at all times. Secondly, as it was prior to the Flood, so it will be prior to the Parousia: People will be spiritually asleep, conducting business as usual, unaware of the disaster that stands at the door (vv. 37–42). In such an environment it will be all too easy for believers to slumber as well (Luke 18:8). Ominously, the Lord warns that if certain people had known the hour of his coming, they would have prepared themselves, for the results of his visitation were dire. Let no saint be among them. Let every saint be on the alert (vv. 43–

Three Parables of the Judgment (Matthew 24:45-25:30)

Jesus's exhortations continue in the form of three parables focusing on the Judgment: The Parable of the Servants (24:45-51; cf. Luke 12:42-46), the Parable of the Ten Virgins (25:1–12), and the Parable of the Talents (25:14– 30; cf. Luke 19:12–27). Importantly, all three clearly reveal his assumptions as to the structure of the Kingdom and the Consummation. Soon, via Calvary, the Master, Bridegroom, and King of his people will journey to the far country of Heaven (25:14; cf. Luke 19:12; 20:9). Once there, he will be delayed for a long time (24:48; 25:5, 19). Though necessary, this delay will be perilous, exposing his followers on earth to various temptations. Therefore, let them always remember: In the end he will return to settle accounts with all who call themselves his followers. When he does, he will richly reward the watchful, the faithful, and the diligent, warmly welcoming them into his eternal Kingdom (25:34). But the foolish, the wicked, and the lazy he will judge, appointing them their portion in Gehenna, together with the hypocrites and unbelievers, which in fact they are (24:51; 25:41; Luke 12:46). Thus, in all three parables we see that the Lord presupposes a simple two-staged Kingdom, separated by a single Consummation at his Parousia. We also see how much he desires his disciples to remain alert and faithful, so that at his Coming—when the Resurrection and the Judgment finally occur—they may fully enter into the joy of their Lord (25:21, 23).

The Judgment (Matthew 25:31-46)

Having issued both promises and warnings, the Lord now completes what he began in his description of his Parousia (Matt. 24:29–31), bringing the Olivet Discourse to a close with his most extensive teaching on the Judgment. It will occur at his Coming, when he arrives in the skies above the earth with all the holy angels (v. 31). It will be universal in scope: Having raised the dead and transformed the living, all people of all times and places will be gathered before him (v. 32; John 5:28–29; Acts 24:15; 1 Cor. 15:23; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:13). It will involve a final separation (vv. 32–33): Those who loved and served his brethren will be welcomed into the Kingdom that God prepared for them before the founding of the world (vv. 34–40). Those who did not will be sent away into Gehenna: the eternal (lake of) fire prepared for the devil and his

angels, who are judged at this time as well (vv. 41–42; Rev. 20:10). Contrary to dispensational teaching, Jesus's "brethren" are not Jewish evangelists who preached the Messiah's coming millennial kingdom during a seven-year tribulation. Rather, as he himself taught, they are loyal believers in Christ, whether Jew or Gentile (Matt. 10:42; 12:48–49). Those who received these brethren were actually receiving Christ, with the result that in time they became believers themselves (Matt. 10:40–42). This Judgment will send all men to their respective eternal destinies: The unrighteous will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life (v. 46). Clearly, this is not a partial or preliminary judgment that ushers in a temporary earthly millennium. No, this is the one final, universal judgment that ushers in the completed Kingdom of God.

Questions and Answers

The Olivet Discourse raises several questions that have troubled modern Christians, in some cases opening doors to unorthodox views of the Consummation. Let us take a moment to examine three of the most important.

1. What exactly did Jesus have in mind when he spoke of "a great tribulation" (Matt. 24:21)?

I suggested above that here the Lord had in view a brief season of time set to occur just prior to his Coming at the end of the age; a season characterized by unprecedented judgments upon the world, and by unprecedented persecution for the Church; a season pictured by the fall of Jerusalem, but not (as preterists maintain) altogether fulfilled in it. Here I want to stress the fact that the Lord did *not* tell us how long this tribulation will last, only that God will cut it short for the sake of the elect. This is the biblical pattern. There is not a single biblical text that reveals the duration of the Greatest Tribulation, only that the saints must watch for it, and that the Lord himself will swiftly appear to rescue them from it.

Here a word of warning is in order. For over 150 years, dispensationalists have told us that the Greatest Tribulation will last for three and a half literal years. We have seen, however, that they base their claim on a faulty exegesis of Daniel 9. Nor is this claim substantiated in the Revelation. As the context makes clear, the Great Tribulation of Revelation 7:14 is simply the present evil

age as a whole, out of which God takes a suffering but faithful people for his own, so that they may stand before his throne and dwell in his sanctuary in the World to Come (Rev. 7:9–17). As for the permutations of three and a half years found throughout the Revelation (i.e., 1,260 days, forty-two months, a time, times, and half a time), we have seen that these are meant to remind us of Elijah's three and a half years of exile in the wilderness beside the Brook Cherith, where God took care of him (1 Kings 17:1–7). In other words, they symbolize the entire Era of Proclamation as a season of tribulation and spiritual sustenance for Christ's pilgrim Church. Far better, then, to speak of this brief season as "the Greatest Tribulation"; as the apogee of the Great Tribulation out of which all of God's children, including his own Son, are called (John 16:33).

2. Does Jesus really teach that his Parousia is "imminent," in the sense that it could happen "at any moment"?

In the Olivet Discourse the Lord told his disciples that no one except the Father knows the day or the hour of his Coming (Matt. 24:36); that he will come at a time when neither the world (Matt. 24:38-39) nor the saints (Matt. 24:40-43) expect him; and that his Coming will indeed catch certain professing believers unawares (Matt. 24:45–25:13). From texts like these our dispensationalist brethren have concluded that true watchfulness requires the saints to believe that Christ could return at any moment. However, this is not what the Lord had in mind; indeed, what he had in mind was quite the opposite. As Matthew 24:23–28 makes clear, Jesus understood that faith in an "any-moment return" sets the saints up for all sorts of winds of corrupt prophetic doctrine, one of which blew powerfully through the church at Thessalonica (Eph. 4:14; 2 Thess. 2:1–3). Therefore, his point here—and Paul's in 2 Thessalonians 2—is that he will *not* return until certain definite signs appear on the historical horizon. When the saints see them, they will still not know the day or the hour of his Coming; but they will know—or at least very strongly suspect—that the day and the hour are now at hand. The Day of the Lord Jesus is *not* imminent, in the sense that it could come at any moment. Yes, there are certain signs that it is imminent, and Christians must watch for them. But until they see those signs, they are to be at peace and occupy until he comes (Matt. 24:32–33; Mark 13:37; Luke 19:13).

3. If, at the end, the world is going through "a great tribulation," how can

the Parousia spring as a trap on people who are going about business as usual?

The Olivet Discourse predicts both of these developments: unprecedented upheavals in nature and society, but also people eating, drinking, working, and marrying as usual, and apparently quite oblivious to the Judgment that is headed their way. How can we reconcile these seemingly contradictory phenomena? The answer is not a pre-tribulation rapture of the Church, after which the judgments begin in earnest. Rather, it is to recall that Jesus spoke of the latter-day tribulation in terms of *birth pains* (Matt. 24:8). But birth pains come in waves, with each one more intense than its predecessor. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that as the end approaches the birth pains will indeed intensify, yet still be characterized by ebb and flow. Immediately prior to the end, they will ebb. Then—presumably because of the presence, power, and promises of the Antichrist—the world will say "Peace and safety." And then sudden destruction will come upon them like the labor pains of a pregnant woman, and they will not escape (1 Thess. 5:3).

Summary

Because of its importance and difficulty, I have lingered long over the Olivet Discourse. What have we learned? Simply this: When we understand that Jesus was answering the disciples' question with prophetic blending, and when we closely examine how he answered it, we see again his underlying assumptions about the coming of the Kingdom and the nature of the Consummation. The Kingdom comes in two simple stages, separated by a single Consummation at his Parousia. The first stage, which is coextensive with his heavenly reign, is a lengthy but finite season of mission, testing, judgments, signs, persecutions, and Kingdom growth. The second is an eternal season, either of reward in the World to Come, or of retribution in the fires of Gehenna. Fittingly, the two stages are separated by a single Consummation that is cosmic in scope and climactic in its impact on man and nature. It will include the appearance of the glorified Son of Man in the darkened skies above the earth, a general Resurrection of the Dead, the transformation of the living saints, the gathering of all men and angels before the throne of Christ, the Judgment, and the inauguration of the eternal Age to Come.

This is the premise and teaching of the Olivet Discourse, and of all NT eschatology. It is the living heart of amillennial faith.

2. I Will Come to You

(John 14:1–3)

This is one of the most comforting eschatological texts in all sacred Scripture. It is also one of the most controversial, since dispensationalists claim that here the Lord is speaking of a secret rapture of the Church. I will begin by offering an amillennial interpretation, and then address John MacArthur's dispensational view.

The disciples are troubled. Jesus has just said that one of them will betray him (John 13:21–30), and that another, their leader, is about to deny him three times (John 13:37–38). Worst of all, he has told them that soon he will go away to his Father, and that they themselves cannot join him (John 13:33, 36). Aware of their fears (and forgetful of his own), he therefore devotes the remainder of the Upper Room Discourse to preparing them for what lies ahead.

He opens with two commands: "Don't let your heart be troubled: You believe in God, believe in me as well" (v. 1). The antidote to their fears—and to ours—is implicit trust in the character, sovereignty, promises, and salvation of God; and not only of God, but also of his Christ, in whom all of these precious gifts and remedies are found (2 Cor. 1:20).

Next, he makes a very special promise, a promise designed to cheer their hearts and calm their fears:

In my Father's house there are many dwelling places; if it were not so, would I have told you that I am going on to prepare a place for you? And if I go on and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be as well. (John 14:2–3)

To benefit from these words we must understand Jewish marriage customs, for they were very much in Jesus's mind when he spoke them. Broadly, an ancient Jewish marriage had three components. First came *the betrothal*. Here the parents of a young man arranged a suitable marriage for their son. This involved the father paying a "bride-price" to her parents, after which the families usually exchanged gifts and drank a cup of wine to seal the marriage covenant. At this point the couple were legally married. Next, there came *the waiting period*. During this time—which could be quite lengthy—the groom

prepared a house (or rooms) for his bride, sometimes on his father's estate. Meanwhile, the bride prepared herself to serve her husband as a skillful keeper of his home. Finally, there came *the wedding ceremony*. On the night of the marriage the groom and his friends would make their way in a joyful procession to the bride's house (Matt. 25:1–13). When they arrived, she and her maids would join the groom, after which they would return to the groom's house for the marriage ceremony, the marriage feast, the consummation of the marriage, and more festivities when the couple emerged from the *chuppa*, or bridal chamber, to join the party. Henceforth they would live together as husband and wife.

Time would fail us to discuss all the ways in which the Holy Spirit drew upon these ancient customs to depict the romance of redemption in Scripture. For our present purposes, however, only one thing is needful: to see that here, in John 14:2–3, Jesus was doing that very thing. He knew that at Calvary the Father would pay the bride-price. He knew that immediately afterwards he himself would return to his Father's heavenly house to prepare a dwelling place for his Beloved. And he knew that at certain appointed times he would return to receive her to himself, so that she might be with him where he is (Matt. 25:1–13).

Keeping the testimony of the DNT in view, let us carefully probe Jesus's exact words, for they are eschatologically richer than we may think.

First, he says, "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places" (v. 2). The reference here is twofold: not only to Heaven above, but also to Heaven up ahead—the new heavens and the new earth that he will create at his return. In this twofold house there are (and will be) many dwelling places. In other words, in both realms God has carefully prepared, or will prepare, not physical shelters, but *spiritual niches*: spheres of life and service specifically designed for each of his dear children. And there are many such niches, for both the world up above and the world up ahead will be filled with a great multitude whom no man can number, drawn from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation (Rev. 7:9–12).

Next, Jesus assures the disciples that "I am going on to prepare a place for you" (v. 2). Again we have a twofold meaning. First, he leaves to prepare a place for the saints in Heaven above. That is, he departs from this world and enters Heaven as their High Priest and Sacrifice, there to make eternal intercession for them, with the result that henceforth the Father can welcome

them into Heaven as his beloved children (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 6:19–20; 7:25). But secondly, at his return he will create new heavens and a new earth, thus "preparing" an eternal *chuppa* for himself and his beloved Bride (Phil. 3:20–21; Rev. 21:1–2).

Finally, Jesus promises his fearful disciples that "if I go on and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am you may be as well" (v. 3). Once again, we encounter layers of meaning, layers that the DNT equips us to discern and enjoy. There are three of them.

First, at the moment of their new birth Christ will come to his disciples in the Person of the Holy Spirit and receive them to himself (John 14:16–18). In the case of the eleven, this occurred on the Day of Pentecost. In the case of the rest of God's children, it will occur throughout the centuries to follow. As a result of this initial coming, the saint's bodies continue to dwell upon the earth and serve the Lord, but their spirits are raised to newness of life, so that henceforth they are also seated in the heavenly places in Christ (Rom. 6:4; Eph. 2:5–6; Phil. 3:20). Even now they are "with Christ where he is." Even now—though only dimly, as if in a mirror—they behold the glory of their Lord (John 17:24; 1 Cor. 13:12; 2 Cor. 3:18).

Secondly, at the moment of their physical death Christ will again come to his disciples in the Spirit, this time to perfect their souls and take them to live with him in Heaven above. In other words, Jesus's words are also fulfilled when the saints enter the Intermediate State (Luke 23:43; 2 Cor. 5:8; Rev. 14:13). As we saw earlier, this is the true burden of Revelation 20:4–6. In all such texts the Lord would have us know that throughout the Intermediate State the saints will be with him where he is: in Heaven itself, reigning in life with their High King.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Christ will come to his disciples on the day of his Parousia. Yes, when he descends from Heaven he will be bringing their (perfected) spirits with him. But then, at the Resurrection, he will join those spirits to new glorified bodies, so that in their flesh they will see God (in Christ) and be fully conformed to him (Job 19:26–28; Matt 5:8; 1 Cor. 13:12; 1 John 3:2). In that Day he will yet again take his Bride to himself, but this time once and for all, so that henceforth they may dwell together *forever* in the glorious new Chuppa to Come (Rev. 14:1; 21:1–5).

Here, then, we have a powerful host of reasons why the Bride of Christ must not let her heart be troubled. When fear and sorrow threaten to overwhelm, she must steady herself afresh by listening to the voice of her heavenly Husband: "Beloved, always remember that through your new birth I have already come for you, and that even now you are dwelling with me where I am. But more than that, always remember that great things are waiting for you up ahead; that at the moment of your death—and also at the Resurrection of the Dead—I will again come to you and receive you to myself, so that where I am, and as I am, you may be also. Beloved Bride, be faithful until death: truly, it will be worth the wait!"

The Dispensational View

We have seen that John 14:1–3 harmonizes quite well with amillennial eschatology. How does the dispensational view fare? To find out, let's listen to John MacArthur commenting on our text:

This is one of the passages that refer to the Rapture of the saints at the end of the age when Christ returns. The features in this description do not describe Christ coming to earth with His saints to establish His kingdom (Rev. 19:11–15), but taking believers from earth to live in heaven. Since no judgment on the unsaved is described here, this is not the event of His return in glory and power to destroy the wicked (Matt. 13:36–43). Rather this describes his coming to gather his own.⁸

In reply, I offer three observations.

First, if the rest of the DNT explicitly taught a pre-tribulation rapture, then we would have to admit that this text *could* be referring to it. It is, as it were, a blank eschatological slate, amenable to different interpretations. We have seen, however, that the DNT *always* teaches a single Coming of Christ and a single Consummation. Accordingly, it is certain that this text does not refer to a pre-tribulation rapture.

Secondly, MacArthur says, "The features in this description do not describe Christ coming to earth with His saints to establish His kingdom, but taking believers from earth to live in heaven." Once again we find MacArthur reading his Dispensationalism into the text. We have seen, however, that the DNT not only bars the way, but also allows us to discern multiple layers of meaning in the Lord's words. Yes, they can indeed be interpreted to say that he will come to his disciples and take them to Heaven, but only through the new birth or the

first resurrection at the moment of their death (Rev. 20:4–6). Moreover, contrary to what MacArthur asserts, they can also be seen to describe Christ coming to the earth with (the spirits of) his saints to establish his Kingdom; not, however, a millennial phase of the Kingdom, but the completed Kingdom: the new heavens and the new earth, where Christ and his beloved Bride will live following the Resurrection. Since the DNT actually teaches this threefold fulfillment, it is biblically justified to read it into our text. But since the DNT does not teach a pre-tribulation rapture or a millennial phase of the Kingdom, it is not biblically justified to read them into this text.

Finally, MacArthur says, "Since no judgment on the unsaved is described here, this is not the event of His return in glory and power to destroy the wicked." This statement is perfectly true *if* we are thinking of the moment of a believer's spiritual birth, or of the moment when his soul enters Heaven on the day of his death. But what about the day of the Lord's bodily return at the end of the age? Does Jesus's silence about a general resurrection and judgment mean that he did not have them in mind? What if he elected not to mention them here in order to leave room for the first two kinds of coming? And in regard to the third kind of coming, what if he elected simply to focus the disciples' attention on the supremely comforting prospect of their being with him forever in the glorified World to Come? MacArthur's argument from silence is not convincing. Moreover, there are many NT texts that refute his assertion by positively teaching that Christ will indeed judge the unrighteous at his bodily Coming (Matt. 13:37–43; 24–25; 1 Cor. 15:20–28, 50–58; 1 Thess. 4:13–5:11; 2 Thess. 1:3–12; 2:1–12).

We conclude, then, that the amillennial interpretation of this text supplies a truer, richer, and far more comforting meaning than that of our dispensational brothers. The Lord is not speaking here of a pre-tribulation rapture, but of a threefold coming to his disciples: first at the moment of their spiritual birth, second at the moment of their death, and finally on the day of his Parousia at the end of the age. When the heart of the Bride is troubled, let her meditate on all three, but especially on the eternal union that will be hers at the Marriage Feast of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7).

3. Behold, I Tell You a Mystery!

(1 Corinthians 15:50–58)

We have seen that 1 Corinthians 15 is one of the premiere eschatological

texts in the DNT, since it touches on nearly every aspect of the Consummation. Earlier we looked at verses 20–28, which richly illuminate the simple twofold structure of the Kingdom. Here I want to discuss verses 50–58, in which Paul unveils the mystery of the glorification of the living saints at Christ's Parousia. Here too we will find that the apostle looks for a single Consummation at the Parousia of Christ, just as Amillennialism teaches.

In verse 50 Paul begins by telling us *why* God will glorify the bodies of his saints at the Parousia: It is because mere flesh and blood, as presently constituted, could not possibly survive the weight of glory that will rest upon the consummated Kingdom. The earthly bodies of the saints must be conformed to their new heavenly environment. To live in the sun, one must be a creature of fire.

This revelation immediately rules out all premillennial scenarios, which explicitly assert that at his coming Christ will introduce a *temporary* kingdom that is (partly) inhabited by mere "flesh and blood" (i.e., children, tribulation Jews, tribulation converts, etc.). Note also that Paul refers to this Kingdom as *incorruptible*. As with the saint's future bodies, so too with their future world: Because both are glorious, they are no longer subject to decay (Rom. 8:19–21). And because they are no longer subject to decay, they are eternal, unchanging, and imperishable. How, then, *after* the return of Christ, shall merely natural men and women be born, grow up, marry, procreate, age, sicken, and die, as premillennarians assert?

In verses 51–52 Paul unveils a new eschatological mystery: "Not all of us will sleep, but all of us will be changed" (v. 51). Here he is explaining in greater detail what will happen to those who are Christ's at his coming (v. 23). Those who are asleep (i.e., those who have died) will be raised; those who are alive and remain will suddenly be transformed (v. 52; 1 Thess. 4:15). The end result is that *all*—the universal Body of Christ—will be changed (i.e., glorified).

Now, observe from our text that this great change occurs not only at the Parousia, but also at *the last trumpet*, which, for Paul, *is simultaneous with the Parousia* (v. 52; cf. Matt. 24:31; 1 Thess. 4:16). But if "last" really means "last," then surely there cannot be *another* sounding of the resurrection trumpet at the end of a future millennium. Still less can there be innumerable such soundings as one believer after another dies and rises again throughout the Millennium. No, the far horizon of Paul's eschatology is the one Parousia of Christ, when the whole Church—"those who belong to Christ at his coming"—is glorified

and enters the completed Kingdom of God (v. 23).

Astonishingly, some dispensationalists assert that in these verses Paul is speaking of the transformation of living believers at the time of the Rapture, when Christ comes to remove the Church to Heaven for seven years. But Paul says not a word about the Lord removing his people to Heaven, for the simple reason that here, as in in vv. 20–28, he is speaking about the one Coming of Christ, and about the one resurrection and transformation by which he will physically equip the saints for eternal life upon the new earth (vv. 24, 50).

Verses 53–55 bring the disclosure of the mystery—and Paul's entire discourse on the Resurrection—to their glorious climax. First, he reiterates what he stated earlier: This corruptible flesh *must* put on incorruption, and this mortal body must put on immortality, for by its very nature a glorified world requires incorruptible and immortal inhabitants (vv. 42-44; v. 50). Then, in language brimming with eschatological triumph and doxology, Paul declares that at the Resurrection God's ancient scriptural promise will be fulfilled: Death will be swallowed up in victory (Isa. 25:8; Hos. 13:14). As in verses 20-28, so here: The apostle clearly has in mind final victory, ultimate victory. He has in mind the abolition of the *last* enemy, which is death (v. 26), and the abolition of every remaining enemy, for which death stands as the supreme emblem (v. 25). How, then, can he not exult at the thought of the Resurrection, seeing that when it occurs Christ will completely expel from the redeemed universe every remaining spiritual and physical enemy that entered the world at the fall? And if that is so, how can any such enemy rear its ugly head in a future millennium?

Verses 56–58, which bring the chapter to a close, elaborate on the theme of eschatological victory, drawing out its practical application for the saints. God, through Christ, has already given us the victory over death, sin, and the power of the Law to condemn us. Therefore, in what remains of the present evil age, let us be steadfast and immovable in our faith, always abounding in the work of the Lord. Why? Because we know that our labors in the Lord are not in vain, but will instead be richly rewarded at the Parousia, when Christ will raise the dead, transform the living, triumph over every spiritual and physical enemy, and bestow full and final victory upon his glorified people and their world.

Truly, this text is one of the most precious jewels in the glorious crown of amillennial eschatology.

4. The Comfort of His Coming

(1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:10)

Paul's two letters to the Thessalonian Christians contain some of the Bible's richest veins of eschatological gold. Written from Corinth around AD 50–51, they reveal that the apostle's early ministry to the European Gentiles was charged with a lively expectation of the Lord's soon return (1 Thess. 1:10; 2:19; 3:11–13; 2 Thess. 1–2; cf. Acts 17:16–21; 1 Cor. 15:1–58). However, they also reveal a problem: Paul's Jewish opponents had forced him to flee the city quickly, with the result that some of his converts were left confused (or ignorant) about his teaching on the afterlife and the Consummation (Acts 17:1–9). These two letters give us his efforts to clear up the misunderstanding. Not surprisingly, they speak often and in great detail about the last things: the signs of Christ's Parousia, the nature and purpose of the Parousia, the Resurrection, the Judgment, and the World to Come. Notably, they never speak of a future millennium (1 Thess. 4:13–18; 5:1–10; 2 Thess. 1:3–12; 2:1–12).

Let's take a close look at two major (and very closely related) texts found in Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Of the three NT passages cited by dispensationalists in support of a pretribulation rapture, this is by far the most important (cf. John 14:1–3; 1 Cor. 15:51–52). Accordingly, I will first offer an amillennial exegesis of the text itself, and then carefully consider both the dispensational interpretation and the case made for it.

Our text begins in 1 Thessalonians 4:13, where Paul states his purpose for the remarks to follow. His goal is to give hope to Christians whose (believing) loved ones have recently "fallen asleep": who have died in the Lord. He knows that some of the brethren are troubled about this. Perhaps they fear that their departed loved ones will not be included in Christ's Kingdom when he comes again. Certainly they fear they will never see them again. Therefore, Paul takes up this subject once again, so that they will no longer grieve as unbelievers do, but instead enjoy a lively hope of being reunited with their Christian family and friends—soon.

In verse 14 he succinctly states the healing truth; in the verses that follow he

carefully explains. It is this: "When Jesus comes again he will bring your departed loved one(s) with him—and back to you." Observe how Paul, in declaring this truth, builds on the Thessalonians' pre-existing faith. They already believe that God has raised Jesus from the dead. But if they can believe that, surely they can also believe that he will raise their loved one(s). And, says Paul, that's exactly what he will do: At the Parousia God will bring with Jesus the souls of all who have fallen asleep in him, so that they, just like their Lord, may rise from the dead and be reunited with the saints who are living on the earth at that time.

Importantly, Paul has already touched on this subject in 1 Thessalonians 3:11–13, where he prayed that God would establish their hearts "blameless in holiness in the presence of our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with *all* his holy ones." Note the comprehensiveness of that final phrase. When Christ returns he will empty Heaven, bringing with him *all* the holy angels and the spirits of *all* the departed saints whom he has redemptively separated to himself. Thus will he set the stage for the Momentous Event: the Consummation of all things.

In verses 15–17 the apostle delves into the aspect of the Consummation that lies uppermost in the minds of his flock: the reunion of the departed saints with the living saints. In verse 15 he declares that the instruction he is about give is "the word of the Lord." That is, it comes, at least in part, from the earthly teaching of Christ himself (Matt. 13:37–43; 24:29–31). Possibly, it also includes further revelation specially vouchsafed to the apostle (1 Cor. 15:51–52). In any case, the Thessalonians can trust what he has to say, for it is the very Word of God.

Next, he affirms that "we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who have fallen asleep." He means that the living saints will not receive their glorified bodies before those who have died in the Lord. There is, then, a definite chronological sequence in the glorification of the Church: First, Christ will join the souls of the departed saints to their new resurrected and glorified bodies; then—and only then—will he transform and glorify the bodies of the living saints. In days ahead, Paul will say much the same thing to the Corinthians: "For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we [who are alive and remain] will be changed" (1 Cor. 15:50–53).

Observe that all of this happens at "the Parousia of the Lord" (v. 15). There

is only one of them. And according to every other Pauline text touching on this event, it has nothing to do with Christ secretly removing his Church to Heaven for seven years. Rather, it has everything to do with his raising (all) the dead, judging the world in righteousness, and bringing in the completed Kingdom of God.

In verses 16–17, which closely parallel our Lord's own descriptions of the Consummation, Paul elaborates on what he has just said about the events surrounding the Parousia (Matt. 13:37–43; 24:29–31). He begins with this: "The Lord himself will descend from heaven." This is Christ's *definitive* descent to the earth, the descent that results in the creation of the new heavens and the new earth, where he will live forever with his beloved Bride. In this descent the Lord is not leaving Heaven behind; rather, he is bringing it with him. In this descent he and the holy angels are *coming home* once and for all (Rev. 21:1–4)!

The cosmic homecoming will be accompanied by three great sounds: A shout (or "cry of command"), the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet of God. I take it that the shout emanates from the lips of Christ himself. If this is indeed a shout, then it is a shout of (final) victory (Num. 23:21; Josh. 6:5; Ps. 47:5; Isa. 42:13; Jer. 25:30; 1 Cor. 15:54). If, as seems more likely, it is a cry of command, it is the voice of Christ summoning the dead from their graves (John 5:25; 11:43) and/or sending the holy angels to their appointed tasks (Mark 13:27). Perhaps it is both.

Concerning the archangel, he is almost certainly Michael (Dan. 12:1; Jude v. 9) or Gabriel (Dan. 8:16; 9:21; Luke 1:19, 26). In either case, this angel, by definition, is a ruler over all the rest. His presence on the scene therefore implies what the NT explicitly unveils elsewhere: the presence of *all* the holy angels (Matt. 25:31). When the archangel raises his voice, it will likely be for the purpose of sending all the angels to their work of judicial and redemptive ingathering (Matt. 13:41; 24:31; Rev. 14:18).

Finally, there is the trumpet of God. Its blast signals not only the final destruction of the evil world system (Josh. 6:15–21; Rev. 18:2), but also the summoning of God's people to their full inheritance: to the enjoyment of eternal life upon the glorious "holy mountain" that is the new heavens and the new earth (Ex. 19:16–17; Isa. 11:9; Matt. 24:31; Rev. 14:1). This interpretation accords well with the teaching of 1 Cor. 15:52: The trumpet that raises the dead will be the *last* trumpet, the trumpet that signals the consummation of the purposes of God and the advent of the World to Come.

Considering the character of these two verses, it is marvelous indeed that anyone could find here a "secret" eschatological event devolving exclusively upon a small band of saints who alone can see and hear it. Quite to the contrary, the actual data cry out, over and again, that this is a hugely *public* event, precisely because it devolves, not simply upon the Church, but also upon the entire created universe. Just as every eye will see, so too every ear will hear: whether Christ's shout, the archangel's voice, or the final blast of the trumpet of God (Matt. 26:64; John 5:28; Phil. 2:9–11; Rev. 1:7).

In verse 16b Paul reiterates the basic message of verse 15: When the Lord returns, the dead in Christ will rise first. In verse 17 he explains what will happen afterwards, such that separated loved ones are reunited once and for all. To understand his thought here we must keep 1 Corinthians 15:50-58 in mind. When we do, a clear picture emerges: Immediately following the Resurrection of the Dead, the living saints (i.e., "we who are alive and remain") will be changed—glorified (1 Cor. 15:51–52). Then the entire company of the saints "will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." The Greek word for "caught up" (arpazo) denotes taking (or being taken) suddenly and with great force, whether urgently to obtain (Matt. 11:12), maliciously to abduct (Matt. 13:19; John 6:15; 10:12), or benevolently to help or rescue (Acts 8:39; 2 Cor. 12:2; Jude v. 23). Here it is used in the latter sense, since at his return the Lord Jesus—with great zeal and power to match—will swiftly gather his Bride to himself, even as he rescues her from her human enemies and the fiery judgment that will engulf the earth below (2 Peter 3:8-13; Rev. 11:11–13).

How exactly will Christ catch up his Church? As we have seen, it will be at the hands of the holy angels (Matt. 24:31; Mark 13:27; Rev. 14:14–16). Carrying the saints into (and perhaps through) the spiritual "clouds" by which God and Christ are visibly manifesting their divine presence, power, and glory, the angels will bring them to meet the Lord *in the air* (Luke 9:34; Acts 1:9). This detail is important, signaling that when Christ comes again he will draw *very near* to the earth, which, according to Scripture, is the center of the physical universe, the apple of God's eye, and the future home of Christ and his Bride (Matt. 17:5; 24:30; Luke 9:34–35; 21:27; Rev. 21:1–4).

Observe carefully that Paul says *nothing at all* about the Lord removing his Church to Heaven. The apostle leaves her—and us—in the air. What, then, will take place *after* this happy reunion? Here, Paul does not say. However,

what he *does* say suggests an interpretation far richer than that of the dispensationalists. Paul writes, "And as a result of these things, we shall forever be with the Lord." Note the finality—the ultimacy—of that phrase. When the Lord returns, we shall *forever* be together: together with him and together with one other. Thus, Paul's exact wording strongly suggests that he has in mind the ultimate goal of Salvation History: life together with Christ in the new heavens and the new earth. Admittedly, he makes no explicit mention of *where* the saints will be with the Lord. But that is simply because his present focus is elsewhere: the reunion of separated loved ones at the Parousia. We have already seen, however, that in his other eschatological writings Paul uniformly associates the Resurrection with the final renewal of all creation (Rom. 8:18–25; 1 Cor. 15:20–28, 50–57; Phil. 3:20–21). Thus, his message here is that *a glorious reunion awaits all the saints*, and immediately following that *a glorious life together in the eternal World to Come*.

In every generation let the saints comfort one another with this astonishing promise of God (v. 18).

1 Thessalonians 5:1-10

Our second text is 1 Thessalonians 5:1–10. Here we do well to remember that the Greek NT does not contain chapter breaks or verse numbers. There is no new chapter, and—in the broadest sense—there is no new subject. Paul is still dealing with events surrounding the Consummation at the Parousia of Christ.

He does, however, address a new facet of the Consummation, and in so doing turns from comfort to *exhortation*. For now, having given the Thessalonians a tiny glimpse of life together in the World to Come (4:17), he wants to prepare them for yet another element of the Consummation, through which they all must safely pass if they hope to enter that World: the Judgment. It too will occur at the Parousia, for when Christ returns he will not only catch up his glorified Bride into the sky, but will also judge the world in righteousness.

He opens by saying, "But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren" (v. 1 NKJV). We cannot help but ask: The times and seasons of what? But the answer is obvious: the times and seasons of the Parousia he has just been talking about. Here, however, he refers to it as the Day of the Lord (vv. 2, 4). Why so? Because now his focus is upon judgment and retribution, themes that appear

prominently in all the "Day of the LORD" passages found in the OT (e.g., Isa. 2; Joel 2; Amos 5; Zeph. 1; Mal. 1). But again, in the DNT the Day of the LORD becomes the Day of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here, then, Paul's focus is upon what Christ will do *after* the Resurrection, Transformation, and Catching Up of the saints: He will judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17:31).

To read the remainder of our text is to see the reason for Paul's exhortation. When the Lord returns, he will come as a thief in the night (v. 2). At that time, he will wreak sudden destruction upon a world system that is completely unprepared for his arrival: a world deluded by the dark presence, power, and promises of the Antichrist (v. 3; 2 Thess. 2:1–12). What will the destruction look like? Here, Paul does not say; however, other NT texts tell us that it will be with fire, and that it will involve the holy angels seizing the unrighteous and bringing them, first to the Judgment Seat of Christ (in the air), and then to Gehenna (i.e., the Lake of Fire), where they will suffer eternal punishment away from the presence of the Lord (Matt. 13:37–43; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Thess. 1:9; 2 Peter 3; Rev. 20:11–15).

But with the saints it shall not be so. They are not in darkness: neither in intellectual darkness about the times, seasons, and events of the Consummation, nor in the moral darkness for which the world system will then be destroyed (vv. 4–5). However, in order to escape the Judgment *they must maintain due diligence* (Matt. 24:32–25:30). They must remain spiritually alert and sober. They must walk as good soldiers of Christ. They must clothe themselves with the breastplate of faith and love; and for a helmet they must put on the hope (i.e., the confident assurance) of salvation (vv. 6–8). Happily, they are well able to do so, for the sovereign God has not destined them for the outpouring of his wrath that will occur on the Day of the Lord Jesus (v. 9; 1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 1:14; 2 Thess. 1:3–12; 2:1–12). Rather, he has destined them for full and final salvation, which Christ himself will bestow on all who belong to him when he comes again (Rom. 8:18–25; 2 Cor. 5:1–10; Phil. 3:20–21; 1 Thess. 4:13–18; 2 Thess. 1:3–12).

Observe in verse 10 how Paul concludes this section by reverting to the theme with which he opened his meditation (1 Thess. 4:13–18). The Lord has died for us so that whether we are awake (i.e., alive on earth) or asleep (i.e., living in Heaven as departed spirits while our bodies slumber in the dust of the earth), we can live: together with *him* now, and together with *each other* in the world that he will create for us at his return.

We find, then, that our two texts do indeed form a unit, a unit that illumines the different facets of the one Consummation set to occur at the one Parousia of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Dispensational Interpretation

I have argued that 1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:10 not only accommodates, but actually assumes and teaches a single Consummation. Our dispensational brethren disagree. John MacArthur writes, "This passage, along with John 14:1–3 and 1 Corinthians 15:51–52, forms the biblical basis for the 'Rapture' of the Church, which takes place when Jesus comes to collect his redeemed and take them back to Heaven." In commenting further, MacArthur argues that the Rapture will occur seven years prior to the Day of the Lord; that the Day of the Lord is exclusively a Day of Judgment upon the unbelieving world; and that the Day of the Lord "falls into two parts," with the first occurring throughout—but especially at the end of—the Great Tribulation, and the second occurring at the end of the Millennium.

Needless to say, this interpretation is controversial. As MacArthur himself would freely admit, the text itself explicitly teaches *none* of these things. In particular, it says nothing about Christ taking his Church to Heaven, nothing about a future millennium, nothing about the Day of the Lord being devoted exclusively to judgment, nothing about it falling into two parts, and nothing about the multiple resurrections required to make this complicated scenario work. Clearly MacArthur is reading his eschatology into the text. The questions are: Has he done so successfully? What arguments does he advance? And are they sound?" Let us turn to the notes in his study Bible to find out.

MacArthur opens his case by appealing to two other NT texts: John 14:1–3 and 1 Corinthians 15:51–52. The former, he says, "specifically explained" the mystery of the Rapture; the latter further illumined it. Here in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, Paul (allegedly) goes on to complete the revelation of this mystery, giving us "the full details."

We have seen, however, that in John 14:1–3 the Lord did *not* "specifically explain" the Rapture. Rather, we saw that his words *could* refer to Christ removing his Church to Heaven, but that the DNT rules out this interpretation, inviting us to embrace the traditional amillennial view, with which John 14:1–3 harmonizes extremely well.

As for 1 Corinthians 15:51–52, we have seen that it closely parallels 1

Thessalonians 4:13–18, teaching nothing more (or less) than the sudden, supernatural transformation of the living saints. It makes no mention at all of a secret rapture of the Church.

If, then, as MacArthur states, 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 is indeed the "premiere" NT text on the Rapture—the text in which Paul gives us the "full details" about this great eschatological mystery—we would certainly expect him (Paul) to at least mention (and hopefully explain) the invisible removal of his Church to Heaven for seven years. We have just seen, however, that he does neither.

Secondly, MacArthur points to various *dissimilarities* between the "Catching Up" of 1 Thessalonians 4 and the Coming (Parousia) of Matthew 24. From these dissimilarities he deduces that two separate eschatological events are in view. Happily, he acknowledges the many similarities: a trumpet, a resurrection, glory clouds, and the ingathering of elect believers. Unhappily, he refuses to draw from them the most natural conclusion: that Paul, with the benefit of fresh apostolic insight, is simply providing *further* details about the same event: the one Parousia that Christ will effect at the Consummation of all things.

MacArthur's case for distinguishing the Parousia of Matthew 24 from the Catching Up of 1 Thessalonians 4 is not persuasive. For example, he points out that in Matthew we see the Son of Man coming on the clouds, but that in 1 Thessalonians we see believers ascending in them. But does this "dissimilarity" really require us to posit two separate events? Is it not far more reasonable simply to say that Christ, at his Parousia, first arrives on the clouds of Heaven, and then, by means of angelic agency, gathers his saints into (or through) those clouds to safety at his side (Luke 9:34)?

Again, MacArthur says that in Matthew 24 we find the *angels* gathering up Christ's "elect" (i.e., the tribulation saints), while in 1 Thessalonians 4 we see Christ himself personally gathering up a *different* elect (i.e., his Church). However, our text does *not* say that Christ himself will gather his Church. Rather, it simply says that we "will be caught up together . . . to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4:17). So again, there is no real conflict between the two passages. In both cases it is clearly Christ who does the "Catching Up" *by means of angelic agency* (Matt. 24:31). And this, in turn, means that there is no need to distinguish between two different "elects" and two different events. Both texts deal with one and the same elect experiencing one and the same

event. They deal with the Church—the called-out ones of all times and places —experiencing the one Consummation of all things.

Thirdly, MacArthur states that in Matthew 24 there is no mention of the Resurrection, while with Paul it is his main theme. Given, however, the many similarities between the two passages, surely the most natural explanation for this minor difference is to say that in the Olivet Discourse (as elsewhere) Christ presupposed on the part of his disciples a good understanding of the Resurrection (Matt. 13:37–43; 22:23–33). Certainly he had already taught them that the Parousia, the Resurrection, and the Judgment were essentially simultaneous events (John 5:19–29). Also, dispensationalists themselves teach that at the visible return of Christ following the Tribulation there *will* be a resurrection of the OT saints and of those who died during the Tribulation. But if Jesus's silence about a resurrection in Matthew 24 does not rule out a resurrection, who is to say that Matthew 24 and 1 Thessalonians 4 are not parallel after all?

Seeing, then, that all of MacArthur's "dissimilarities" are easily explained, and seeing that the many similarities are actually quite compelling, we conclude that these two texts are indeed parallel; that both passages teach and presuppose a single Parousia of Christ, at which time there will be a general resurrection and a general judgment. And as we saw in the previous chapter, every major eschatological text in the DNT confirms this conclusion.

In his final argument for a pre-tribulation Rapture, MacArthur invites us to draw a sharp distinction between the two parts of our text. He states that the first part (1 Thess. 4:13–18) deals with the redemption of the Church, whereas the second (1 Thess. 5:1–10) deals with the judgment of the unbelieving world. In particular, he asserts that the "coming" of Christ mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 4:15 (i.e., the Rapture) exclusively affects the Church, while the Day of the Lord mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 5:2 exclusively affects unbelievers living at three different times: (1) the seven-year tribulation, (2) the Judgment at Christ's Coming following the Tribulation, and (3) the Judgment at the end of the Millennium. In short, the "coming" of 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 is redemptive only, while the (threefold) Day of the Lord of 1 Thessalonians 5:1–10 is judicial only.

For many reasons this distinction (not to mention the complicated scenario built around it) is profoundly misguided.

Concerning the texts themselves, we have already seen that they are a unit—

that throughout 1 Thessalonians Paul has in mind a single Momentous Event. It is *the* Day of the Lord Jesus (1 Thess. 5:2), which will occur at *the* Parousia (1 Thess. 4:15), and which has both redemptive (1 Thess. 4:13–18) and judicial (or retributive) aspects (1 Thess. 5:1–10).

Concerning the one Parousia, we have seen that it most certainly *does* involve judgment upon the unbelieving world, as well as (final) redemption for the Church (Matt. 13:37–43; 24–25; 1 Cor. 15:20–28; 2 Thess. 1–2). Concerning the one Day of the Lord, we have seen that it most certainly *does* involve redemption for the Church, and not simply judgment upon the unbelieving world. Indisputably, this is the united testimony of God's OT prophets, Christ himself, and all his NT apostles (Isa. 2; Ezek. 38–39; Joel 2:28–32; 3:12–17; Obad. vv. 15–21; Nah. 1:12–15; Zeph. 2:4–11; 3:8–13; Zech. 12:1–9; Matt. 7:21–23; 26:29; 2 Cor. 1:14; 2 Tim. 1:12; 4:8; 2 Peter 3:10–13).

Finally, it is especially important to note that in his second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul quite powerfully represents the Day of Christ as having both redemptive and judicial components (2 Thess. 1:3–10; 2:11–12). What does this tell us about his thinking in the first letter?

For all these reasons, then, MacArthur greatly errs when he states, "Believers have no part in the Day of the Lord." And he also errs when he concludes from this false premise that the Catching Up of the saints (1 Thess. 4:15) and the Day of the Lord (1 Thess. 5:2) are two separate events.

Some Final Questions

Having addressed John MacArthur's arguments for a pre-tribulation Rapture, I want to conclude our study of this crucial text by asking my dispensational brethren a few pointed questions.

If Paul really desired to distinguish between a coming of Christ *for* the saints (1 Thess. 4:15) and a coming *with* the saints (1 Thess. 4:13), why would he not have created and consistently used two different terms to describe these events, thereby making his meaning clear and avoiding all confusion?

Why, in all of Paul's writings, would he repeatedly speak of *the* Coming of Christ (1 Thess. 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:1), or of "his Coming," as though there were only one of them (1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thess. 2:19; 2 Thess. 2:8)?

Why would he speak of *the* Resurrection as though there were only one of them (Acts 17:18, 32; 1 Cor. 15:21, 42; 2 Tim. 2:18)?

Why would he speak of *the* Judgment (Acts 24:25; Rom. 2:2), or *the* Day of Judgment (Rom. 2:16), or *the* Day of the Lord (1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 1:14; 1 Thess. 5:3) as though there were only one of them?

And why—if *the* Parousia, *the* Resurrection, and *the* Day of the Lord are all fractured into sub-units and spread out on the timeline of Salvation History—would he not carefully explain such things, whether here in the highly eschatological Thessalonian letters, or elsewhere in the DNT?

Finally, is it not clear from all these questions that the great apostle—and all the other NT writers—viewed the Consummation as a single unified event set to occur at the Parousia of the Lord?

And if this is true, is it not time, and past time, for our dispensational brethren to retrace their steps, seat themselves afresh at the feet of the Teacher, and listen to him?

5. It Will Not Come Until

(2 Thessalonians 2:1–14)

For all its doctrinal complexity, this lengthy eschatological text was written primarily out of deep pastoral concern. As verses 1–2 make plain, a rumor was circulating among the Thessalonian house churches to the effect that the Day of the Lord had come; that it was imminent. Since this rumor was troubling the brethren, distracting them from their spiritual mission and daily responsibilities, Paul addressed it pointedly. His message is clear: The Day of the Lord will *not* come until certain things happen first; until certain unmistakable *signs* appear on the historical horizon. Therefore, until you see those signs, *stand firm* (v. 15) and *stay busy* (v. 17; 3:6–13).

Because this passage informs the Church about important events leading up to the Consummation, it demands close attention. My approach will be to give the gist of each section, and then to spotlight the many characteristics indicating that Paul presupposes a single Consummation at the Parousia of Christ.

An Urgent Request (vv. 1–2)

Verses 1–2 give us the apostle's urgent request. The subject matter is threefold: The Coming of Christ (1 Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23), the gathering together of the saints to him (i.e., the "Catching Up" of 1 Thess. 4:17), and the Day of the Lord (1 Thess. 5:2). Dispensationalists assert that the

gathering together is distinct from the Day of the Lord, with seven years between the two. But Paul says no such thing. On the contrary, the juxtaposition of these closely related subjects makes it quite clear that he has in mind a single Consummation. Yes, each is a discrete event; but the discrete events are elements of a single Momentous Event. If the concerned apostle and pastor thought otherwise, would he not have said so?

As for the request itself, it may be paraphrased thus: "Don't let any evil spirit, any false teaching or prophecy, or any fake letter as if from one of us apostles persuade you that the Day of the Lord has come, and so shake you from your proper spiritual composure" (see Mark 13:5–6). Concerning the crucial verb "has come," the NIV Study Bible well remarks: "Obviously, Christ's climactic return had not occurred, but Paul was combating the idea that the final days had begun *and their completion would be imminent.*" "No," says the apostle, "certain things must happen first; certain signs must appear on the stage of history." This simple truth, directly contradicted by dispensational teaching on the Rapture, is of great importance for all of God's people, but especially for those who will live and serve in the last of the last days. By holding firmly to it, Christians should be well able to keep their cool, even at the end of the world."

It Will Not Come Until (vv. 3–5)

What exactly are the telltale signs that will enable them to do so? In the Olivet Discourse the Lord had identified several. Here, Paul focuses on just two, presumably because they are especially important and will occur closest to the end. They are *the rebellion* (Greek: *apostasia*) and *the revelation of the Man of Lawlessness* (or the Antichrist).

Concerning the first of these, it is true that the DNT anticipates a large-scale apostasy, or falling away from the (profession of) faith, at the time of the end (Matt. 24:10–12; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1–9). Here, however, the close association of the *apostasia* with the revelation of the Man of Lawlessness strongly suggests a causal relation. If so, it is surely best to follow the NIV and ESV in translating *apostasia* as *rebellion*. On this reading, Paul is saying that the Day of the Lord will not come until the corrupt world system fully and finally rebels against the Law and Gospel of God, paving the way for Satan to go public with his counterfeit christ, and for the fallen world system to follow after him (vv. 10–11; Matt. 24:12; Rev. 13:3).

As for the Man of Lawlessness, Paul draws freely upon OT prophecy to give us the gist of his character and very short career (vv. 3–4; Dan. 7:8, 20–21, 25; 9:26–27; 11:36). Though Paul does not use the word, it is clear that he thinks of this man, above all, as an *Antichrist*. As the apostle John would put it, he is the final human embodiment of the antichrist spirit, and so is *the* Antichrist himself (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3). Very importantly, the Greek word *anti* means *against* or *instead of*. We see both meanings here and throughout our text. The Man of Lawlessness will act *against* Christ, even as he blasphemously tries to act *instead of* Christ as the appointed prophet, priest, and king of the world.

Verses 3–5 give us several illustrations of this all-pervading motif.

Like Christ at his first and second comings, the Man of Lawlessness will be *revealed* in his proper time; his time, however, will be (cut) short, since he, unlike Christ, is a "son of destruction"—that is, a man doomed to destruction (v. 3; 2 Thess. 1:7; 2 Tim. 1:10; 1 Peter 1:7, 13; 1 John 3:2).

Unlike Christ, who loved the Father and delighted to do his will, the Man of Lawlessness will *oppose* every so-called god or object of worship, including the one true living God and his divine Son (vv. 4, 8; John 8:28; Heb. 10:7). He will stand *against* the triune God and his people.

Finally, acting *instead* of Christ, the Man of Lawlessness will exalt himself, "seating himself in the sanctuary [or temple] of God, displaying himself as God" (v. 4). This verse calls to mind the sin of (the archangel?) Lucifer, who, from the very beginning, has sought to exalt himself above God, and to usurp the worship that properly belongs to the LORD (Isa. 14:13–14; Matt. 4:9). In the Man of Lawlessness—who will present himself as God incarnate—he (Satan) will briefly achieve his goal: The whole (unregenerate) world will worship him (Rev. 13:8).

This, I believe, is the sense of Paul's words about "the sanctuary," (Greek, *naos:* the sacred, inmost part of a temple). He is not looking for the Man of Lawlessness to seat himself in the temple at Jerusalem, from which, in Paul's day, he could hardly have been expected to gain a worldwide following. Still less is he looking for him to seat himself in the Church, since at the time of this letter the Church had neither institutional status nor spiritual credibility in the eyes of the Gentile world (1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21). Rather, he is simply looking for the Man of Lawlessness to present himself as God incarnate, thereby seating himself in the place of the universal worship that rightfully belongs to God and Christ (Isa. 14:13-14).

Note from verse 5 that Paul had previously taught the Thessalonians about these things, and is therefore surprised that they have already forgotten them. Now if, as dispensationalists admonish us, the Church is supposed to look only for Christ (i.e., at a secret Rapture), and never for the Antichrist (i.e., as a sign of Christ's Coming), why does Paul tell the Thessalonians to do the exact opposite? The answer is clear: *He never told them to look for a secret Rapture*. Rather, he told them to look for the one Coming of Christ, but also for the foremost sign of that Coming: the appearance of the Antichrist. Armed with such wisdom, no believer can fall prey to false prophecies about an "imminent" return of Christ—as all too many of our dispensational brethren have.

The Restrainer (vv. 6–7)

Seeking to keep the Thessalonians on their spiritual toes, Paul now reminds them that the mystery of lawlessness is already at work (v. 7). He means that the spirit of Antichrist (i.e., Satan and his demon hosts) is now abroad in the world, eager to raise up *the* Antichrist himself: the Man of Lawlessness (1 John 2:18). For the moment, God is restraining Satan from doing so—through what instrumentality, Paul does not say, since he spoke of this earlier when he was with them. Possibly he has in mind a (Roman) ruler (something he might be loath to mention in a letter), or an angel, or simply the power and person of the Holy Spirit himself (Rom. 13:1–7; Rev. 12:7). In any case, his inspired words assure the Church that the restrainer will continue to restrain Satan until God, at his good pleasure, takes him out of the way. Since this must happen, and since it could happen without warning, the saints must stand watch.

In passing, let us note how closely these verses parallel the teaching of Revelation 20 (Rev. 20:1–3, 7–10). In both cases we learn that Satan is bound —and the Church free to fulfill her mission of global evangelism—*until* God removes the restrainer (who is ultimately God himself), thereby, in swift succession, releasing the devil for a little season, bringing forth the Man of Lawlessness, bringing on the Last Battle, and bringing back the High King of Heaven and Earth. Thus shall the sovereign God work all things together for the good of those who love him, of those who are the called according to his purpose (Rom. 8:28 NKJV).

The Deceptive Career of a Counterfeit Christ (vv. 8-14)

In verses 8–12 Paul again takes up his theme of the revelation of the Man of Lawlessness, this time going into greater detail about his brief, dramatic, and dangerously deceptive career. In so doing, he also gives us an astonishing disclosure, not simply of a sovereign God, but also of a sovereign God with a flair for the dramatic. In particular, for wise reasons God has ordained that at the end of Salvation History Satan will be allowed to raise up a counterfeit prophet, priest, king, kingdom, and "god-man" who, in many ways, will darkly mirror the Person and Work of the true Christ. Here we have the final manifestation of the principle laid down in the Protoevangelium and the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares: Both Christ and Satan will have their own people, sown together in the same earth, growing side by side, and running closely parallel to each other until the Day of Judgment and final separation at the end of the age (Gen. 3:15; Matt. 12:22-30; 13:36-43; Luke 4:6; Rev. 14:14–16). Knowing this, the apostle is at pains to show that the Man of Lawlessness is doubly an Antichrist: Not only does he oppose Christ, but he also apes him—powerfully, deceptively, and dangerously. Yet for all that, he and his evil career are in the omnipotent grip of the true God and the true Christ, who will by no means allow their little ones to be deceived (Matt. 24:24; John 10:5).

Accordingly, Paul begins by telling the Thessalonians what will happen when the restrainer is removed: The Lawless One will be revealed, much as Christ was revealed in the days of his flesh (and will again be revealed in the Day of the Lord). Unexpectedly, yet quite significantly, Paul does not immediately describe his evil career. Instead, he first speaks of his destruction: The Lord himself will slay him with the breath of his mouth at the appearing (epiphaneia) of his coming (parousia) (Isa. 11:4). The message here is both clear and comforting: The career of the Lawless One will be exceedingly short, brought swiftly to an end by the return of Christ in judgment. Therefore, the revelation of the Man of Lawlessness is the single most important sign of the imminence of the end—and, in its own way, a great encouragement to the (suffering) saints of God (Luke 21:28).

In verse 9 Paul resumes his teaching about the career of the Lawless One. Now, however, he speaks of his *coming*. Again, this word denotes the arrival of a powerful dignitary, as of an emperor or a king. Just as Christ, in the days of his flesh, arrived on the scene with great power and authority, so too will the Lawless One. Just as God the Father enabled Christ to perform signs and true

wonders, so too will Satan—the spiritual father of the Lawless One—enable his son to perform signs and "lying" (i.e., real, but misleading) wonders (John 8:44; Rev. 13:2, 4). The Lord Jesus himself warned his disciples of this very thing (Matt. 24:24). Later, John the Revelator will do the same (Rev. 13:13–14; 16:14; 19:20). Let not the saints forget.

According to verse 10, when the Lawless One appears he will come not only with counterfeit miracles, but also with "every deception of wickedness." This deception will include "the lie"—a false but very winsome gospel: a new, alternative religion. It will work. Multitudes who did not welcome the love of the true Gospel of Christ will believe the false gospel of the Antichrist, and so perish (v. 11; Rev. 13:3).

Because the Lawless One will gain a large following, and because it is important for the saints to understand why, Paul is moved to explain. He does so in verses 11–13. He has just said that the Man of Lawlessness will deceive multitudes because "they did not welcome the love of the truth" (v. 10). The Greek here is dechomai, a word that can mean to welcome or to receive. In this case, both senses are applicable, bringing into view the biblical tension between man's freedom and responsibility on the one hand, and God's sovereignty on the other. Why will latter day unbelievers fall prey to the deceptions of the Antichrist? It will be because they did not welcome the message of the truth, but chose instead to take pleasure in unrighteousness (v. 12; Eph. 1:13). Consequently, the God of judgment will hand them over to a deluding influence, so that they will believe "the lie" and stand condemned, together with their god. Here Paul depicts unbelievers as free agents who are responsible to take and pass the Gospel test (John 3:16-21; Acts 13:46). Nevertheless, through a fervent personal expression of thanksgiving, he also reminds his converts always to ascribe their salvation to God: the God who loved and chose them from the beginning, and who—through the preaching of the Gospel, and by the sanctifying work of the Spirit—called them to saving faith Christ (vv. 13-14; Eph. 1:3-14). The Thessalonians are to understand that they freely welcomed the truth of the Gospel only because they had received the love of the truth as a gift from the sovereign God (Matt. 5:6; 13:10–17; John 8:43– 45; 1 Thess. 1:2–5).

Reading this challenging text, Christ's Church is taught to understand, fear, and rejoice. One day up ahead Satan will unveil his man. When he does, few on earth will discern or resist him since his person and work will hew so closely

to Person and Work of Christ. Like Christ, the Antichrist will have a coming and a revelation. Like Christ, he will have a spiritual father who leads and empowers him. Like Christ, he will perform supernatural signs and wonders. Like Christ, he will proclaim a gospel of salvation. Like Christ, he will have a flock and a kingdom, both of which will seem larger and more powerful than those of the Good Shepherd.

In short, things will be just as the Truth himself said: "For false messiahs and false prophets will arise; and they will display great signs and wonders, so great that even the elect would be led astray, if that were possible" (Matt. 24:24). Let his little flock therefore give thanks to the sovereign God who has chosen them, and who has promised to keep them from all deception. But let them also be ever vigilant to receive and welcome the love of the truth, both now and in the dark days immediately prior to the Second Coming of the Light of the World (2 Thess. 2:9, 13). For it is he who endures to the end that will be saved (Matt. 24:13; Jude v. 24).

Conclusion

We have completed our survey of five crucial NT texts dealing with the Parousia and the Consummation. We have heard from Christ, Peter, and Paul. If we had consulted James, John, Jude, and the writer to the Hebrews we would have heard more of the same. None of them speak of a pre-tribulation Rapture. None of them speak of a future millennium. Rather, all of them consistently look for a single Momentous Event at the end of the present evil age: a single Christ-centered consummation set to occur at the Parousia of the High King of Heaven. In sum, all of them crown Amillennialism with the victor's wreath in the Great End Time Debate.

^{1 .} C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 401–402. Cited in Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2003), 160.

^{2.} The Reformation Study Bible (Orlando, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2015), 1401. Hereafter cited as RSB.

^{3.} But see also Matthew 13:30, 41, where the order seems to be reversed.

^{4.} For excellent summaries of various views, see Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1979) pp. 115–118; William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1973), 867–868.

^{5.} Commenting on this passage, the RSB says:

The "all these things" of verse 34 refers to the "all these things" of verse 33, which are distinguished from the Consummation itself. They are the "beginning of the birth pains" (v. 8) and signs that point to the

final Coming of Christ, including the siege and fall of Jerusalem. All the elements of this prophecy, except for the Second Coming itself, had occurred in some form before the apostles died. (p. 1402). We have seen, however, that while in some cases the italicized statement may be true, many of the sign-events mentioned in the discourse did not occur in history prior to the death of the apostles; and even now, some are yet to occur.

- <u>6</u>. Twice in verses 40–41 the Lord says that certain persons will be "taken" while others will be left. What does he mean? On this subject the previous reference to the days of Noah is illuminating. In those days, the people who were spiritually asleep were left behind and swept away by the flood (v. 39). Meanwhile, Noah, his family, and the preserved creatures of the earth were taken up into the ark for salvation. Similarly, at the Parousia the Lord will take (up) his believing family to himself (Greek, *paralambano*: to take and join to oneself), whereas unbelievers will be left behind and therefore swept away in judgment. According to Matthew 13:41–42 the holy angels will have a major role in the sweeping away.
- Z. Commenting on Matthew 25:31–46, NT theologian George Eldon Ladd writes as follows: The clue to the meaning of the parable is Jesus's "brethren." And we have clear evidence as to its meaning.

The clue to the meaning of the parable is Jesus's "brethren." And we have clear evidence as to its meaning. Jesus himself said that his brothers and sisters are those who do the will of the Father—Jesus's disciples (Matt. 12:50). Jesus used a parabolic incident of the nightly separation of sheep and goats to tell his disciples that they have a mission to the nations of the world. The destiny of individuals will be determined by the way they treat Jesus's representatives—his brothers and sisters. They are to go as itinerant preachers, finding lodging and food from those who receive them (Matt. 10:8–11). However, they will meet persecution and imprisonment (Matt. 10:17–18). Those who receive these preachers and treat them well in reality receive Christ. "Whoever receives you receives me" (Matt. 10:14–15). The destiny of nations will be determined by the way they respond to Jesus's representatives. This is not a program of eschatology [as the dispensationalists teach], but a practical parable of human destiny.

New Testament Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1974), 206–207.

- 8. MSB, 2211.
- 9. MSB, 252.1
- 10. NIV Study Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1985), 1869.
- 11. See the article *Keeping Our Cool Till the End of the World*, posted on my website: www.clr4u.org, under Essays.
- 12 It is well worth noting that Paul's words in this text do not rule out the possibility that the Antichrist will emerge from, or associate himself with, a nominally Christian church. (For more, see HKOH, p. 700, and the article at https://www.clr4u.org/it-will-not-come-until-understanding-2-thessalonians-21-14/.)

CHAPTER 14

THE CONSUMMATION: A BIBLICAL SCENARIO

In the course of our journey we have learned much about the Consummation. It is the historical hinge on which the temporary Kingdom of the Son swings into the eternal Kingdom of the Father (and the Son). It is the theme of many solemn, majestic, and soul-stirring OTKPs. It is the capstone of the Millennium and the Morning Star of the World to Come. Its purpose is manifold, its elements simple, its structure unified, and its essence Christ-centered. It is the Blessed Hope of the Church (Titus 2:11–14).

And we need this hope. The God who alone is wise has predestined his Church to an arduous walk through wilderness of this world. But he has not left her comfortless (John 14:16–18). Far from it. When the Risen King ascended on high he gave gifts to men (Eph. 4:8). One of the greatest of these was hope (Rom. 5:2; 8:24; 15:13). He intends that we should see it, embrace it, and constantly draw upon it, thereby receiving strength to worship, serve, and rejoice as we make our difficult way to the Promised Land.

Accordingly, as we bring our study of the Consummation to a close, I want to offer a final biblical scenario of this majestic event—but this time with a special emphasis on hope. As we journey together we will see that God has designed each element of the Consummation in such a way as to ignite a special kind of hope in the hearts of his pilgrim children. At the end of the day, I trust you will have found that the totality of these different kinds of hope makes our one Blessed Hope blessed indeed!

1. The Signs of His Coming

We have seen that Christ and the apostles gave us a body of signs by which we may know that the Parousia and the Consummation are drawing near. Again, in strictness we cannot call them *elements* of the Consummation, since they are providential events that herald the Consummation rather than supernatural events that actually bring it to pass. Nevertheless, because they are

so closely associated with the Consummation—and so vital for the spiritual health of God's people—we do well to consider them afresh.

On this score our Lord himself led the way, speaking about many of these signs in his Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21). After his ascension and the subsequent outpouring of the Holy Spirit, he would inspire his writing apostles to disclose the rest, thereby giving us a complete picture of the events that will herald the end (Rom. 11; 2 Thess. 2; Rev. 6–20). The signs of his Coming fall into two basic categories. Let us consider them once again, paying special attention to the kinds of hope they engender.

Perennial Signs of Cosmic Judgment and Rebirth

Our Lord spoke of *the beginning of the birth pains* (Matt. 24:8). These are signs that appear throughout the Era of Gospel Proclamation, and that point ahead to the Greatest Tribulation, the Day of Judgment, and the eternal rebirth of the universe, life, and man.

Importantly, these signs reflect the continual clash of the Kingdom of God with the kingdom of Satan. Ever since the Day of Pentecost, Christ himself has been mounting a powerful redemptive assault on Satan's Domain of Darkness (Rev. 6:1–2; 12:17). The strong man and his followers are not pleased (Matt. 12:22–31). At every turn they seek to oppose the High King and his army; at every defeat they seek to avenge their formidable losses (Rev. 12:13–17). This warfare is perennial, so that the signs associated with it are also perennial. They occur throughout the entire course of the High King's heavenly reign.

Broadly, there are two kinds of early birth pains.

On the one hand, we have what are manifestly judgments of God (but also the wages of human sin): wars, famines, earthquakes, pestilence, and the judicial hardening of human hearts (Matt. 24:7; Luke 21:5–19; Rom. 1:18–32; Rev. 6:1–8; 9:20–21; 16:9, 11). But while God disciplines and warns the world through these events, he also gives understanding and hope through the Church. In every generation she is called to interpret these judgments, to proclaim the greater Judgment that they portend, and to direct sinners to the One who took that judgment upon himself so that a believing people might flee the wrath to come (Matt. 3:7; 20:28; 1 Thess. 1:10).

On the other hand, we have what are manifestly acts of Satan: the emergence of false christs and false prophets, the apostasy of nominal believers, and the persecution of the true spiritual Church (Matt. 24:4–14; Rev. 6:9–11;

11:7–10; 16:12–16; 20:7–10). As in Eden, so throughout all Salvation History: God tests men's love of God, truth, and righteousness, in large part by allowing deceiving spirits to raise their voice against his (Gen. 3:1–5; Prov. 17:3; John 3:16–21; Acts 17:26–28; 2 Thess. 2:9–12; 1 John 4:1). In the midst of this spiritual warfare the Church also raises her voice, urging men and nations to listen to him who is the way, the truth, and the life, and to ponder the many reasons why they should do so (John 5:30–47; 14:6; Acts 2:22–26; 17:22–31).

Importantly, the Lord strictly warned his disciples against misconstruing the meaning of the beginning of the birth pains, saying, "These things must take place, but the end has not yet come" (Matt. 24:6). Yes, they are indeed signs that the end is fast approaching (Rev. 12:12); but they are also signs that the end is still to come (Mark 13:7). Accordingly, the wise disciple will not allow himself to be distracted by these particular signs. Instead, he will recall their meaning, renew his commitment to the cause of Christ, and immerse himself afresh in the gifts and callings of his Lord, all in the sure hope that his labors are not in vain, and that soon the day of birth will arrive (Matt. 24:14; 1 Cor. 15:58).

Unique Signs of the Imminence of the Parousia

These signs will occur near the end of the present evil age, and will indeed herald the imminence of the Parousia and the Consummation. Again, they will not enable believers to determine "the day or the hour" of their Master's return, only that it is quite near, even at the door (Matt. 24:32–36). Therefore, wise disciples should be on the lookout for (the confluence of) these signs, and should take courage when they see them on the horizon.

One such sign is *the completion of world evangelization*. As Jesus himself expressed it, "This Gospel of the Kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all the nations. *And then the end will come*" (Matt. 24:14; cf. Rev. 11:7). Only the Lord himself knows exactly when this prophecy will be fulfilled. Nevertheless, alert believers, closely monitoring the state of the global harvest, will rejoice in hope as they see thriving churches planted in "every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9). And when it becomes clear that the Last Battle is indeed upon them, they will know with certainty that now the Great Commission is indeed complete (2 Peter 3:15; Rev. 11:7–13; 20:7–10).

Another such sign—closely related to the first—is the conversion of the great

mass of ethnic Jews. According to the apostle Paul this will occur near the end of the Era of Proclamation, when the full number of elect Gentiles has finally come to Christ (Luke 21:24). At that time God will graciously visit his ancient people and graft (many of) them into his New Covenant vine through the preaching of the Gospel and a newfound faith in their Messiah. When he does, it will be nothing less than "life from the dead," a thrilling promise that surely refers to the Resurrection that Christ himself will shortly effect at his Parousia (Rom. 11:20–27).¹

A third sign of the nearness of the end is *thick and widespread spiritual darkness*. Hitherto, the light of the Gospel has shone fairly brightly in the darkness of the world system, restraining much of its evil (Matt. 5:14; John 1:5; Phil. 2:15; Rev. 20:1–3). But in the last of the last days, the darkness will largely prevail. The Lord himself warned us that lawlessness will increase, and that the love of many (professing believers) will grow cold (Matt. 24:12). He said that things will be as they were in the days of Noah, Lot, and Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 6:5; Matt. 24:36–44; Luke 17:26–30).

The apostle Paul concurs, predicting that in those days the manifestations of human depravity will be appalling and appallingly diverse (2 Tim. 3:1–9); that many (professing Christians) will fall away from the faith (1 Tim. 4:1); that prior to the eschatological conversion of ethnic Israel (many of) the Gentile branches (i.e., nominal Christians and nominally Christian nations) will be broken off from the vine of God (Rom. 11:19–21); and that just prior to the manifestation of the Antichrist, a final "rebellion" will occur, in which unregenerate humanity itself will altogether cast off the cords of the Law and Gospel of God (Ps. 2:1–3; 2 Thess. 2:3; Rev. 13:3; 16:14).

In the Revelation, the Spirit corroborates these testimonies: Even in the face of lethal temporal judgments, the men of the last days will refuse to repent of their idolatry, murders, sorceries, sexual immorality, and thefts (Rev. 9:13–21). Such prospects are daunting, but forewarned is forearmed.

This brings us to the fourth sign of the imminence of the end, *the Last Battle* (Rev. 11:7; 13:7; 16:12–16; 19:17–21; 20:7–10). It will commence with the rise to power of the Man of Lawlessness (2 Thess. 2:1–4), also referred to as the Antichrist (1 John 2:18). He will be a satanically energized world leader with pretensions to deity, who, by means of persuasive words and miraculous powers, will succeed in consolidating the fallen world system around himself and against the people of God (Rev. 13:3–4). The resulting persecution—

global in scale and fierce in intensity—will culminate in the apparent demise of the true spiritual Church and her expulsion from the public square. Institutionally, she will lie dead in the street of the great city, which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also her Lord was crucified (Matt. 24:15; Rev. 11:7–10; Rev. 16:12–16; 20:7–10). It was this latter-day persecution—and not simply the destruction of Jerusalem—that the Lord had in view when he warned his disciples, saying, "For at that time there will be great tribulation, the likes of which have not been seen from the beginning of the world until now—no, and never will be" (Matt. 24:21–22).

It should not be supposed, however, that the Church alone will endure the tribulation of those days. For God—responding to the final assault of evil against his Christ, his truth, and his people—will bring wave upon wave of providential judgment against the rebellious nations. As the end draws near, these judgments will increase in number and intensity, with less and less time in between for (a dangerously deceptive) "business as usual" (see Matt. 24:36–44; Luke 18:1–8; 1 Thess. 5:1–3; Rev. 8:1–6).

Here, then, is the fifth and final sign of the imminence of the end: stupendous disruptions in nature and society. They are at once "death throes" and "(transitional) birth pangs." On the one hand, they signal the imminent destruction of Satan's evil kingdom and the demise of the City of Man (Rev. 18). As such, they are like trumpets, mercifully warning sinners of the Judgment soon to come, and giving them a final opportunity to repent and trust in Christ (Rev. 8:2). On the other hand, they signal the imminent birth of God's Kingdom in its glorious fullness. As such, they are meant to give insight and courage to the saints (Dan. 12:10; Matt. 24:8). Speaking of these extraordinary events, the Lord remarked as follows:

And there will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on earth distress among nations perplexed by the roaring of the sea and its waves; men will be fainting from fear, and from foreboding over the things that keep coming on the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. (Luke 21:25–26)

And unless those days had been cut short, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake, they will indeed be cut short. (Matt. 24:22)

It is not difficult to see why Christ and his (writing) apostles make these

signs known to all disciples: How shall they endure such strong tribulation unless they know that it is all part of God's plan, that God will preserve them through it, that it will be ever so brief, and that it will both herald and trigger the return of their King: the One who will fly swiftly to the rescue of his beloved Bride, and who will richly reward her faithfulness with the unspeakable joys of the Kingdom of God (Luke 21:17–19; John 10:28–29; 2 Thess. 1:3–10; Rev. 11:11–19; 20:9–10; 21–22)?

We see, then, that the Lord gave us all these signs in order to kindle hope: hope of his provision and protection amidst tribulation, hope of his Parousia, and hope of the eternal blessings that it will bring (Rom. 8:18–24; 31–39). As he himself said, "Now when these things start to happen, stand up and lift your heads, for your redemption is drawing near!" (Luke 21:28).

2. The Parousia

This is the hub, the central element of the Consummation, the core eschatological event that brings all the others to pass in quick succession. Many NT texts describe it, but none more famously than the one found in the Gospel of Matthew:

But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will wail and mourn and beat their breasts; and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send forth his angels with a loud blast of the trumpet; and they will gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of the skies to the other. (Matt. 24:29–31; cf. 1 Thess. 4:13–18; 2 Thess. 1:3–10; Rev. 19:11–21)

Earlier we discussed this text in some detail; here I want simply to highlight five outstanding elements of the Lord's Parousia, and then to consider afresh why God has so poignantly revealed them to us before they actually come to pass.

First, there is a *darkening*. God literally extinguishes the sun, moon, and stars. The result is thick darkness, the kind that engulfed the earth-in-the-deep at the dawn of creation, and a kind that will recall the spiritual darkness that

engulfed all mankind through the fall of Adam (Gen. 1:1–5; Col. 1:13). But as it was in the beginning, so here: The darkness sets the stage for the appearing of the Light of the World, the One who will now separate all light from all darkness forever. In that day, sinners will recoil from the Light; but the saints will loudly declare that it is exceedingly good (Gen. 1:1–5; Eccl. 11:7; 2 Cor. 4:6).

Secondly, there is an *appearing*: of the Son of Man, and also of the sign, the power, and the glory that will surround him. Because of the one Resurrection, every eye will see him (Rev. 1:7). But with the seeing of the eye, there will also be a seeing of the mind and heart. In his Light, all will see light (Ps. 36:9). The spiritual truth that was previously made known to all men and nations through creation, conscience, Scripture, history, and the Gospel of Jesus Christ will now appear: palpably, powerfully, and inescapably (Josh. 4:23–24; Isa. 45:20–25; Gal. 6:16; Eph. 3:4–6; Phil. 2:9–11; 1 Thess. 1:9; 1 Tim. 3:15).

Thirdly, there will be *mourning*. It will emanate from all who, to the very end, suppressed the knowledge of the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18). Yes, there will mourning over the loss of the things they worshiped in life (Rev. 18). But far more dreadfully, there will be mourning over the loss of their eternal souls (Mark 8:36). Scripture itself anticipates their lament: "If only I had sought the Lord when he could be found; if only I had called on him when he was near; if only I had responded to the light by which God tested my love of the truth. For now the door is shut, and the thing that I feared has come upon me" (see Job 3:25–26; Isa. 55:6; Prov. 3:20–33; Matt. 7:7, 25:10; John 1:9; 3:16–21; Acts 17:30–31; 2 Thess. 1:8; Rev. 1:7; 18:1–24).

Fourthly, there will be *gathering*—a gathering of Christ's elect, a gathering of his enemies, and so a gathering of all nations (Matt. 13:30, 24:31, 25:32; Luke 19:27). It is a gathering unto judgment: unto eternal reward and eternal retribution (Matt. 25:31–46). But above all, it is a gathering unto the truth: the truth about what each human being did with the light that was given to him during the days of his pilgrimage on the earth (Luke 12:47; John 3:16–21; Rom. 2:1–16).

Finally, there will be a *centering*. At the Parousia the luminaries above will be dissolved, and the earth below will be consumed in fire (Isa. 34:4; Zech. 14:6; 2 Peter 3:10; Rev. 20:11). As a result, the true Center will now be revealed: the High King of Heaven, seated on his glorious throne, with all men and all angels gathered before him, awaiting the final disposition of all things.² So shall

all mankind realize that the One now enthroned at the center of the physical universe is the One who has *always* been enthroned at the center of the Father's affection, purpose, plan, and work. So shall all mankind behold the Son of God for who he is, and for what God appointed him to be: the Alpha and the Omega, the divine Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer, Ruler, Judge, Re-creator, Light, and Life of the world.

Do we understand why God has structured the Parousia in this way? And do we understand why he has told us all these things beforehand?

Yes, in so speaking he means to instruct, warn, and encourage his believing people, thereby strengthening faith and instilling hope. But beyond this, he also means to address the unbelieving world: all the people who are not yet his people. By structuring the Parousia as he has, and by revealing that structure to us in his Word and through his Church, he is asking beloved sinners everywhere these all-important questions: "Who or what is *your* center? To whom or what are you devoting your life's time, talent, treasure, and energies as you journey through this world toward the hour of your death or the day of my Son's return? Have you considered him: his life, his miracles, his teachings, his death, his resurrection, his exaltation, his people, and his book? Is he not, far and away, the world's best candidate for every man's true center? Will you not therefore turn aside and see this great sight (Ex. 3:3)? Will you not earnestly inquire as to who he is and why he came? Will you not keep on asking, seeking, and knocking until you have found out for sure (Matt. 7:7–8)? And will you not turn from your life of sin and come to him, even as I have commanded all men and all nations to do (Matt. 4:17, Acts 17:30; Rev. 14:6-7)? For I tell you the truth: When the High King of Heaven comes again he will indeed be the absolute center of all things. And no tongue or pen will be able to describe the joy of those spiritual pilgrims who sought and found the Truth, and who then made him the absolute center of their lives" (John 14:6; Jude 1:24).

3. The Resurrection

The Resurrection of the Dead, promised by the OT prophets, taught by Christ, proclaimed by the apostles, and longed for by all the saints, takes place at the Parousia (Acts 26:6–8). Christ himself will accomplish it. As Jesus said, "Don't be amazed at this; for an hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth: those who did what is good to a

resurrection of life, and those who practiced what is evil to a resurrection of condemnation" (John 5:28–29; cf. Phil. 3:20–21).

As these words make clear, there is but one general resurrection, for which reason Christ and his apostles repeatedly speak of it as *the* Resurrection (Matt. 22:30; Luke 14:14; Acts 17:18; 24:15; Phil. 3:11). The saints look forward to it as the consummation of their redemption (John 11:24; Rom. 8:23; Phil. 3:11). When it occurs, their perfected spirits, descending with the Lord from Heaven above, will be joined to perfected bodies, after which they will live forever as fully restored human beings, perfect in body, soul, and spirit (1 Thess. 4:13–18; 5:23). Their new bodies will be like Christ's body: glorious, powerful, incorruptible, and immortal, perfectly suited to the glories of the World to Come (Luke 20:35–36; 1 Cor. 15:43–49; Phil. 3:20–21). One of Israel's leading sects, the Sadducees, flatly denied the bodily resurrection (Mark 12:18). The Athenians, at the sound of Paul's preaching, scoffed at the very idea (Acts 17:32). Modern skeptics follow in their footsteps. But Jesus rebukes them all, saying, "You are mistaken, knowing neither the scriptures nor the power of God" (Matt. 22:29; cf. Mark 12:27). The Resurrection will abundantly vindicate both.

Saints living at the time of Christ's return will not be raised, but suddenly transformed and glorified. According to the apostle John, this amazing change will occur the moment they behold the Lord coming in the sky. "Beloved, even now we are God's children. As for what we will be, that has not yet been revealed; but we do know that when he appears we will be like him, for we will see him just as he is" (1 John 3:2; cf. 2 Cor. 3:18). Similarly, the apostle Paul declares: "Listen carefully, for I am telling you a mystery: Not all of us will sleep, but all of us will be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet" (1 Cor. 15:51–52; cf. 1 Thess. 4:13–18). At the Resurrection of the Dead and the Transformation of the Living Saints, Christ will glorify and gather together the new family of man so that they may live forever with him and his Father in the World to Come.

The Resurrection also involves the Catching Up of risen (or transformed) mankind to meet the Lord in the sky. As we learn from the Olivet discourse, at his Parousia Christ will send forth his angels to gather his elect from the four corners of the earth (Matt. 24:31; 1 Thess. 4:13–18). But as we learn from the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares, he will also send forth his angels to gather up the unrighteous (Matt. 13:36–43). To judge from related NT texts, it

appears that they too will be brought before the Judgment Seat of Christ (where *all* must appear), and then cast into the "furnace of fire" (Matt. 13:43, 50; 25:31–46; cf. 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:11–15). Dispensational interpreters argue that the Catching Up (which they call the Rapture) affects only Christ's Church, occurs in secret, and takes place seven years prior to his visible return in glory. We have seen, however, that this view seriously departs from the Bible, and also from historic Christian theology, confessions, and creeds.

The Resurrection and its concomitants bring the saint's Blessed Hope exceedingly close to home. These amazing events promise believers a healthy new body, a joyful reunion with departed Christian loved ones, and the privilege of being *like* the Lord, *with* the Lord, forever.

4. The Judgment

The Resurrection leads quickly to the Judgment. Christ himself will administer it. In the days of his flesh Jesus taught his disciples that he would occupy the Judgment Seat of God on the Last Day (Matt. 19:28; 25:31). He also said, "As the Father has life within himself, so too has he granted the Son to have life within himself; and he has given him authority to execute judgment, since he is the Son of Man" (John 5:26–27; cf. John 5:30; 2 Cor. 5:10). The Judgment signals the end of all Gospel probation for the sons of Adam: There is no further opportunity to receive salvation, no further opportunity to earn rewards. As on the day of his death, so on the Day of Judgment: A man's eternal destiny is sealed once and for all (John 8:24; Heb. 8:27; Rev. 20:11–15). When eternity overshadows time, men learn to cherish time and use it well.

The Judgment has two main components. First, Christ will forever separate the saved from the lost. This component is vividly set forth in the Olivet Discourse, where the Lord likens himself to a shepherd who must separate the sheep from the goats at the end of the day (Matt. 25:31–46; cf. Matt 3:12; 13:30, 48). All-pervasively, the NT teaches that the one criterion for inclusion in God's Kingdom is personal faith in the Person and finished work of Christ (Matt. 11:28; 22:11–12; John 3:16–21; 5:24; 6:29; Acts 16:31; 26:18; Rom. 3:28; 4:16; 5:1; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8; Titus 3:4–5). When the scrolls are opened, those who trusted in him—and who therefore lived for him—will find their names written in the Lamb's Scroll of Life (Rev. 20:12, 15). Those who did not, but who trusted instead in their own righteousness to win

Heaven's favor, will be dismayed to see how far short they fell of the one and only standard for salvation: the glory (i.e., the character, perfection) of God, freely offered to mankind in the Christ of God (Matt. 5:48; 22:11–12; Luke 18:9–14; Rom. 3:23; Phil. 3:8–9; Heb. 12:15).³

The second component of the Judgment is reward and retribution. Christ himself will administer them both. In the case of the saints, there is no retribution since the Savior underwent their punishment in his own Person (1) Peter 3:18). Indeed, this was one of his great purposes in laying down his life as a ransom for many; namely, that he should deliver them from the wrath to come (Mark 10:45; 1 Thess. 1:10). Believers will, however, receive rewards. For their faith in—and faithfulness to—Christ, they will receive a warm welcome into the completed Kingdom (Matt. 25:34; 2 Peter 1:11). For their spiritual labors—that is, for all that they allowed Christ to accomplish through them by his Spirit—they will receive gifts and privileges: some thirty, some sixty, and some a hundredfold (Matt. 6:20; 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-19; 1 Cor. 3:14; Rev. 11:18). Soberingly, Paul warns that negligent saints will find many of their works burning up like wood, hay, and stubble, though they themselves will be saved (1 Cor. 3:12–15). Presumably, the temporary awareness of such loss will occur on the day of their death (v. 13); with respect to the Day of Judgment, it portends real but limited reward.

As for the lost, it is written that they will suffer eternal retribution in Gehenna (Matt. 5:22, 29; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33), also called the Lake of Fire (Rev. 19:20; 20:10, 14). The Scriptures represent Gehenna as a true place; and since the Father has given all judgment to his Son, it would appear that Christ himself will "prepare" it on the Day of Judgment (Matt. 5:22–30; 10:28; 18:9; 25:41; John 5:22). It may be situated in another dimension or in space itself, close to the (new) earth (Rev. 14:10–11). Since it is a place of "outer darkness," the exact nature of its fires is unclear (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30). As previously in Hades, so now in Gehenna: Its inhabitants will experience loss, regret, torment, and the awareness of God's wrath abiding upon them (Matt. 8:12; Luke 16:22–31; John 3:36; Rom. 2:12–16; Rev. 18:1–19). For their specific sins, its inhabitants will endure varying degrees of torment (Mark 12:38–40; Luke 12:47; 2 Cor. 5:10).

The etymology of the word *Gehenna* identifies it as a kind of cosmic garbage dump, in which the refuse of the universe—both human and demonic—will burn forever just outside the City of God (Rev. 19:1–4; 22:15). Very

importantly, the Lord Jesus taught that its eternal fires will not be prepared for men, but for the devil and his angels (Matt. 25:41). Therefore, if human beings arrive in this place of eternal rejection, it is because they themselves persistently rejected the light of God, choosing darkness instead (John 3:19–21; Acts 13:46; Rom. 1:18; 2 Thess. 1:8–9). Though God and the saints will indeed rejoice in this final administration of justice (Rev. 16:6–7), they will take no pleasure at all in the punishment of the wicked; indeed, there is likely to be great sorrow (Ezek. 33:11; Luke 19:41–44; Rom. 9:1–5; Phil. 3:18).

Solemn as it is, the Judgment is also an integral part of the saint's Blessed Hope. Christ's disciples look forward to the day when their King will send forth the Judgment that leads to final victory, when the scales will be balanced at last, and when the righteous will receive their just reward, and the wicked their just desserts (Luke 6:20–26; 18:1–8; Rev. 6:9–11; 15:3–4; 18:20). They also look forward to receiving their own rewards, and to hearing these precious words from the Master's lips: "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Matt. 25:21; cf. 1 Cor. 3:9–15).

Recognizing, however, that the true source of their righteousness is Christ himself, they mostly look forward to casting down their crowns at the feet of him who loved them and gave himself for them: the One who called, kept, sanctified, and empowered them throughout their lifetime on earth so that he might present them faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy (Gal. 2:20; Jude v. 24; Rev. 4:10).

5. The Restoration of All things

In order to supremely honor his Son, the Father has also conferred on him the privilege of restoring and glorifying the universe. This is the climax of Christ's specifically redemptive acts. God has made him to be the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End (Rev. 1:8, 17–18). This means that the Father has granted the Son not only to create the universe in the beginning, but also to re-create it at the end. Just as Christ at his return has authority to raise, transform, and glorify the broken bodies of his saints, so too he has authority and power to subdue *all things* to himself. So shall he liberate them from their subjection to futility, and lift them into the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Rom. 8:20; 1 Cor. 15:24–27; Phil. 3:20–21).

The restoration of the universe is twofold. It begins with a cosmic conflagration: a universal meltdown in which, as the Lord predicted, the

heavens and the earth shall pass away (Matt. 24:35). The most complete description of this awesome event is found in 2 Peter 3, where the apostle writes:

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar, the elements will be dissolved in blazing fire, and the earth—and the works done in it—will be laid bare. Since all these things will be dissolved in this manner, what kind of persons should you be, conducting yourselves in holiness and godliness, and looking for and hastening the coming of the Day of God, on account of which the heavens will be dissolved by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat? Nevertheless, in accordance with his promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. (2 Peter 3:10–13; cf. 3:7)

Importantly, Peter is not looking for the annihilation of the natural world, only for its purging and restoration. It is only the *form* of this present world that will pass away, not the world itself (1 Cor. 7:31). Just as the ancient Flood cleansed the earth of sinners and paved the way for a new world, so too in the Day of the Lord—only this time in eschatological fullness. In the conflagration, Christ will erase from the natural order every scar of sin, so that out of the very fires that consume "the former things" new heavens and a new earth may emerge (Matt. 13:41–43; Luke 17:26–30; 2 Peter 3:3–6).

The second stage of the restoration is what Jesus called *the Regeneration*, what Peter called *the Restoration of All Things*, and what Paul called *the Subjection of All Things* (Matt. 19:28; Acts 3:21; Phil. 3:20–21). Negatively, these expressions point to cosmic deliverance: Once and for all Christ will lift the curse that lies like an iron blanket upon the natural order, thereby releasing it from its bondage to hindrance, defeat, and corruption (Isa. 25:7; Rom. 8:18–25; Rev. 22:3). Positively, these expressions point to the creation of new heavens and a new earth: a new universe upon which God impresses both the forms and functions that will perfectly reflect his benevolent will for his creatures (Isa. 65:17; 66:22; Matt. 6:10; 2 Peter 3:13).

What will this world—also referred to as the Eschaton and the Final State—be like? Sparingly, yet richly, the Bible offers some tantalizing replies.

As for the saints' resurrection bodies, we have seen that they will be like the body of the risen Christ. As the Scriptures repeatedly teach, he is "the first

fruits of those who have fallen asleep." He is the divine prototype to which the new humanity will be conformed in body, soul, and spirit (1 Cor. 15:20; cf. Rom. 8:29; Phil. 3:21; 1 John 3:2). Our Lord gave us provocative glimpses of the resurrection body on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1–3), in his several resurrection appearances (Luke 24; John 21), and to some extent in his self-disclosure to John on the island of Patmos (Rev. 1:9–16). Being altogether perfected both within and without, the saints will shine like the sun in its strength in the Kingdom of their Father (Dan. 12:3; Matt. 13:43; Rev. 1:16).

But what of the World to Come, the future home of the saints: What will it be like? Since much of the language used to describe it is symbolic, we must be cautious. Still, it is clear enough that there will no longer be sun, moon, or stars, for God and Christ themselves, throughout a single eternal day, will be the light *in* all, and the light *of* all (Dan. 12:3; Zech. 14:7; Rev. 21:25; 22:5). Also, there will be no more sea—though a world inwardly refreshed by the lifegiving waters of the Spirit will doubtless be graced with physical analogues thereof: springs, fountains, streams, lakes, and rivers (Isa. 35:5-7; 41:17-20; Rev. 21:1; Rev. 22:1). As for the great panoply of creaturely life—plants, flowers, trees, fish, birds, beasts, and creeping things—there is much to encourage us that we will see them all again in a vast eternal home of Edenic beauty (Gen. 1:26–28; 6:19–20; Isa. 11:6–9; 35:1–10; 55:12; Rom. 8:19). It is doubtful that we should look for a physical city, since the NT consistently identifies the Church herself as the Bridal City of God and Christ (John 4:21– 24; Gal. 4:26; Eph. 2:19–22; Heb. 12:22; Rev. 3:12; 21:2, 9–10, 12, 14). Our new dwelling place will be the world itself, a garden universe so perfectly suited to its inhabitants that indoors and outdoors are no longer two, but one (Gen. 2:8; Isa. 51:3; Ezek. 36:35; Rev. 21:1–2).

While some interpreters have tried to tease out of Scripture further details about the physical nature of the World to Come, the Bible itself seems content to describe it in these few generalities. In so doing, it stirs the saints to a holy curiosity and an eager expectation of the glories that are yet to be revealed (Rom. 8:18–25; 1 Cor. 13:12).

Meanwhile, we may take rich comfort in Scripture's many promises concerning the spiritual nature of the completed Kingdom. For example, we can take comfort in the sure knowledge of what will not be there: the curse, sin, Satan, violence, war, sickness, pain, sorrow, and death (Isa. 2:4; Rev. 20:10; 21:4). Similarly, we can rejoice in all that will be there: God, Christ, the Holy

Spirit, all the holy angels, multitudes of fellow saints, light, life, purpose, service, righteousness, beauty, and joy inexpressible and filled with glory (Matt. 25:31; 2 Thess. 1:7; 1 Peter 1:8; Rev. 19:14; 21–22). This is, of course, the world of mankind's dreams, precisely because it is the world of their Creator's dreams, whispered through the ages into the secret chambers of the human heart. It is a world in which, by God's consummating grace, dream and reality have at last become one. Such is the Blessed Hope of the Church.

6. The Handing Over of the Kingdom

When the restoration is complete, there remains one final act for Christ to perform: He must hand over the completed Kingdom to his Father. Of this mysterious transaction the apostle Paul wrote as follows:

For as in Adam all die, so too in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, and after him those who belong to Christ at his coming. Then comes the consummation, when he delivers up the kingdom to God the Father, having abolished all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign till he has placed all his enemies beneath his feet. Now the last enemy to be destroyed is death. For, "He has placed all things in subjection beneath his feet." (But when he says that all things have been placed in subjection, clearly this does not include the One who subjected all things to him.) Now when all things have been subjected to him, then the Son himself also will become subject to the One who subjected all things to him, so that God may be all in all. (1 Corinthians 15:22–28)

Paul's theme in this text is the Resurrection. However, while discussing it, he is moved to survey the entire course of the Messiah's heavenly reign. At the beginning of that reign God the Father gave his Son all authority in Heaven and on earth—and with that authority, a commission. Here Paul states that the commission was to abolish all hostile rule and authority, and to place all his enemies beneath his feet (Ps. 2; 8; 110; Matt. 28:18; Eph. 1:15–22). Elsewhere, he defines it as the heading up of all things in Christ, whether things in the heavens or things on the earth (Eph. 1:10). At the Parousia, Christ will fully fulfill this commission. Every enemy will be expelled, and all things will be headed up in and under him. The glorious Kingdom that the

Father commissioned him to create will stand complete before him.

Accordingly, but one thing remains: one final act of worship, one final acknowledgment of the great trinitarian mystery that brought about Salvation History: The Son must hand the Kingdom over to the Father. The High King must give the Kingdom up to the One who gave it to him (John 17:6). In other words, the Son must now relinquish *this form* of his cosmic sovereignty, and freshly submit himself, his people, and his Kingdom to the Father. He must do this so that the Father may be properly glorified as the supreme Sovereign of the universe. He must do it so that the Father (together with his Son) may be all in all (Rev. 11:15). And because the Son loves the Father, he will do so gladly (John 17:1).⁴

This handing over of the Kingdom is the consummation of the Consummation. Moreover, it is also the crowning touch upon the Blessed Hope of the saints. Mysterious as the transaction is, they anticipate it with relish, knowing that herein the redemptive achievements of the Son are forever sealed, the Father is fully glorified, and the completed Kingdom of the triune God is introduced at last. Accordingly, even before it happens, they think they hear the Father saying to the Son precisely what the Son will say to them when their own labors are complete: "Well done, good and faithful Servant; enter into the joy of your Lord" (see Matt. 25:31).

Conclusion

Our theme in this chapter has been the Blessed Hope of the Church. In love and wisdom, God our Father has given it to us through his appointed Teacher so that we may enjoy eternal comfort and good hope by grace (2 Thess. 2:16). My prayer is that we all may understand, use, and savor it well.

What is this hope? As we have seen, it is the one Consummation of all things at the end of this present evil age, a Consummation wrought by Christ himself at his Parousia.

It is, however, a multifaceted hope. We look with hope, not only upon the one Consummation, but also upon its several elements.

Therefore, should God so ordain it, we hope to glorify Christ and promote his redemptive plan through our steadfast witness in the midst of the Greatest Tribulation and the Last Battle (2 Thess. 1).

We hope to behold his face at his appearing, and so to be changed into his likeness (Rom. 6:5; 1 John 3:2).

We hope to see our beloved Master universally vindicated: honored by all men and all angels as the High King of Heaven and Earth (Phil. 2:5–11).

We hope for perfect spiritual and physical wholeness, bestowed on us at the Resurrection of the Dead (1 Cor. 15; Col. 3:4).

We hope for a joyful reunion with departed loved ones as we all gather together to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:13–18).

We hope to see the Holy and Righteous Judge turn a morally upside-down world right side up, and expel all evil from his new homeland (Matt. 13:41–42; 25:41; Rom. 2:1–11).

We hope to hear the merciful and gracious Judge commend us for lives well lived, and for works well done in the power of his Holy Spirit (Matt. 25:21; Rom. 15:17–19).

We hope to see the realm of nature purified of every vestige of sin, and a beautiful new world rising out of the ashes of the old (2 Peter 3:10–13).

And in that world we hope to know, love, serve, and enjoy our triune God forever (Rev. 21:9–14).

Such is the Blessed Hope.

Such is the eschatological Pearl of Great Price.

Such is the hidden treasure, formerly locked away in the storeroom of Scripture, but now opened to our wondering eyes by the High King of Heaven, who so graciously places in our grateful hands the master keys to the Great End Time Debate.

^{1.} See the HKOH, Appendix 5: Is the Modern State of Israel a Fulfillment of Biblical Prophecy?

^{2.} In the DNT and the Revelation there are several references to the throne (or Judgment Seat) of Christ, before which men and angels will appear on the Day of Judgment (Matt. 25:31; Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:12). It is unclear whether this throne is material, visionary, or simply a symbol of the divine holiness and sovereignty. In any case, the biblical emphasis certainly falls upon the deity, holiness, and judicial sovereignty of Christ the Judge (John 5:27; Acts 17:31).

^{3.} Theologians wrestle with the question of the eternal destiny of those who lived beyond the borders of Israel in OT times, or beyond the reach of the Gospel in NT times. Here and elsewhere I have defended the idea that the Bible presents life as a test of our love of spiritual truth, and that God therefore gives each person a *bona fide* opportunity to choose it, even if they have not received the Gospel from the mouth of man. No matter how one resolves this important question, all who revere the Bible as God's Word affirm, with Christ, that no one comes to the Father except through him (John 14:6), and that "He who has the Son has this life; but he who does not have the Son of God does not have this life" (1 John 5:12). For more, see Dean Davis, *The Test*, 558.

^{4.} Numerous biblical texts affirm that Christ will reign forever over his people (Dan. 2:44; 7:14, 27; Luke

1:33; 2 Peter 1:11; Rev. 11:15). These passages make it clear that the delivering up of the Kingdom does not *terminate* the Son's sovereignty, but rather—in a manner that defies complete description—*transforms, subordinates*, and *seals* it once and for all.

PART VI RESOLVING THE GREAT END TIME DEBATE

CHAPTER 15

OPTIONS IN BIBLICAL ESCHATOLOGY: AMILLENNIAL CRITIQUES

elcome to the sixth and final part of our journey, the part in which we apply all we have learned about biblical eschatology to the GETD, in hopes of resolving it once and for all.

In Part I of the journey we identified the underlying issues and contemporary options in this debate. Also, we uncovered the root cause of the debate, and therefore learned how God would have us resolve it: by listening to his appointed Teacher in the DNT.

In Parts II through V we did that very thing—closely examining the Lord's teaching on each of the four issues underlying the debate. In every case we found that the DNT supports the traditional amillennial understanding of biblical eschatology.

Accordingly, we now have in our hands a powerful tool with which to study, evaluate, and critique the various schools of biblical eschatology. This tool consists of four questions that we must bring to each one of them:

- 1) What is its view of the nature and structure of the Kingdom of God?
- 2) How does it interpret OT Kingdom prophecy?
- 3) How does it interpret the Revelation in general, and chapter 20 in particular?
 - 4) What is its view of the Consummation?

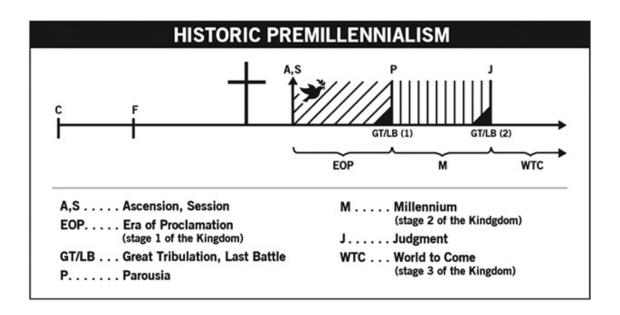
Again, in the course of our journey we have arrived at solid amillennial answers to all these questions. Accordingly, with those answers as our benchmark, we are in an excellent position to discern the strengths and weaknesses of other schools, and to discuss these things with our fellow Christians. Henceforth, we can participate in the GETD with skill, confidence, teachability, and fruitfulness.

In the pages ahead I will be offering brief critiques of Historic

Premillennialism (New Covenant and Old Covenant), Postmillennialism, Dispensational Premillennialism, and Full and Partial Preterism. For more detailed discussions please consult the appendices of *The High King of Heaven*.

1. Historic Premillennialism

With the help of the timeline below, let us use our four questions to critique Historic Premillennialism (HP). Along the way I will comment on the features that are unique to each of two branches of HP: New Covenant Historic Premillennialism (NCHP) and Old Covenant Historical Premillennialism (OCHP).¹



View of the Kingdom

As our timeline reveals, HP envisions the Kingdom of God as entering history in three stages: The Era of Proclamation, the Millennium, and the World to Come. We have seen, however, that the one Kingdom appears in just two stages: the Era of Gospel Proclamation (also called the Kingdom of the Son), followed by the Era of Reward and Retribution. The Era of Reward is also called the Kingdom of the Father and the World to Come. The DNT makes no mention of a millennial stage of the Kingdom. As it was in NT times, so it is for us today: the Kingdom is *already* and *not yet*. It is already here

spiritually in the Kingdom of the Son; however, it is not yet here spiritually and physically. For that we must await the Parousia, when Christ will introduce the Kingdom of the Father and the eternal World to Come.

View of OTKP

We have seen that HP's have difficulty interpreting OTKP. NCHPs interpret it less literally, arguing that it speaks of the Church living under the New Covenant. OCHPs interpret it more literally, arguing that it speaks of ethnic Israel living under a modified form of the Old Covenant designed to celebrate the work of Christ. But both schools look for a literal fulfillment of some OTKPs in a future millennium.

We have learned, however, that this approach plunges the interpreter into a great thicket of difficulties: apparent contradictions, historical anachronisms, a future return to elements or modifications of the Mosaic Law, and a losing fight with NT teaching about the (definitive character of the) New Covenant, the Kingdom of God, and the Consummation.

Happily, the DNT shows us the way of escape. Yes, God meant for "simple" Messianic prophecies—prophecies fulfilled *prior* to Pentecost—to be interpreted basically literally, and to be used as a witness in the global proclamation of the Gospel. But according to the NCH, true OTKPs—prophecies fulfilled *after* Pentecost—must be interpreted typologically, covenantally, and ecclesiologically. In all such prophecies the Spirit was using OT ideas and images to give us veiled revelations of the New Covenant institutions and blessings that Christ would bestow upon his Church, whether in the Kingdom of the Son or the Kingdom of the Father. Our premillenarian brethren can escape prophetic confusion and conflict by using the NCH to interpret OTKP.

View of the Revelation

While HP's hold different views as to the overall structure of the Revelation, all agree that chapters 6–19 speak of events *prior* to the Parousia, whereas chapter 20 speaks of events *following* it. We have seen, however, that this futuristic reading of Revelation 20 brings HP into direct conflict with the DNT, which pervasively represents the Kingdom as entering history in two simple stages, and which represents the Consummation as a single Momentous Event centered on the Parousia. There is no way to reconcile a future

millennium with NT eschatology.

There is, however, a way of escape. As we learned in Part IV of our journey, Revelation 20 is one of six parallel recapitulations of the course and character of Christ's heavenly reign. This means that the Millennium does not lie in the future, but in the present. We are living in the Millennium now: the lengthy season of Salvation History wherein God is calling and testing the nations, and wherein Christ is applying the redemption that he accomplished for his people during the days of his humiliation. This view of Revelation 20 brings it into perfect harmony with the rest of the book, and with the eschatology of the entire DNT.

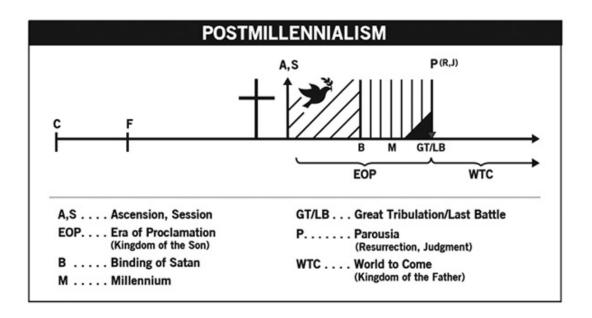
View of the Consummation

HP's look for two distinct comings of Christ: one at the end of the present evil age and another at the end of the Millennium. Accordingly, they also look for two distinct resurrections, judgments, and transformations of nature. Thus, HP's actually anticipate two separate consummations. However, in Part V of our study we saw that the DNT anticipates only one.

Conclusion

Summing up, we find that both forms of HP plunge the biblical interpreter into inescapable confusion, conflict, and frustration. When, however, we receive from Christ the master keys to the GETD, all difficulties are resolved and the true eschatology of the Bible rises like the sun in its strength, dispelling all darkness. My hope and prayer for my HP brethren is that they will receive those keys, and that one day soon we will rejoice together in the amillennial dawn.

2. Postmillennialism



As we learned in Part I of our study, Postmillennialism is a species of Amillennialism. Its distinctive characteristic is the expectation of a Golden Era of widespread Christian faith, peace, and prosperity prior to the Consummation. With the help of the diagram below, let us review and critique this eschatological option, which lately has gained some traction among younger pastors in the US. The timeline and discussion below focus on the most popular contemporary form of Postmillennialism.

View of the Kingdom

Like Amillennialism, Postmillennialism envisions the Kingdom of God as entering history in two stages: the Kingdom of the Son, followed by the Kingdom of the Father. Unlike Amillennialism, it typically posits that the Kingdom of the Son itself is divided into two stages. In the first, the Gospel goes out and begins to prosper, but only haltingly amidst great opposition and tribulation. In the second—which begins at a point yet future to us—Satan is bound in such a way that the Gospel now makes unprecedented advances. This is the "millennial" stage of the Kingdom of the Son.

We have seen, however, that Scripture does not support this idea. Nowhere in the DNT do we find any suggestion that the Kingdom of the Son is divided into two stages, or that it includes a future Golden Era of Gospel prosperity. On the contrary, both Christ and the apostles repeatedly gird the loins of the saints for constant opposition and persecution, but also for a significant

measure of success as the sovereign God gathers his little flock through the Church's faithful preaching of the Gospel (Matt. 24:9–14; John 10:16; Rom. 8:30; 1 Thess. 2:2; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 4:12; 1 John 3:13; 5:19).

On this score the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares is paradigmatic (Matt. 13:24–30, 36–43). Here the Lord clearly assumes that throughout the entire Era of Proclamation the tares will be growing alongside the wheat. Indeed, so abundant are the tares that the angels regard them as a threat to the safety of God's crop (Matt. 13:27-28). This is the template for all NT eschatology. Believers live and serve in the present evil age (Gal. 1:4). They constantly struggle against the world forces of this present darkness (Eph. 6:12). To the very end the world system will lie in the grip of the evil one (1 John 5:19). The Church is a light shining in the ever-deepening darkness of the world system (Matt. 5:14; John 1:5). She must redeem the time, for the days are evil (Eph. 5:16). Her ongoing experience is one of great tribulation (Rev. 7:14). She is making a hard pilgrimage through the wilderness of a hostile world (Rev. 12:6, 13–17). The Last Battle is simply the final and most extreme engagement in the Church's perennial war. Where, in all of this, is there room for a Golden Era of peace, righteousness, and prosperity? And when in Church history have we ever experienced one?

Nevertheless, amillennarians can learn from postmillennarians. Their confidence in the transformative power of the Gospel is both biblical and winsome. History proves that Christ and Scripture can indeed make significant positive impacts on culture and social institutions. Postmillennarians serve as a healthy reminder to amillennarians that the Church must remain culturally and politically engaged. On the other hand, amillennarians serve as a healthy reminder to postmillennarians that in the end the Church's mission is not to subdue the world system for Christ, but to help Christ take a believing people out of it for himself (John 15:19; 17:6). It is not the Church that will bring in the Golden Era of which we dream; it is Christ at his return.

View of OTKP

Postmillennarians argue that many OTKPs predict a global triumph of the Gospel *in the Era of Proclamation* (e.g., Ps. 72; 110; Isa. 2:1–4; 45:2–3; 65:17–25; Mic. 4:1–3; Zech. 9:10). Here we encounter some confusion. Our brothers are correct when they assert that these prophecies are fulfilled under the New Covenant and must therefore be interpreted typologically and figuratively. But

they err when they assert that they are largely fulfilled in the Era of Proclamation, and hardly at all in the World to Come.

The truth here is nuanced and accessible only through a careful use of the DNT and the NCH. The DNT depicts the Kingdom of the Son as a temporary season of partial Gospel success leading up to the Consummation, and the Kingdom of the Father as an eternal season of complete Gospel success following the Consummation. We must interpret OTKP under the discipline of this rubric. If we don't, we will stumble into error, false optimism, and deep disappointment.

Let us apply this principle to a text that is especially dear to the hearts of our postmillennial brothers. In Psalm 72, the writer (likely David) supplies his fellow Israelites with a coronation prayer that they can offer to God in behalf of Solomon and his royal successors. In so doing he gives the world a picture of Israel's ideal king, and of the blessings that will attend his reign. Premillennarians say David is describing the fruits of a millennial era that will begin after Christ's return. Postmillennarians say he is describing the fruits of a Golden Era that will occur before his return. Amillennarians, operating under the discipline of the DNT, say he is describing the fruits of Christ's heavenly reign during the Era of Proclamation, at the Consummation, and throughout the eternal World to Come. They understand that the mystery of the two-staged Kingdom was hidden from the Psalmist's eyes, with the result that the latter gives us a seamless vision of the total fruitage of the Messiah's promised reign.

With the help of the NCH we can see exactly how the vision is fulfilled. For example, we can see that even now the heavenly King defends the cause of the poor (v. 4; Matt. 5:3; 1 Cor. 1:26–30). Even now he gives deliverance to the oppressed and needy (vv. 4, 12; Eph. 2:1–10; 1 Thess. 1:10; Titus 3:3–7). Even now, to his spiritually thirsty people, he is like showers that water the earth (v. 6; Acts 3:19; 1 Cor. 12:13; Phil. 1:19). Even now, through the faithful preaching of the Gospel, his far-flung dominion is spreading from sea to sea, and to all the ends of the earth (v. 8; Matt. 13:33; Acts 1:8; Col. 1:23).

However, this psalm also anticipates the Consummation, as well as the eternal stage of the Kingdom that will follow. At his return, the King's enemies will lick the dust (v. 9; Luke 19:27), all the rulers of the earth will fall down before him (v. 11; Phil. 2:10), and every remaining oppressor, including death itself, will be crushed (vv. 4, 14; Rom. 16:20; 1 Cor. 15:25). Then, in the

completed Kingdom that he himself has ushered in, the mountains will bring forth perfect prosperity (v. 3; Heb. 12:18–24; Rev. 21:10), the peoples will flourish like the grass of the field (v. 16; Rev. 22:2), the saints will praise his name forever (v. 17; Heb. 13:15), and all the nations of the saved will call him blessed (v. 17; Rev. 5:6–14). Long shall he live, and long shall his redeemed Bride and Family live with him in the eternal Kingdom of God (vv. 14, 15; Rev. 1:18; 21:3–4).

It is not that OTKPs *cannot* be understood to promise a Golden Era of Gospel prosperity; it is that the DNT *requires* us to interpret them otherwise. The OT does indeed promise a universal reign of Israel's Messiah and Israel's God. But that reign will overspread the earth *in part* through the preaching of the Gospel, and then *in fullness* at the Lord's return. In that day the OT prophets themselves will rejoice, for the Golden Age of Israel's ideal King will have come at last.

View of the Revelation

As a rule, postmillennarians teach that the events described in Revelation 20 follow those described in Revelation 19:11–21. But since Revelation 20:7–15 clearly speaks of the Consummation, postmillennarians conclude that Revelation 19:11–21 must be speaking of something else. Accordingly, Loraine Boettner argues that Revelation 19 is giving us "a vision setting forth in figurative language the age-long struggle between the forces of good and the forces of evil in the world, with its promise of complete victory." In other words, Revelation 19 gives us Christ winning a measure of Gospel success in the first stage of the Kingdom of the Son. This, in time, will lead to a special binding of Satan, which in turn will inaugurate a millennial era of extraordinary Gospel success (Rev. 20:1–3). In that day, say the postmillennarians, the world will experience "the first resurrection." That is, it will experience a "restoration and vindication of the cause for which the martyrs died" (John Jefferson Davis) and "a rebirth of the martyr spirit" (Augustus Strong).³ Accordingly, vast numbers of millennial saints, now fully subject to the Spirit of Christ, will reign in victory over sin on a peaceful and prosperous earth (Rev. 20:4–6). Yes, at the close of the Millennium this global triumph will seem, for the briefest of moments, to end in defeat, as Satan is released from his prison and gathers multitudes against the faithful people of God. But at his Parousia, Christ will swiftly intervene to destroy his enemies

(Rev. 20:7–10). This will lead to the Last Judgment (Rev. 20:12–15), which in turn will lead to the new heavens and the new earth (Rev. 21–22).

But again, the DNT does not support this teaching. As we have seen, Revelation 20 runs *parallel* to Revelation 17–19, and does *not* follow it chronologically. Revelation 19:11–21 most certainly *does* give us the Parousia, as do Revelation 6:12–17, 11:11–19, 14:14–20, and 20:10–15. The binding of Satan took place at the *beginning* of the Era of Proclamation, through Christ's work on the cross. It is *not* still future, even to us who live two thousand years into that era (Matt. 12:29; John 12:31; Col. 2:15; 1 Peter 3:22; Rev. 12:7–12). The first resurrection is *not* a revival of the martyr's cause or spirit, but rather the perfection of the spirits of the saints as they enter upon the joys of the Intermediate State (Rev. 14:13). And finally, the millennial reign of the saints does *not* take place on the earth, but rather in Heaven, where the spirits of the saints reign in life with Christ, even as they await the final triumph of life in Christ: the resurrection of their bodies at the Parousia of the High King (Rom. 5:17; 1 Cor. 15:1–58; Rev. 20:11–15).

View of the Consummation

Fundamentally, the postmillennial view of the Consummation is sound, since it looks for a single Consummation at the Parousia of Christ. There are, however, some weighty problems.

First, many postmillennarians anticipate a latter-day conversion of ethnic Israel *prior* to the Golden Era of Gospel success. But this is not the teaching of the DNT, which looks for Israel's conversion near *the end* of the Millennium; that is, near the end of the Era of Proclamation. Here the postmillennial error is of real concern, since it robs the Church of an important sign of the imminence of the Parousia: the grafting of (many) ethnic Jews back into the vine of Christ, after which we may soon expect "life from the dead" (Rom. 11:15).⁴

Secondly, Postmillennialism vitiates biblical teaching about the Last Battle. Yes, postmillennarians confess that a Last Battle will occur just prior to the Parousia. But by placing it on the far side of their Golden Era, they leave the Church looking first for a Golden Era (that will not come), and only then for a Last Battle (which, for postmillennarians, will come all too soon). Thus, Postmillennialism cuts the nerve of NT teaching, which warns that the Last Battle can swiftly fall upon the Church, and that she must always be ready for

it (Mark 13:37; 2 Thess. 2:1–10; Rev. 16:15). It leaves a naively optimistic Church vulnerable to the shock of the sudden rise of the Antichrist, and to all the spiritual disillusionment that must flow from such a disappointment. These dire consequences are rooted in Postmillennialism's failure to see that the *entire* Era of Proclamation is a season of Gospel combat, conflict, and "great tribulation" (Rev. 7:14).

Finally, Postmillennialism tends to trivialize the Last Battle and the Judgment. Both are solemn events that will engulf huge swaths of humanity. Postmillennialism pictures the Last Battle as an unfortunate ripple upon a sea of millennial bliss. Similarly, it minimizes the gravity of the Judgment by implying that in virtue of the Golden Era of Gospel progress, relatively few souls will be lost.

On both counts the DNT disagrees. Our Lord said that throughout the Church Era, and especially at its end, his disciples will be hated by all nations (Matt. 10:16–25; 24:9). John relates that the number of those who will wage war against the eschatological camp and city of the saints will be "like the sands of the seashore" (Rev. 20:8). As for the ratio of the saved to the lost, we are unwise to engage in speculation (Luke 13:22–30). Nevertheless, it is sobering to recall that wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and that many go in by it (Matt. 7:13; 13:24–30, 36–43); that Christ refers to his Church as a "little flock" (Luke 12:32); and that those who will follow him upon the slopes of the eternal Zion are the *first* fruits (i.e., the smaller part) of the total harvest of God and the Lamb (Matt. 3:11–12; 13:36–43; James 1:18; Rev. 14:1–4, 14–20).

We find, then, that despite its welcome nod to orthodoxy, Postmillennialism gives us a marred and potentially harmful view of the Consummation.

Conclusion

Certainly we can be grateful when our postmillennarian brethren remind us that God has promised to redeem a great multitude of believers out of every tribe, tongue, people and nation (Rev. 5:9; 7:9). And certainly we can join them in affirming that the advance of Christ's Kingdom will leaven the evil world system in such a way as to have positive impacts on its various institutions, whether cultural, political, or economic (Matt. 5:13–16). By all means, then, let individual Christians serve the Lord in every legitimate sphere of life, and let them be grateful for whatever temporal good their presence may

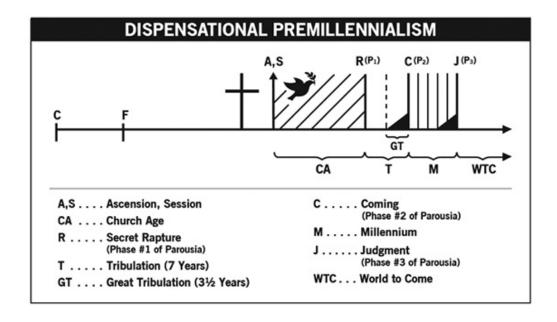
accomplish, whether great or small (John 17:15).

Nevertheless, we do well to regard Postmillennialism as a seriously flawed eschatology. As we have seen, it misconstrues the primary purpose of God for the Kingdom of the Son, which is not to Christianize the Domain of Darkness, but rather to rescue a chosen people out of it and transfer them into the Kingdom of his beloved Son (Gal. 1:4; Col. 1:13). Its unbiblical doctrine of a Golden Era bleeds into its interpretation of OTKP, distorting the true sense of these precious OT texts. And the same is true concerning the Revelation. But above all, Postmillennialism distorts the believer's Blessed Hope, focusing it upon an illusory stage of Church history, rather than upon the true signs of the times and the Consummation at Christ's return (Titus 2:13; 1 Peter 1:13).

For all these reasons I would invite my postmillennial brethren to come home to your spiritual birth mother: the amillennial eschatology of the classic Reformation. Truly, she has prepared her table well, and is eager to forgive, forget, and savor all good things with her beloved sons.

3. Dispensational Premillennialism

In the course of our journey, we have touched on most of the tenets of Dispensational Premillennialism. In this section I will offer a short but comprehensive critique of this popular eschatological option, pausing for a closer look at dispensational teaching on Daniel 9 and the Revelation.



View of the Kingdom

Our journey has shown us that Dispensationalism misunderstands the Kingdom of God in three fundamental ways.

First, it misunderstands the *nature* of the Kingdom. Classic Dispensationalism identifies the Kingdom as a future earthly theocratic reign of Christ over ethnic Israel and the nations. However, the DNT identifies the Kingdom as a direct spiritual reign of God the Father, through the Son, and by the Holy Spirit, over all who have entered the New Covenant by faith. The Kingdom has nothing to do with a return to the theocratic institutions of the Mosaic Law, all of which have been fulfilled and rendered obsolete by Christ and the New Covenant.

Secondly, it misunderstands the *structure* of the Kingdom. As in the case of HP, so here: Dispensationalism looks for three stages of the Kingdom, whereas the DNT only looks for two.

Thirdly, Dispensationalism misunderstands the *people* of the Kingdom. According to the DNT, they are the universal Church: believers of all times and places, called out of the Domain of Darkness and into the Eternal Covenant of God through faith in Christ (Matt. 11:28–30; John 6:37, 44, 65; Eph. 2:11–3:13). This is the true spiritual seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:29). This is the true Israel of God (Gal. 6:16). The DNT is emphatic: God does not have two separate families, nor does he have two separate plans for those families: a Gospel of the Kingdom for the Jews, and a Gospel of Grace for the Gentiles. Through Christ, God has broken down the middle wall separating Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:14). Henceforth, there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, but all are one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28). Henceforth, there is one flock (John 10), one Woman (Rev. 12), one Bride (Eph. 5), one Wife (Rev. 21), one Body (Eph. 5), one New Man (Eph. 2), one Olive Tree (Rom. 11), one City (Rev. 21), one Royal Priesthood (1 Peter 2), and one Holy Nation (Gal. 6:16; 1 Peter 2). Therefore, let no man rebuild what God has forever torn down (Gal. 2:18); and let no man separate what God has forever joined together (Matt. 19:6).

View of OTKP

Like OCHPs, dispensationalists interpret OTKP quite literally. Thus, the hermeneutical problems of the latter are the same as those of the former. Their

literal approach entangles them in historical anachronisms, apparent contradictions, a resurrection of the OT Law, a rebuilding of the wall between Jew and Gentile, and the problem of millennial conditions said to endure forever. And this in turn brings them into direct conflict with NT teaching on the nature and structure of the Kingdom introduced under the New Covenant.

Thankfully, progressive dispensationalists have begun to feel the force of these objections. Recognizing that the Kingdom is indeed "already" and "not yet," they acknowledge that even now the greater David is reigning on his heavenly throne, and that as members of the New Covenant the Church is indeed participating in the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants. Accordingly, these interpreters (who nevertheless still adhere to the basic the dispensational scheme of Salvation History) argue that OTKP has a *double* fulfillment: It speaks of *both* the Church Era *and* a future Jewish millennium. Amillennarians are grateful for this small step in the right direction. It is, however, but a first step in a long journey that will only end when dispensationalists finally come home to the eschatology of the Bible and their Protestant forefathers.

View of the Revelation

The dispensational interpretation of Daniel 9:24–27 is the rock of dispensational theology. Broadly, it grounds their conviction that God has a double purpose in Salvation History: the salvation of the Church (his heavenly people), and the salvation of ethnic Israel (his earthly people). More narrowly, it governs their understanding of the Revelation. Very importantly, dispensationalists find the perceived harmony between Daniel 9 and the Revelation compelling: The one seems clearly to reinforce the other, and so to vindicate the entire dispensational system. Accordingly, in this section we must spend some extra time discussing these crucial matters.

We will do so in three steps. First, we'll look briefly at the dispensational interpretation of Daniel 9. Next, we'll discuss the dispensational interpretation of the Revelation, emphasizing its (alleged) connection with Daniel 9 and offering amillennial critiques along the way. Finally, we'll inquire as to why dispensational interpreters have so grievously misunderstood the Grand Finale of All Scripture.

A. The Dispensational Interpretation of Daniel's Seventy Sevens

Here, very briefly, is the standard dispensational interpretation of Daniel

9:24–27. The theme of the prophecy is not the future of spiritual Israel, but of ethnic Israel; Daniel's people and Daniel's city are not spiritually circumcised Jews and Gentiles, but the Jewish race and nation (Dan. 9:24). Throughout OT times God promised the latter a theocratic kingdom mediated by his Messiah. But before Israel can enter this promised Kingdom Age it must first traverse Daniel's "seventy sevens." These are weeks of calendar years, totaling 490. The sixty-nine weeks of verse 25 began with Artaxerxes's decree to rebuild Jerusalem (445 BC); they ended at the birth (or triumphal entry) of Christ. Verse 26 gives us the events of the sixty-ninth week: the week in which Christ was rejected, and after which the Roman general Titus came and destroyed the temple in Jerusalem. At this point in the prophecy Daniel leaps over the entire Church Age (now some two thousand years long), thereby keeping God's dealings with his heavenly people (i.e., the Church) a mystery later to be unveiled by Christ. Accordingly, verse 27 gives us future events set to occur during the seventieth week: the week that follows the secret rapture of the Church. Just here, "God's prophetic time clock" begins to tick again; here he resumes his dealings with the (physical) sons of Abraham. This week of seven years is called the Tribulation. At the beginning of the Tribulation, the Antichrist makes a covenant with ethnic Israel. In the middle of the week he breaks the covenant, suppresses Jewish worship, and defiles the (restored) Jewish temple. This marks the beginning of the Great Tribulation, which lasts three and a half years. At their end Christ will return in glory, destroy the Antichrist, and welcome the Jewish saints (and Gentile converts) who have survived the Tribulation into the promised Kingdom Age. According to Revelation 20, it will last one thousand literal years.⁵

B. The Dispensational Interpretation of the Revelation

In the paragraphs ahead, I will give the standard dispensational interpretation of each section of the Revelation. Then, *in italics*, I will offer an amillennarian reply. Along the way I will also point out how the dispensationalist's understanding of Daniel 9 controls his thinking about the Revelation.

Chapter 1 of the Revelation gives us a vision of the exalted Christ, the One who will first bring to pass God's purpose for the Church (Rev. 2–5), and thereafter God's purpose for ethnic Israel (Rev. 6–20).

Amillennarian reply: Yes, chapter 1 gives us a revelation of the exalted Christ, the Lord of the remainder of Salvation History. But no, the book does not give us God's twofold purpose and plan, first for the Church, and then for ethnic Israel. Rather, it gives us God's singular purpose and plan for his one and only people: the Church, comprised of elect Jews and Gentiles of all times. Here, however, the emphasis falls upon God's New Covenant people, as the High King of Heaven enables them to make their difficult spiritual pilgrimage through the Era of Gospel Proclamation.

Chapters 2–3 give us the Lord's messages to the seven churches of Asia. Real as they were, these churches also symbolize the universal Church, and (for some of us) the historical stages through which she must pass over the course of the Church Age. This age is the "mystery parenthesis" that neither Daniel nor any of the other the OT prophets foresaw. It is the age that Christ unveiled when, in anticipation of his rejection by Israel, he said, "I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18). Thus, in chapters 2–3, Christ is speaking to the Church, about the Church, during the Church Age. Soon, however, he will be speaking to Israel, about Israel (and the nations), during the Tribulation, and on into the Millennium.

Amillennarian reply: Yes, the true nature of the Church, as the spiritual Body of the Messiah, was a mystery hidden from the OT prophets. However, the prophets did indeed foresee the Church, and were moved by the Spirit to speak about her, albeit under a veil of OT imagery. And this is true of the prophet Daniel himself, who was speaking about the Church in Daniel 9:25b–27! As for the Revelation, in chapters 2–3 the High Prophet of Heaven speaks to the Church about the various strengths and weaknesses she will manifest during her pilgrimage to the World to Come. Then, in chapters 6–20 he speaks to her about the persons, powers, events, and institutions she will encounter along the way. In the Revelation, ethnic Israel is never in view, whereas Israel's antitype, the Church, is always and only in view.

In chapters 4–5 we have John's vision of Heaven, its occupants, and the worship with which they fill it. The apostle hears a voice, saying, "Come up here" (Rev. 4:1). For many of us this is a veiled reference to the Rapture. For all of us the twenty-four elders represent the raptured, glorified, rewarded, and worshiping Church. In her sight, and eliciting her praise, Christ receives from the Father the title deed to the earth and prepares to unfasten the seven seals.

When he does, the seventieth week of Daniel (i.e., the seven-year Tribulation) begins. In other words, the exalted Christ now commences his eschatological dealings with ethnic Israel and the nations, with a view to bringing in the thousand-year Kingdom Age.

Amillennarian reply: No, John's journey to Heaven does not picture the Rapture (a doctrine not found in the DNT). It does, however, remind us that through the new birth all the members of Christ's Church are, or will be, seated in the heavenly places in/with him. As for the scene in Heaven, it is timeless, and therefore depicts the worship of all God's people of all times and places: the Church. She is comprised of OT saints (symbolized by twelve patriarchs upon thrones) and NT saints (symbolized by twelve apostles upon thrones). The scroll in the Father's hand is a last will and testament, containing the eternal inheritance of the saints (Rev. 21–22). Before they can receive it, the High King of Heaven, who prevailed upon the earth for the salvation of his people, must unfasten its seven seals. That is, he must preside over the various historical events through which his redemptive work will be proclaimed and applied to the hearts of his believing people. He must oversee the pilgrimage of the Church through the Era of Proclamation, after which he will come again to consummate God's plan in judgment and redemption, and to bring in the new heavens and the new earth, the eternal inheritance of the saints.

Chapters 6–19 give us the Tribulation, the seventieth week of Daniel. In essence it is a seven-year season of world evangelization, during which 144,000 redeemed Israelites will proclaim the Gospel of the (coming millennial) Kingdom amidst ever-increasing and ever-intensifying providential judgments, culminating in a final judgment of the living nations at the visible return of Christ (Rev. 7:1–8; 19:11–21). The judgments are serial in nature, progressing from the six seals (6–7), through the seven trumpets (8–11), and on into the seven bowls (15-16). As John MacArthur says, "The seal judgments include all the judgments to the end. The seventh seal contains the seven trumpets, the seventh trumpet contains the seven bowls." Midway through the Tribulation the Antichrist (i.e., the Beast) will arrive on the scene, break his covenant with Israel, defile the temple, and devastate Jerusalem; at this, the three and a half years of the Great Tribulation begin (Rev. 13:5). This section ends with chapter 19, which alone gives us the Second Coming of Christ in glory (19:11-16), the demise of his enemies gathered against him (and Israel) at Armageddon (19:17–21), and the close of the Great Tribulation.

Amillennarian reply: No, these chapters do not speak of a future seven-year

tribulation. Rather, along with chapter 20, they give us six parallel recapitulations of the course and character of the High King's heavenly reign. Each one begins at the beginning of the Era of Proclamation and ends with a more or less symbolic representation of the return of Christ in judgment and, on occasion, redemption. Literal interpretations of the 144,000 sealed Israelites, the seal judgments, the trumpet judgments, the bowl judgments, the two witnesses, the permutations of three and a half years, the mark of the Beast, and the Battle of Armageddon all wreak havoc with the text. They needlessly strain credulity, engender crippling fears, and obscure the meaning, solemnity, and wonder of these parallel visions. Here, the dispensational view works positive harm to the Church by projecting the fulfillment of these chapters onto another people and into a distant (post-Rapture) future. The flock of God is journeying through the howling wilderness of this present evil age. It is headed for the special challenges of the Last Battle. It needs to hear the wise and comforting voice of its heavenly Shepherd. Here, as elsewhere, Dispensationalism silences it.

Chapter 20 gives us the goal and aftermath of Daniel's seventy weeks: the one-thousand-year Kingdom Age, in which all OTKP is (literally) fulfilled at last. First, Satan and his demons are cast into the abyss, paving the way for vastly improved spiritual and physical conditions upon the earth. Then, in "the first resurrection," Christ raises the OT saints and the tribulation martyrs. They, along with those who came to faith during the Tribulation, enter the Kingdom Age and rule with Christ during the Millennium. OT temple worship, centered in Jerusalem, is revived, but only to commemorate the finished work of Christ. Fundamentally, the Millennium is a lengthy season of peace, prosperity, longevity, righteousness, and joy. Nevertheless, as time passes many of the children of the tribulation saints fall into unbelief. The result is a series of dramatic eschatological events that bring the Millennium to a close: the release of Satan from the abyss, a gathering of rebellious nations against Jerusalem, a divine judgment by fire, a second resurrection (this time of the unrighteous dead), and a final Judgment of all unbelievers at the Great White Throne.

Amillennarian reply: No, Revelation 20 does not describe a future thousand-year reign of Christ upon the earth. Rather, it gives us a seventh and final recapitulation of the course and character of his heavenly reign and its earthly impacts. During this time, which stretches between the Lord's first and second advents, Satan is bound from deceiving God's elect, and also from gathering the unbelieving world to

the Last Battle. It is a long time (symbolized by 1,000), but also a finite time, during which the triune God (3) completes (10) the application of the redemption purchased by Christ (10 x 10 x 10). During this time the souls of believers who die in the faith are raised to spiritual perfection and reign in life with Christ in Heaven above. This is the first resurrection. At the end of the age Satan is released from his restraints and gathers the unbelieving world against the Church for the Last Battle. However, Christ swiftly returns to raise the dead, judge the world, consign the unrighteous to the Lake of Fire, and bring in the eternal World to Come.

Concerning chapters 21–22, we hold different views. All of us look for new heavens and a new earth. All of us look for a physical city: the eternal habitation of the saints. Many of us look for a physical tree and water of life, albeit with spiritual properties and benefits. Some of us say that the middle wall between Jew and Gentile will be removed once and for all. Others say it will endure forever.

Amillennarian reply: Yes, chapters 21–22 give us the eternal World to Come; but no, we should not bring a literalist hermeneutic with us when we enter it. Here the Spirit depicts the Church—comprised of all God's people of all time—not only as a Bride, but also as a City. She is the Bridal City, forever dwelling in glory in the new creation. The throne of God and the Lamb, the river of the water of life, the tree of life, its fruits and its leaves—all are spiritual realities rather than physical objects. All are symbols, teaching us that the sovereign Father and Son, by the Holy Spirit, will forever refresh, nourish, and maintain the good health of their beloved children and Bride in the glorious World to Come.

C. Why the Dispensational Interpretation Fails

Our dispensational brothers have stumbled badly in their interpretation of the Revelation. Given the widespread popularity of this interpretation, it will serve us well to ask why. I would answer as follows:

First, they have misunderstood the intended *audience* of the book, which is the Church.

Secondly, they have misunderstood the *nature and purpose* of the book, failing to see that it is an extended prophecy designed to edify, exhort, and encourage the Church as she journeys through the wilderness of this present evil world.

They have misunderstood the underlying theme of the book, which is the

exaltation of Christ, the High King of Heaven, who, at the Father's right hand, rules Heaven and earth for the ingathering, upbuilding, preservation, and final glorification of his Church.

They have misunderstood the *literary genre* of the book, which is biblical apocalyptic, and have therefore interpreted the persons, places, objects, and events of the Revelation literally instead of figuratively (i.e., in terms of spiritual realities previously disclosed in the DNT).

They have misunderstood the *structure* of the book, failing to see that its five major blocs are meant as a celebration of the heavenly reign of the exalted Christ, and that the very lengthy fourth bloc (chapters 6–20) gives us parallel representations of the course and character of the High King's reign. They also have failed to see that this structure rules out a futurist interpretation of the book, but instead mandates an "idealist" interpretation according to which its key symbols (i.e., the Woman, the Dragon, the Beast, the False Prophet, the Harlot, Babylon the Great, etc.) all stand for persons and institutions that Christ's Church will encounter again and again throughout her historical pilgrimage.

Finally, they have misunderstood the *ancillary purpose* of the Revelation, which is to give us the Grand Finale of All Scripture: a biblical movement that introduces no new themes (such as a future millennium), but instead simply rehearses and celebrates all that was previously disclosed in the Bible, and especially in the master key to the Bible: the DNT.

In short, our dispensationalist brothers have stumbled over the Revelation because, in trying to understand it, they turned away from the Teacher and the DNT, choosing instead to impose their novel interpretation of Daniel's Seventy Sevens upon the Grand Finale of All Scripture. The result has been great complexity, and therefore great confusion and controversy. But the cause was simple: They failed to listen to Him (Matt. 17:5).

View of the Consummation

For believers steeped in the DNT, dispensational teaching on the Consummation is especially painful. The essential problem here is that it destroys the Blessed Hope of the Church by breaking that one eschatological gem into tiny pieces, and then sewing them like sequins on a false timeline of Salvation History. The result is still more confusion and controversy, neither of which well serves a people upon whom the ends of the ages have come (1 Cor.

10:11).

In the course of our journey toward eschatological clarity I have sought to address every element of the dispensational scenario of the Consummation. Working our way through the timeline above, let us briefly review what we have found.

First comes the Rapture, when Christ secretly returns to the earth and removes his glorified Bride to Heaven, thereby marking the onset of a seven-year season of tribulation. We have seen, however, that this teaching is based on a faulty exegesis of Daniel 9, and on a small handful of NT texts forced into its mold. In truth, the Catching Up of God's glorified saints occurs at the one Parousia of Christ, when the High King returns in power and glory, raises *all* the dead of all time, transforms the living, and gathers all men and angels before his throne in the sky for the Judgment (Matt. 13:36–43; 24:29–31; 1 Thess. 4:13–18).

Next comes the seven-year Tribulation, or the seventieth seven of Daniel. Here, error abounds. The Great Tribulation of Revelation 7:14 is the entire present evil age, begun at the fall and stretching all the way to the Consummation. Now over six millennia long, it has always been a season of tribulation for the true saints of God. The permutations of three and a half years, found throughout the Revelation (i.e., 42 months, 1,260 days, a time, times, and a half a time) all recall Elijah's years in the wilderness, and therefore symbolize the entire Era of Proclamation as a season of persecution and divine provision (1 Kings 17:1-6). The "greatest tribulation" of which our Lord spoke in Matthew 24:21 is a brief season of unspecified length, set to occur at the end of the age: a season of affliction for both the Church and the world. Dispensationalists are correct when they identify Daniel's seventieth seven as the "week" in which the Antichrist will rise to power, deceive the world, and persecute the saints (Dan. 9:27). They err, however, when they identify that "week" as seven literal years. And they further err when they assert that the Church will escape it. Quite the opposite: The Spirit's purpose in giving this prophecy was to prepare the saints for the spiritual opportunities and challenges of the sixty-two sevens (i.e., the Era of Gospel Proclamation), and especially for the vicissitudes of the seventieth (i.e., the Greatest Tribulation). In those days the saints must take up the weapons of their warfare and, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, fight bravely right up to the last hour of the Last Battle (2 Cor. 10:4; Eph. 6:19–20; 2 Tim. 2:3; 4:5).

Next we have "phase two" of the Parousia: Christ's visible coming with his saints, at which time he will resurrect the OT saints and tribulation martyrs, and welcome tribulation saints into his millennial Kingdom. We have seen, however, that this truncated view of the Consummation empties it of much of its Christ-centered power and glory. For again, according to the DNT there is only one Consummation of all things, set to occur at the Lord's one Parousia. When it has run its course, the divine Consummator will lay the shining trophy of God's completed Kingdom at his Father's feet, thereby concluding his Messianic reign, rather than beginning it.

Finally, we have the Millennium, or the so-called Kingdom Age, which is brought to a close by the Last Battle and the Last Judgment at the Great White Throne. Here again, the dispensational error abounds. As we have seen, the one thousand years are not literal, but symbolic. The Millennium is not future, but present. It is none other than the present Era of Gospel Proclamation, during which Christ reigns from Heaven above. The Last Battle does not occur after Christ's Coming in glory, but just before it. And there is but one general Judgment, set to occur at the one Coming of Christ, following the one Resurrection of the Dead.

We conclude, then, that the dispensational view of the Consummation seriously departs from Scripture, robs Christ of his proper glory, and needlessly confuses the saints by breaking up the one Consummation into multiple comings, resurrections, judgments, and transformations of nature.

Conclusion

For over 150 years, much of the Protestant church has been held captive by the dispensational error. While its adherents are to be commended for their fierce loyalty to an inspired Bible, it is now clear that the system itself is profoundly flawed and a fecund source of needless confusion and controversy. Accordingly, I would invite my dispensational brothers to listen afresh to the Teacher, rethink their position from the ground up, and return to the eschatological faith of their Protestant forefathers. In the midst of exceedingly difficult days it served our ancestors well. It can do the same in ours, if only we will stand together with them (Phil. 1:27).

4. Preterism

We have seen that Preterism emphasizes the past fulfillment of biblical

prophecies surrounding the Consummation. Partial Preterism (PP) says that *many* of these prophecies were fulfilled between AD 30–70. Full Preterism (FP) says that *all* of them were. In our eschatological journey I have addressed a number of preterist claims; however, because preterist views have lately gained considerable traction in Reformed circles, we must take a closer look. We'll begin by going to the heart of the matter: *the preterist hermeneutic*, the distinctively preterist method for interpreting the NT prophetic scriptures. After that, we'll examine PP (the most popular of the two views), and then comment briefly on FP (the most troubling).

The Preterist Hermeneutic

Remarkably enough, it appears that the entire edifice of preterist eschatology is built on a small and exceedingly shaky foundation: the preterist interpretation of Matthew 24:34. The Lord said, "I tell you the truth: This generation will by no means pass away till all these things have taken place." Preterists claim that here Christ was referring strictly to the generation of his own contemporaries, the generation that would experience the events of AD 70. But having drawn that conclusion, they now have a problem. That's because the Lord's description of his Parousia, found in Matthew 24:29-31, looks *highly* supernatural, eschatological, and cosmological. But if, as preterists claim, this event really occurred in AD 70, then obviously we cannot take his words literally (as, indeed, most Christians do). Rather, in order to preserve their truthfulness, we shall have to interpret them typologically and figuratively. We shall have to say that here Jesus was doing as the OT prophets did in OTKP: veiling the truth in typological and figurative language, and so actually speaking of his providential judgment of Jerusalem at the hands of Titus.

Alas, the problem does not end here. For if the Lord used figurative language on this occasion, we are compelled to ask: Might he also have done so a little while later, when he spoke of the Judgment (Matt. 25:31–46)? Might he have done so when he previously spoke of the last things (e.g., Matt. 13:37–40; 22:23–33; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:27–36; John 5:21–29)? Indeed, did he predict a supernatural Parousia on *any* occasion? And what of his apostles? In making their predictions, were they simply following their Master by using apocalyptic language to describe the destruction of Jerusalem? And what of the Revelation? Did the Spirit really use these stunningly cosmological symbols simply to speak

of the vicissitudes of "the last days" (i.e., AD 33–70)? In short, where in the NT does all the typological language end, and where does the straightforward teaching begin? Where are the words by which alone we can know God's true future, and so decipher any veiled revelations used to describe it?

Happily, we have already received the answer: God has told us to listen to his Son, the appointed Teacher of the human race (Matt. 17:5). When he came, he revealed all facets of the Eternal Covenant. In particular, he (and his apostles) gave us many *simple prophecies*—straightforward, easily understood predictions—concerning the course and consummation of Salvation History. Having done so, and having seen to their preservation in the DNT, he has *given us the keys:* the revealed eschatological truths by which alone we can know the future and decode the mystical meaning of the OT, OTKP, and the Revelation. Contrary to the claims of the preterists, Jesus Christ did not come to veil God's truth, but to unveil it once and for all (Matt. 13:52).

Here, then, is the great *faux pas* of our preterist brothers. Just as premillennarians err by interpreting OTKP literally, so preterists err by interpreting simple NT prophecies figuratively and typologically. Bound by their narrow interpretation of Matthew 24:34, they feel constrained to embrace an entirely new hermeneutic for the interpretation of NT eschatological texts. Accordingly, they have fallen away from some or all of the tenets of traditional Christian eschatology.

Let us therefore take a moment to address the two main preterist stumbling blocks.

Concerning the Olivet Discourse, we saw earlier that it was the Lord's extended reply to his disciples' twofold question, a question that concerned both the destruction of Jerusalem and his supernatural Coming at the end of the age. Accordingly, the reply itself was twofold, blending the local with the global, the historical with the eschatological, and the providential with the supernatural. We need only read the text itself to see that in *all* these arenas the Lord was giving *simple prophecies* of events future to his disciples.

This includes Matthew 24:29–31, Christ's prediction of his (supernatural) Parousia. Contrary to the claims of our preterist brothers, it does not read like Isaiah 13, Isaiah 24, or Ezekiel 32:7–8—OTKPs that blend the temporal with the eschatological, frame God's judgments in terms of OT covenant curses, or use cosmological images poetically for emphasis. Rather, it reads like a straightforward prediction of the Coming of the Son of Man in glory. This is

evident from the straightforward prediction itself, the straightforward predictions leading up to it (Matt. 24:21–27), and the straightforward predictions flowing down from it (Matt. 24:32-51; 25:31–46). And it is especially evident from the many other NT predictions that so closely resemble this one (Matt. 13:37–43; 1 Thess. 4:13–5:3; 2 Thess. 1:3–12; 2:1-12; 2 Peter 3:1–13). Clearly, this is the mother of all NT prophecies of the Parousia. If, as the preterists claim, it is not giving us a true picture of the Parousia and the Consummation, then we are completely at sea in trying to form a mental picture of the Blessed Hope of the Church.⁸

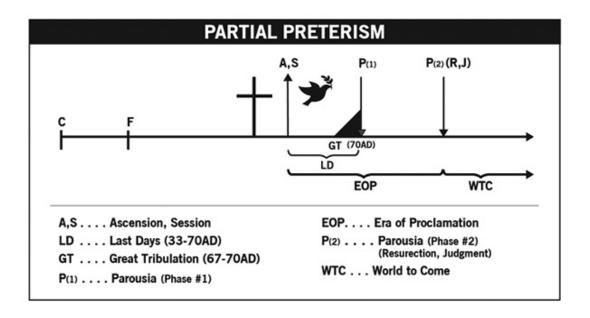
But what of Matthew 24:34? As we saw earlier, in light of the vast historical scope of the Olivet Discourse, which stretches from the first century to the Consummation at the end of the age, it appears that here the Lord was using the word *genea* in its widest possible sense; that he was assuring *all* his disciples of all generations that "this generation"—this fallen, sinful, guilty, judgeable, but also beloved and eminently redeemable offspring of Adam and Eve, and/or the present evil age in which they live—will not pass away until all that he has so solemnly predicted has taken place. This interpretation readmits the supernatural, the eschatological, and the cosmological into the Olivet Discourse. In so doing, it rescues the Church from the preterist error, and restores to her the eschatology of the classic Reformation.

Summing up, we have seen that preterist eschatology—and the confusion it brings in its train—is based on a major hermeneutical error. Having misinterpreted Matthew 24:34, preterists have forced an alien hermeneutic upon some or all of the NT texts dealing with the Consummation. Having misunderstood the mission of the Teacher—which was to *unveil* all of God's truth—they have veiled it again by imposing typological and figurative interpretations upon a precious NT body of simple eschatological prophecies: *prophecies that are meant to supply the scriptural foundation for, and the keys to, all biblical eschatology.* This makes perfect sense. Somewhere, sometime, someone in the Bible is going to have to speak plainly about the Eternal Covenant, the Kingdom of God, and the course of Salvation History, so that God's people will be able to decode all the typological texts dealing with those themes. In the DNT Christ and the apostles have done this very thing (Matt. 13:10–12, 51–52; John 16:12–14, 25; 1 Cor. 2:6–16; Eph. 1:8–10). Alas, our preterist brethren fail to see it.

Keeping these thoughts in mind, let us now take a critical look at PP by

examining its position on the four underlying issues of the GETD.

4a. Partial Preterism



View of the Kingdom

In agreement with Amillennialism, PP affirms that the Kingdom of God is the direct spiritual reign of God the Father, through the Son, and by the Holy Spirit; that it is entered through faith in the Person and Work of Christ; and that it is the promise of the Eternal Covenant. Also, the two schools agree that the Kingdom enters the world in two stages: a spiritual Kingdom of the Son, followed by a spiritual and physical Kingdom of the Father. However, as we shall see, PP holds heterodox views on certain key events proper to the Kingdom of the Son.

View of OTKP

Like amillennarians, PPs use the NCH to interpret OTKP. Rightly, they have learned to view Christ, the New Covenant, the Church, and the two-staged Kingdom of God as the true spheres of fulfillment for all OTKP. However, to the extent that they misunderstand NT teaching on the course of the Era of Proclamation, to that same extent they will misinterpret OTKPs

dealing with its key events. For example, if a partial preterist believes that NT predictions of the Man of Lawlessness were fulfilled by the emperor Nero, then that conviction will shape his interpretation of OT prophecies dealing with the Antichrist and the Last Battle (e.g., Dan. 7:1–28; 9:26–27; 11:36–12:13).

View of the Consummation

Before discussing the PP view of the Revelation and the Millennium, we must first examine its understanding of the Consummation.

Like Amillennialsim (and unlike FP), PP affirms the traditional elements of the Consummation: a single supernatural coming of the glorified Christ, a single resurrection, a single judgment, and a single advent of the glorious World to Come. However, on the following five points, PP departs from traditional orthodoxy.

First, most PPs assert that "the last days" are the years during which the Mosaic Covenant remained in effect (ca AD 33–70). However, no NT text teaches this. Though the early Church would need time to realize it, the Mosaic Covenant ended on a single day: the Day of Pentecost, when, for the first time, through the mystery of preaching (Rom. 10:14), Christians entered the New Covenant that Christ sealed with his blood, thereby abrogating the Old (Mark 11:13–14; Matt. 27:51; John 19:30; Acts 2). As for "the last days," some NT texts use this expression to speak of "the last of the last days": the (difficult) days prior to the Consummation (2 Tim. 3:1; 2 Peter 3:3). However, as a rule the Bible understands "the last days" as the season of Salvation History in which the Eternal Covenant and the Kingdom of God have been manifested in the world. They began with Christ's incarnation and will extend into eternity future (Isa. 2:2; Hos. 3:5; Mic. 4:1; Acts 2:17; Heb. 1:2).

Secondly, most PPs assert that the early Church fully evangelized the world prior to AD 70, thus fulfilling Matthew 24:14. Now it is true that in the apostolic era the Gospel spread like wildfire, thoroughly penetrating the Roman "world" (Acts 19:20; Rom. 15:18–19; Col. 1:6; 1 Thess. 1:8–9). But hyperbole notwithstanding (Col. 1:23), this was only a prelude to, and a picture of, the evangelization of the whole earth, of which the Lord Jesus spoke in the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24:14; cf. Rom. 15:18–29). Many NT texts depict the Great Commission as open-ended and incomplete. The Lord tarries, not desiring that any should perish (2 Peter 3:8–9). The Two Witnesses of Revelation 11:7 (i.e., the witnessing Church) have not yet finished giving their

testimony. Fittingly, even after two thousand years of Gospel proclamation, the Church still hears the Great Commission as a command to finish the job of world evangelization in the power of Christ, who promises to be with her *always*, for that purpose, even till the end of the age (Matt. 28:18–20).

Thirdly, most PPs teach that Nero was the Man of Lawlessness (i.e., the Antichrist). However, while Nero was indeed animated by the spirit of the Antichrist (1 John 4:3), he was *not* the eschatological Antichrist himself, as an objective reading of 2 Thessalonians 2 will make clear. The coming of *the* Antichrist—with his miraculous powers, unprecedented claims to deity, and universal following—still lies ahead, and is arguably the single most important sign of the nearness of the end (2 Thess. 2; Rev. 13:3).

Fourthly, PPs identify "the greatest tribulation" of Matthew 24:21–22 with the vicissitudes of Titus's invasion in AD 67–70. We have seen, however, that while the Lord did indeed have those vicissitudes in mind, and while they were indeed dire, he primarily had in view something far worse: a tribulation the likes of which the world has never seen before, and never will again. Set to occur at the end of present evil age, it will be triggered by the coming of the eschatological Abomination that Causes Desolation (i.e., the Antichrist), cut short for the sake of the elect, and ended with the visible appearing of the Son of God in glory in the skies above the earth (Matt. 24:15–31; Rev. 1:7). It is contemporaneous with, and largely constituted by, the Last Battle between the Church and the world, which, notably, is repeatedly foreseen in the Revelation (Rev. 11:7–10; 13:6–10; 16:12–16; 19:19; 20:7–10).

Finally, while it is indeed true that PPs affirm a supernatural Coming of Christ at the end of the present evil age, their teaching on this point is confused. The crux of the problem is the relationship between Matthew 24:29–31 and Matthew 25:31–46. Amillennarians teach that the former is a simple prophecy of Christ's supernatural Parousia, and the latter a simple prophecy of the (final) Judgment immediately to follow. PPs disagree. Constrained by their interpretation of Matthew 24:34, they assert that the former is a *veiled* prophecy of Christ's "judgment-coming" to Jerusalem, whereas the latter is a *simple* prophecy of his supernatural judgment of the world.

But this view strains all credulity. The Olivet Discourse (Matt 24–25) is a seamless teaching in which Christ gives his disciples a series of simple prophecies covering events that will occur between the days of his flesh and the

end of the age. These two portions of the very same discourse—with their shared references to *the* Coming of the Son of Man, his glory, his angels, and his judgment—fit together hand in glove. Both are clearly describing the one supernatural Parousia of Christ and the one cosmological Consummation it will bring.

The preterist exegesis of the Olivet Discourse wreaks havoc on the interpretation of other NT texts dealing with the Consummation. For again, if Christ himself used veiled language to describe his providential coming, but straightforward language to describe his supernatural coming, then which of the two comings were the apostles referring to when they themselves spoke of the last things?

Inconsistencies and debates among PPs show that this is a very real problem. For example, we have seen that Matthew 24:29–31 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:3 are so similar that most Christians regard them as parallel texts. Yet *all* PPs say that the former gives us the Lord's providential coming, while only *some* say that the latter gives us his supernatural Coming. FPs avoid this inconsistency by saying that both texts give us the coming of AD 70, with the result that amillennarians say they are altogether mistaken instead of partially mistaken.

Again, nearly all PPs say that in 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12 the apostle was predicting the death (by suicide) of the emperor Nero, whom the Lord Jesus "providentially" slew with the breath of his mouth and brought to an end by the appearance of his Coming! Setting aside the historical and exegetical implausibility of this interpretation, how then can some PPs (e.g., Ken Gentry) affirm that in 2 Thessalonians 1:3–12 Paul was referring to Christ's supernatural Parousia, when it is obvious that in both prophecies he was speaking of the very same event?

Or again, how can one PP (Ken Gentry) say that in 2 Peter 3 the apostle was describing cosmic destruction and renewal, while another (Peter Leithart) says that he was actually predicting the events of AD 70? Amillennarians reply, "Because Leithart is more consistent in his application of the preterist hermeneutic, and so has slidden further down the slippery slope into error."

The truth of the matter is as simple as it is important: Whether we have in mind their statements in the book of Acts, the Epistles, or the Revelation, Christ's apostles show *no interest whatsoever* in the destruction of Jerusalem (unless, perhaps, it is found in 1 Thessalonians 2:16). This is true whether it lay ahead of them (as in the case of Paul's early writings) or behind them (as in the

case of all of John's). Their only eschatological concern is *the* Parousia: the one supernatural coming of Christ, set to occur at the end of the present evil age (1 Thess. 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:1; James 5:7; 2 Peter 3:12; 1 John 3:2). Yes, in the Olivet Discourse we do find the Lord referring to the destruction of Jerusalem, for his disciples had specifically inquired about this, and it was necessary for him to prepare them for it. But in the rest of the DNT, which is directed almost entirely to gentile Christians, or to Jewish believers dispersed throughout the Roman empire, interest in the events of AD 70 completely falls away, seeing that the one true Blessed Hope of the universal Church was (and is) the visible coming of Christ in power and glory at the end of the present evil age. This is the living heart of all apostolic eschatology, as indeed every major NT eschatological text makes clear.

View of the Revelation and the Millennium

Having critiqued preterist teaching on the Consummation, we are now in a position to consider its views on the Revelation and the Millennium. I will do so in two steps.

1. View of Revelation 1–19

By and large, PPs assert that Revelation 1–19 was fulfilled prior to, during, or very shortly after AD 70. For preterists, the theme of these chapters is not a supernatural Consummation to be accomplished at the end of a lengthy Era of Proclamation, but rather the events of "the last days," understood as the years following Pentecost and culminating in a "judgment-coming" of Christ at the Battle of Jerusalem (ca AD 33–70). Of necessity, this approach requires preterists to correlate the symbols of the Revelation with concrete historical persons and events of the first century. Those who have surveyed preterist writing on this subject realize that the attempt is as maddening as it is vain.

Here is a *very* general survey of the PP view. Chapters 1–3 give us Christ's message to the seven Asian churches—messages that were designed to equip the first century Church to endure tribulation until "the end" (i.e., AD 70). Chapters 4–5 give us visions of God and Christ, who, by their good providence, will safeguard the redeemed as Providence brings "the end" to pass. The visions of the six seals (Rev. 6), the seven trumpets (Rev. 8–11), and the seven bowls (Rev. 15–16) all depict various events and judgments up to and including "the end" itself. Revelation 7:1–8 depicts the spiritual sealing of the

universal Church (or of the faithful Jewish remnant), so that the saints might safely pass through the tribulation of "the last days." Revelation 7:9–13 depicts them as having done so and now enjoying the blessings of Heaven above. Chapters 12–14 were meant to gird the early Church for persecution at the hands of two of the Dragon's helpers: the Beast (i.e., Nero/Rome), and the False Prophet (i.e., either the Roman governor of Jerusalem, or the cabal of apostate Jewish clerics who fell in with Rome). Chapters 17–19 depict the fall of the Dragon's third helper, the Harlot (i.e., apostate Jerusalem), who wickedly consorts with the Beast (i.e., Nero/Rome). According to most PPs, none of these chapters contain a description of Christ's supernatural Parousia, only of the spiritual and providential victories he will grant to his faithful first century Church.

In the course of our journey I have defended a standard amillennial interpretation of the Revelation. With that in mind, I offer the following short critique of the PP view of chapters 1–19.

First, we have seen that a large majority of NT scholars, citing both internal and external evidence, have concluded that the Revelation was written around 95 AD and not around 60 AD, as PPs assert. If so, the preterist interpretation is impossible. The Spirit of God would not inspire a prophecy that instructs, warns, and encourages the saints concerning things to come (Rev. 1:1, 19) when all or most of those things had already come to pass!²

Secondly, PP misunderstands both the audience and purpose of the Revelation. The audience is the universal Church, and the purpose is to equip her for her centuries-long journey through the howling wilderness of this present evil age (Rev. 12). It does so by keeping *before* her eyes (and not *behind* her back) the rigors of the Great Tribulation through which she must pass, the nature and tactics of the enemies she will face, the vicissitudes of the Last Battle she is destined to endure, and the eternal rescue and restoration she will experience at the Coming of her mighty King. PP turns Revelation 1–19 into a historical curiosity, when in fact it is an urgently needed prophecy, valuable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness, so that the people of God may stand complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work in these last days (2 Tim. 3:16–17).

Thirdly, PP opens the door to exegetical chaos. It does so by forcing the interpreter to look *outside* of Scripture for the meaning of the symbols it employs. To what first century persons, places, things, and events does the

Revelation refer when it speaks of the Seal, Trumpet, and Bowl judgments; of the 144,000 sealed Israelites, or the Two Witnesses; of the Beasts from the Sea and the Earth; of the Mark of the Beast; of the Harlot and Great Babylon; of the Battle of Armageddon; or of the stupendous judgments described at the end of each of the six visionary cycles comprising Revelation 6–20? Combing the works of Jewish and pagan historians, PPs bring back one speculative answer after another. But who is to say which answer is right? By forcing us to look outside of Scripture, the preterist hermeneutic opens the door to exegetical chaos, whereas the idealist hermeneutic—which locates the meaning of all the symbols in the OT and the DNT—keeps us on solid exegetical ground.

Finally, PP obscures—indeed, trivializes—the majestic symbolism of the Revelation, which clearly does *not* point to the local and the historical, but instead to the global, the cosmological, and the eschatological. We have seen, for example, that the Seal, Trumpet, and Bowl judgments do *not* fall (exclusively) on Jerusalem or Rome, but rather upon the entire world-system; that the Beast from the Sea is *not* Nero, but the governmental face of the anti-Christian world-system; that the False Prophet is *not* an obscure Roman functionary or a cabal of apostate Jewish clerics, but the religious face of the anti-Christian world-system; that the Harlot is *not* earthly Jerusalem, but the economic and cultural face of the world-system; that Babylon the Great is *not* Rome or Jerusalem, but the City of Man of all time, the fallen world-system as a whole; etc. Yes, the preterist approach may give us some valid historical *applications* of these symbols, but it by no means exhausts them. Being universal in scope, they therefore speak with fresh power to every generation of believers.

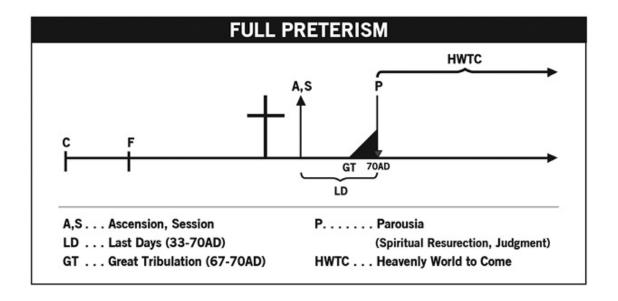
2. View of Revelation 20-22

Concerning Revelation 20–22, PPs disagree among themselves. Some identify the Millennium with the entire Era of Proclamation. On this view, the binding of Satan is an ongoing work of the Spirit made possible by the cross of Christ. Henceforth, the Deceiver of men and nations cannot prevent the ingathering of God's elect, nor can be foment the Last Battle until the Godappointed time. The first resurrection is spiritual rather than physical, and refers either to the new birth or the onset of the Intermediate State. Revelation 20:7–10 gives us the book's one and only prediction of the Last Battle between

the Church and the world. However, the Man of Lawlessness will not spearhead it, since he has already appeared in the person of Emperor Nero. Other passages that *seem* to predict a future Last Battle were fulfilled during the Great Tribulation of AD 66–70, when the Church was persecuted by Israel and Rome. Therefore, Revelation 20:7–15 gives us the book's one and only description of the supernatural Coming of Christ, the Resurrection, and the Judgment, while chapters 21–22 give us the advent of the World to Come. We have seen, however, that chapters 1–19 actually give us numerous visions of the Consummation (6:12–17; 11:15–19; 14:14–20; 16:17–21; 19:11–21), and that the advent of the Man of Lawlessness is actually the preeminent sign of the imminence of the Lord's supernatural return (2 Thess. 2; Rev. 13:8).

Other interpreters—like David Chilton, Ken Gentry, Keith Mathison, and Doug Wilson—defend a postmillennial interpretation of Revelation 20. For such as these, the Millennium is a Golden Era still future to us. The binding of Satan has yet to occur, but certainly will, probably when God visits ethnic Israel and graciously brings (many of) them to faith in his Messianic Son (Rom. 11:15). This will bring about the first resurrection and the millennial reign of the saints, these being understood as fresh bursts of Gospel vitality that will fill the earth, not only with multitudes of devoted Christians, but also with widespread Kingdom righteousness, peace, and joy. Alas, the Golden Era will be (dreadfully) marred by the release of Satan and a resultant global rebellion against Christ and his faithful remnant. But the Lord will reverse the reversal at his swift return, and will raise the dead, judge the world in righteousness, and bring in the new heavens and the new earth. For a critique of this view, please see my previous evaluation of Postmillennialism.

4b. Full Preterism



We have seen that Full Preterism (FP) is the natural result of a consistent application of the preterist hermeneutic. If our Lord used apocalyptic and cosmological language in his Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24:29–31) to describe what was in fact a providential and spiritual coming in AD 70, who is to say that he and his apostles did not use the same kind of language in *all* their eschatological predictions? Who is to say that in *all* their utterances about the Consummation they did not have the events of AD 67–70 in mind?

Alas, in a radical departure from PP and Christian orthodoxy, FPs have taken this very position. Focusing on FP distinctives, I will briefly critique their views here.

View of the Kingdom

FPs teach that the Kingdom of God is a direct spiritual reign of the triune God over his New Covenant people, and that it enters history in two stages: the last days of the Mosaic Covenant (AD 33–70), followed by eternal heavenly and earthly worlds to come, inaugurated at the time of Christ's Parousia in AD 70. They also teach that the reign of God is always and only spiritual, never coming upon the physical bodies of the saints or the natural world in which they were created to live.

We have seen, however, that the NT supplies a dramatically different picture of the Kingdom. Yes, the one Kingdom does indeed enter history in two stages. But the first—the Kingdom of the Son—is co-extensive with the entire

Era of Gospel Proclamation. And the second—the Kingdom of the Father—is not only spiritual but also physical and eternal, and is the sudden, supernatural creation of the High King of Heaven at his visible return in power and glory. Fundamentally, there is no fellowship between the amillennial and full preterist views of the Kingdom of God.

View of OTKP

FPs rightly interpret OTKP typologically and figuratively in terms of the New Covenant. But again, their great misstep is to impose a bastardized version of the NCH on *all* the simple eschatological predictions of the DNT. Alas, in doing so they actually take away the master key to all biblical eschatology, making it impossible for us to discern the true shape of Salvation History, and therefore the true sense of the Old Testament prophetic texts dealing with the last days and the Consummation.

View of the Revelation and the Millennium

FPs teach that this stunningly eschatological and cosmological book was entirely fulfilled in historical and spiritual events that occurred around AD 70 (though the spiritual aftermaths remain with us to this day). Concerning Revelation 20, opinions differ. Its temporal sphere of fulfillment is held to be "the last days" (AD 33–70), the Battle of Masada (AD 70–73), or perhaps the Bar Kochba rebellion (AD 132). In any case, all FPs agree that Revelation 20 does *not* take us to a genuinely cosmological judgment and "end of all things" (1 Peter 4:7).

We have seen, however, that the Revelation actually scans the entire centuries-long journey of the pilgrim Church, and that its manifold symbols, which the DNT alone can illumine, confront us afresh with every element of the classic NT eschatology: the various judgments and deliverances of God administered throughout Salvation History, the Church's serial encounters with the Dragon and his helpers, her constant spiritual nourishment at the hand of her heavenly King, the hope of spiritual perfection during the Intermediate State, the Last Battle, the Parousia, the bodily Resurrection of the Dead, the Transformation of the Living Saints, the Judgment at the Great White Throne of Christ, the Lake of Fire, and the New Heavens and the New Earth. Again, the Revelation is actually the Grand Finale of all Scripture and is therefore one of the greatest prophetic treasures of the pilgrim Church. She

must never let FP rob her of it.

View of the Consummation

Just here the preterist error is at its worst, since FPs, while disagreeing on fine points, stand united in expressly denying the traditional elements of the biblical Consummation. Having already discussed NT teaching on these points, I will simply describe the basic FP view here.

There is but one Parousia of Christ, and it is not a future bodily return of the Lord in glory. Rather, it is a past "judgment-coming" that occurred in AD 70, a coming that (somehow) brought the suffering first-century Church into the fullness of her spiritual inheritance. Therefore, as never before, Christ has now *fully* come to his people.

The Resurrection is not a future event in which Christ will join the spirits of the dead with their physical remains, thereby creating eternal physical bodies. Rather, it is a past spiritual event in which he raised the souls of the biologically dead out of Sheol/Hades and gave them new "spiritual bodies" suited for Heaven or Gehenna. Now that the one general Resurrection has occurred, the souls of all who die physically are spiritually "raised" at death and go directly to Heaven or Gehenna.

Again, the Judgment is not a future event in which all mankind will appear bodily before the judgment seat of Christ, there to receive eternal reward or retribution. Rather, it too occurred in AD 70, when Christ opened Heaven, created Gehenna (the Lake of Fire), raised the souls of the dead out of Sheol/Hades, and assigned them to their eternal spiritual habitation. Also, at his return in AD 70 the Lord "destroyed" the earth and its works (see 2 Peter 3:10), for at that time he fully entered his Church, through which, in a whole new order of things, he will henceforth topple the powers of evil and bend the nations to his will.

As for the World to Come, it has in fact *already* come. Why? Because Christ has already come (in AD 70), the Resurrection has occurred, the Judgment has taken place, and the New Jerusalem (i.e., his Spirit-filled Church) has "descended" onto a new, spiritually transformed Earth, in which she will continually summon all men and nations to enter her blessed precincts through faith in Christ and the Gospel (Rev. 21:2, 22–27; 22:1–2, 17).

But what of the present physical world in which we live, "the whole creation that groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now" (Rom.

8:22)? What is her future? Alas, on this subject the Scriptures are (allegedly) silent. Ours is simply to occupy—not until he comes, but until we go.

Again, having closely examined NT teaching on all these themes, I will not offer further criticisms of FP here. Suffice it say that if Amillennialism really is the eschatology of the Bible, then FP clearly stands under the stern rebuke of Holy Scripture (Matt. 24:26–27; Acts 1:11; Rom. 8:18–25; 1 Cor. 15; 1 Tim. 1:18–20; 2 Tim. 2:18). Indeed, if we may define heresy as a persistent and harmful departure from widely accepted biblical doctrine, then the historic creeds of the Church unanimously declare that FP eschatology is heresy (1 Cor. 11:2, 19; 2 Thess. 2:15). Let every good Berean decide for himself.

Conclusion

By imposing an alien, spiritualizing hermeneutic on the simple eschatological predictions given by God's appointed Teacher and his apostles, PP badly damages our Blessed Hope, while FP destroys it altogether. Therefore, I would urge all my preterist brothers to return swiftly to the traditional amillennial faith of the Church. I think it likely that we are living in the last of the last days. If so, the Bride of Christ will need all the eschatological truth, clarity, and encouragement she can get. And she will need *you* to help her receive them all.

1. To review the distinction between these two schools of Historic Premillennialism, please see chapter 3.

^{2.} Cited in Stanley Grenz, *The Millennial Maze* (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 1992), 72.

<u>3</u>. *Ibid*, 74.

<u>4</u>. For a detailed discussion of Romans 11:11–36 and God's future plans for ethnic Israel, see *HKOH*, p. 548f. Also, in that book see Appendix 5, titled, *Is the Modern State of Israel a Fulfillment of Biblical Prophecy?* This appendix is also available on my website: www.clr4u.org.

^{5.} For a critique of the dispensational interpretation of Daniel 9:24–27, see *HKOH*, pp. 368–371. For my own interpretation, see chapter 9 of this book.

<u>6</u>. MSB, 2712.

Z. For a more detailed study of the key symbols of the Revelation, see *HKOH*, chapter 20: *The Revelation:* Structure and Key Symbols, pp. 426f.

^{8.} Full preterists sometimes defend their figurative interpretation of Matthew 24:29–31 by pointing out that it is impossible for the stars literally to fall from the sky (Matt. 24:29). But the text does not say they will fall from the sky to the earth, only that they will fall from the sky. Isaiah and Peter illuminate this event, telling us that at the Judgment the heavenly bodies will be dissolved (Isa. 34:4; 2 Peter 3:10–13). There is a sense, then, in which the stars will literally fall out of the sky. Also, for observers on earth the dissolution of the light connecting the stars to the earth may well give a visual impression that they are suddenly falling out of the sky, and perhaps even earthward. We shall see.

9 In defense of an early date preterists cite verses in the Revelation stating that the events in view "must shortly come pass" (Rev. 1:1; 22:6), and that "the appointed time is near" (Rev. 1:3; 22:10). But these texts hardly prove an early date of composition, or a strictly 1st century fulfillment of the prophecies. To begin with, the verses from chapter 22 state that all things, *including the advent of the World to Come*, must shortly come to pass, and that their time is near. So unless one is a full preterist, these texts rule out a strictly 1st century fulfillment of the book. More to the point, the progressive idealist interpretation of the book richly illumines the nuanced meaning of these expressions. Since the Revelation speaks to all believers of all times, it is indeed true that many of its predictions will soon come to pass in their lives. As for the prophecies that speak of the end of the age (i.e., of the Last Battle, the Parousia, the Judgment, etc.), they too will soon come to pass, for against the backdrop of eternity a thousand years in God's sight are like yesterday when it has passed by, and like a watch in the night (Ps. 90:4; 2 Peter 3:8).

CHAPTER 16

AMILLENNIALISM: AN ESCHATOLOGY FOR THESE LAST DAYS

A re we living in the last days? Yes, I *know* we are, for the Bible says that we have been ever since the Son of God came into the world to purchase our redemption (Heb. 1:1–2).

But are we living in "the last of the last days"? Are we swiftly closing in on the final scenes of cosmic history: the Last Battle, the Parousia, and the Consummation of all things? Only God knows. Nevertheless, I will say that *I think* we are; and here, on the last leg of our journey, I want to explain why, and also how the classic amillennial eschatology can prepare us for them.

The Last of the Last Days

For two millennia the Church has been experiencing what our Lord referred to as *the beginning of the birth pangs*. These include wars, rumors of war, famines, earthquakes, pestilence, the deceptive teachings of false christs and false prophets, and the ebb and flow of persecution. All of this has been part and parcel of the Great Tribulation, out of which God has faithfully been rescuing his beloved children for generations, uniting them with his Son, and planting them safely on the Zion above (Gal. 4:26; Rev. 7:9-17).

Today, however, the universal Church is witnessing a notable intensification of these birth pangs. Much of Christendom is in collapse. European churches stand empty. Whole denominations, rich with Christian history and culture, slide into compromise and apostasy. Outspoken (and soft-spoken) atheism is on the rise, even in America, an historic citadel of the faith. The Western intelligentsia speaks openly of a "post-Christian" society. As in the days of Noah and Lot, world culture descends into lawlessness: gratuitous violence, theft, kidnapping, slavery, murder, sexual immorality, drug abuse, lying, greed, fraud, religious fanaticism, and anarchy.

Meanwhile, the persecution of Christians and Jews increases. Courts, universities, employers, political parties, and media outlets drive believers to

the margins of society. Freedom of religious speech and assembly is curtailed, if not canceled. While estimates differ widely, all agree that thousands of believers are dying annually for their faith. Day by day the souls of the martyrs flow into Heaven, taking their place beneath the altar of God (Rev. 6:10).

But amidst all this gloom there is good news as well. The glory of the Lord abides upon his true spiritual Church, and through the global preaching of the Gospel people from every nation are coming to her light and streaming into the City of God (Isa. 60 1–3; Matt. 24:14). Where sin abounds, grace still more abounds, though usually below the radar and off the screen (Rom. 5:20). Despite the modern headwinds, the Lord is still building his Church (Matt. 16:18).

Have we therefore reached transition itself? Is the delivery near? Is the rebirth of all things at our door?

No and yes. No, because we have not yet witnessed at least three of the special signs that our Lord taught us to look for—signs that herald the imminence of the end. But yes, if we pause to consider why these signs may soon be upon us.

Consider first the Great Commission. It is indeed true that we have not yet fulfilled it. According to the Joshua Project, there are currently more than 17,000 people groups in the world, of which about 7,000 remain technically "unreached." This is over 40 percent of all people groups, 2.9 billion souls. It is a staggering number, largely representing the Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Communists, and animists who inhabit the so-called "10/40 window."

We must remember, however, that the gap between "reached" and "unreached" has never been smaller, that the pool of potential missionaries has never been larger, that revivals are continually springing up in many of these populations, and that modern advances in communications technology are bringing the Gospel to multitudes, thereby facilitating rapid church growth even in "closed" nations. Yes, much work remains to be done, and many pioneer missionaries are needed to do it. Nevertheless, it is not wishful thinking to say that today's Church is powerfully "hastening" the Coming of the Lord, and that the completion of the Great Commission is near (2 Peter 3:12).

Secondly, it is also true that we have not yet seen the large-scale conversion of God's ancient covenant people, ethnic Israel. But the stage is certainly set for one. Globally, anti-Semitism is on the rise. Many of the sons of Jacob have

returned to their former homeland, a staggering feat of providence that can hardly be without redemptive significance. Israel's spiritual wealth is inversely proportional to their material: From Christ's perspective, they are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, naked—and deeply loved (Rom. 11:28; Rev. 3:17). Even now there is a great famine in the land, such that one day soon—perhaps amidst the birth pangs of persecution and war—multitudes of Jews will finally cry out to God's greater Joseph: first for forgiveness, and then for food, drink, and perfect safety in a far better homeland where righteousness dwells (Gen. 45:1–28; 2 Peter 1:13).

Finally, it is also true that the Man of Lawlessness has not yet been revealed, and that the Last Battle and the Greatest Tribulation have not yet begun. As never before, however, there are signs that the final clash of the kingdoms is drawing near. I have already mentioned rapidly growing lawlessness, apostasy, and persecution, all of which may well herald, or even fulfill, the "rebellion" of which the apostle Paul spoke in 2 Thessalonians 2.

Alongside these we also observe a fresh upsurge of the Babylonian tendency in world history (Gen. 11:1–9). Guided as if by an invisible hand, an emerging network of powerful elites—political, bureaucratic, military, corporate, scientific, educational, journalistic, and technocratic—militates against democratic and nationalist impulses, working instead toward a Great Reset of human nature and society. What's more, recent history has shown that this network is quite capable of manipulating huge swaths of humanity toward their chosen ends. Though God's prophetic word indicates that their path to a global utopia may well be strewn with the thorns of war (Dan. 11:36-12:13; Rev. 17:16), it is nevertheless clear that the unthinkable has now become thinkable: A final world empire, ruled by a final world tyrant holding the family of nations in a twofold iron grip: the hope of Heaven on earth, and the fear of annihilation for those unwilling to comply. Happily, the Gospel continues to go forth with good success to every tribe, tongue, people, and nation, with the result that new churches are springing up in their midst. Yet even as it does, a world system given over to idolatry—and drunk with pride, wealth, sensuality, and the lust for power—grows increasingly hardened. Like Egypt of old, at any moment it could turn en masse against God's eschatological Israel, thinking to pursue her to the death through a Red Sea of religious cleansing.

An Eschatology for These Last Days

Yes, the Church may well be entering the last of the last days. And if that is so, it is more important than ever that she recover the Bible's one true eschatology. In our journey together I have shared my conviction that this high honor properly belongs to Amillennialism. In what follows I will explain why I think it is vital for the Church to embrace it.

First, Amillennialism powerfully caps, completes, and crystallizes the entire biblical worldview. As we have seen, it secures for us the one true timeline of Salvation History, revealing both its heart (the Eternal Covenant) and its body (the stages and administrations of that Covenant). Similarly, Amillennialism rounds out biblical cosmology, which, to be complete, requires a good understanding not only of the origin, purpose, and structure of the universe, but also of its final destiny. All of us have a God-given longing to behold "the Big Picture" concerning the cosmos. Amillennialism alone supplies it.

Secondly, Amillennialism opens up and integrates the Bible as a whole. It begins by identifying Jesus Christ as God's appointed Teacher. Then it takes us to the Didactic New Testament: the *classroom* in which the Teacher gives us the master keys to all Scripture, and the *courtroom* in which he arbitrates all of our theological disputes. In this classroom we discover the heart of the Bible: the Eternal Covenant in Christ. We also discover the New Covenant Hermeneutic: the apostolically endorsed method for understanding the most difficult parts of the Bible (i.e., OT types and shadows, OTKP, and the Revelation). As a result, we now see the big biblical picture: Christ and the several elements of the Eternal Covenant: pictured, promised, predicted, manifested, proclaimed, embraced, and eagerly awaited by all who love the Lord and his God-breathed Word. Lest she be swept away by the strong ideological crosscurrents of the last days, the Church must be anchored to total truth. By fully opening up and integrating the Bible, amillennial eschatology gives her total truth. As she takes hold of it, the Lord takes fresh hold of her, keeping her safe, sound, and strong all the way to the end.

Thirdly, Amillennialism strengthens the preaching and teaching ministry of the Church. This is a corollary of the previous two points. By giving God's people total biblical truth, Amillennialism enables them to *proclaim* that truth. In particular, it empowers evangelists, pastors, and teachers, not only to proclaim Christ from the four Gospels and the Epistles, but also from OT

history, OTKP, and the Revelation. It empowers them not only to proclaim the Lord's birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension, but also his present heavenly reign and his future coming again. And it mightily empowers them to proclaim the one Consummation that he will effect at his return: the one Resurrection, the one Judgment, and the one new World to Come. In short, Amillennialism enables God's Gospel messengers to bring the full force of his total truth to bear upon saints and sinners alike. The saints and sinners of these last days will need it as never before.

Fourthly, Amillennialism prepares the Church for the Last Battle. Like the good Father who gave it to us, this eschatology does not indulge in escapist fantasies or wishful thinking. It tells us honestly and comfortingly that the Church is destined to follow in the footsteps of her Master; that for a brief season at the end of the age she will endure severe marginalization, unfair vilification, gross injustice, widespread rejection, and (institutional) death. However, it also tells us that at the Parousia she will swiftly rise again to final vindication, eternal life, and joy unspeakable and full of glory. As it is written, "A disciple is not above his teacher, neither is a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple to be like his teacher, and a servant like his master" (Matt. 10:24–25). The saints will be like their Master in life, death, resurrection, and everlasting glory. To all eternity they will confess that it was enough and more than enough (Rev. 11:1–14).

Finally, Amillennialism revives the Church with a fresh revelation of the glory of Christ. As we have seen, it does so by opening her eyes to the true nature of her Lord's exaltation: his resurrection, ascension, heavenly reign, and return in glory for the Consummation of all things. For a longish season smoke ascending from the abyss has obscured this particular sun (Rev. 9:1–2). Now, however, the Lord is clearing the air. As he does, the Bride begins to behold her King afresh: not only up above, but also up ahead. The vision is breathtaking, filling her eyes with the deity, sovereignty, mighty power, and covenant love of her heavenly King. As never before, she beholds the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and is thereby changed from one degree of glory to the next (2 Cor. 3:18).

In sum, Amillennialism is indeed an eschatology perfectly suited for these last days. Opening a window onto the one true timeline of Salvation History, it lets in the light from God's one true future, pouring it into the perplexing present, and filling the hearts of the saints with clarity, conviction, joy, and the

zeal of Christ himself. Thus filled, the Bride becomes sound in faith, strong for outreach, steady in the midst of birth pains, proof against lies and error, holy before the rising tide of lawlessness, and courageous in the face of persecution—always looking beyond the Last Battle to the eternal joys of the Marriage Feast of the Lamb.

Indeed, as her heavenly Husband washes her eyes with the water of his Word, the veil between the present and the future grows increasingly thin—so thin that she seems to see him standing right before her.

With love and longing, she cries, "Come!"

With love and longing he replies, "Yes, my Beloved, I am coming quickly. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life!"

APPENDIX I

OLD TESTAMENT KINGDOM PROPHECIES LISTED

Ere is a very full, though not quite exhaustive, list of Old Testament Kingdom Prophecies (OTKPs). Please recall from our study that I define an OTKP as any OT prophecy of the Kingdom of God fulfilled on or after the Day of Pentecost, when the first stage of the Kingdom began with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. As opposed to "simple" OT prophecies, which were fulfilled prior to Pentecost, OTKPs cannot be interpreted literally, but rather through a skillful use of the New Covenant Hermeneutic. That is, they must be interpreted:

- Covenantally: As being fulfilled under the New/Eternal Covenant, and as referring to the several elements of that Covenant.
- Christologically: As being fulfilled in the Person and Work of Christ.
- Typologically: As using OT ideas and images to convey NT truth.
- **Ecclesiologically:** As being fulfilled among God's New Covenant people, the Church, comprised of believing Jews and Gentiles.
- **Eschatologically:** As being fulfilled in "the last days": the days in which the New Covenant is made manifest, whether in the first stage of the Kingdom (the Kingdom of the Son), the second stage of the Kingdom (the Kingdom of the Father), or both.

My hope and prayer is that as you apply the New Covenant Hermeneutic to these beautiful OT prophecies, the Holy Spirit will enable you to understand and delight in them, with the result that you can also use them mightily for the advance of Christ's Kingdom.

Text Gist of Text **Deuteronomy** 30:1-10 The Lord Will Gather You (DF)* The LORD Will Make Atonement for His Land 32:34-43 2 Samuel 7:8-17 Your Kingdom Shall Endure Forever (DF) **Psalms** The Reign of the LORD's Anointed 2 22:27-31 The Ends of the Earth Will Turn 69:34-36 God Will Save Zion A Prayer for the Coming King 72 God's Eternal Covenant with David 89 96 Sing to the LORD, All the Earth Zion, My Resting Place Forever 132 Isaiah 2:1-5The Mountain of the Lord The Day of the Lord 2:6-22 4:2-6 The Branch of the Lord A Child is Born 9:1-710:20-23 A Remnant Will Return A Branch from Jesse 11:1-9 A Remnant from All Nations 11:10-16 12:1-6 The Church's Song of Praise 14:1-2 Taking Their Captors Captive Israel, Egypt, Assyria: God's Inheritance 19:16-25 24:21-23 Bound for Many Days 25:6-9 A Feast of Fat Things

26:1–6	The Song of Judah
27:1–12	A Remnant Will Worship in Zion
30:18–26	Your Eyes Will See Your Teacher
32:1-5	A King Will Reign in Righteousness
33:16–24	The Land of the Majestic King
35:1-10	The Joy of the Remnant
40:1-11	Comfort My People!
41:8-20	Fear Not, I Am with You!
42:1–4	Behold, My Servant!
43:1-7	Israel's Only Savior
44:1-5	Israel My Chosen
44:21–28	She Shall Be Built
49:1–7	A Light for the Nations
49:8–13	The LORD has Comforted His People
49:14–26	God's Promise to Zion
52:1–12	How Beautiful Upon the Mountains
52:13-53:12	A Suffering Servant, an Exalted King
54:1–17	Your Maker is Your Husband
55:1–13	Come, Buy, Eat!
56:1–12	I Will Gather Others
60:1–22	Zion's Future Glory
61:1–11	They Shall Build Up the Ancient Ruins
62:1–12	A City Not Forsaken
63:1–6	The Day of Vengeance
65:8–10	The Faithful Remnant
65:17–25	I Create Jerusalem a Joy
66:7–14	A Nation Born in a Day

66:18–24	The Nations Gathered to Zion
Jeremiah	
3:11–18	God's Promise to Faithless Israel
12:14–17	God's Word to Israel's Wicked Neighbors
23:1–8	The Righteous Branch of David
29:10–14	I Will Bring You Back (DF)
30:1–24	I Will Break His Yoke (DF)
31:31–34	A New Covenant, a New Heart
32:36–44	They Shall Be My People
33:1–13	Jerusalem, a Name of Joy Before the Nations
33:14–26	God's Eternal Covenant with David
46:25–26	Eschatological Mercy to Egypt
48:47	Eschatological Mercy to Moab
49:6	Eschatological Mercy to Ammon
49:39	Eschatological Mercy to Elam
50:4-5	They Will Ask the Way to Zion
50:17-20	I Will Pardon the Remnant
50:34	Eschatological Mercy to the Earth
Ezekiel	
20:33–44	I Will Be King Over You
28:24–26	Israel Will Dwell Securely
34:11–31	I Will Lead My Flock to Rest
36:8–15	God's Word to the Mountains of Israel
36:22–38	I Will Prove Myself Holy
37:1–14	Resurrection Life in the Valley of Dry Bones
37:15–28	One Stick in My Hand
38–39	Gog and Israel in the Day of the LORD

40-48	Israel's Worship in the World to Come
Daniel	
2:31–45	The Statue of Man, the Kingdom of God
7:11–28	The Vision of the Four Beasts
9:20-27	The Prophecy of the Seventy Sevens
11:36–12:13	The Last Battle and the Resurrection of the Dead
Hosea	
1:10-11	Children as the Sand of the Sea
2:14-23	Wedded in the Wilderness
3:5	Israel Will Come Trembling
11:10-11	The LORD Will Roar
14:4–7I	Will Heal Their Apostasy
Joel	
2:18-27	You Shall Eat in Plenty
2:28–32I	Will Pour Out My Spirit
3:1-21	Judah's Glorious Future
Amos	
9:11–18	David's Tabernacle Restored
Obadiah	
vv. 15–21	Salvation on Mount Zion
Micah	
2:12-13	I Will Gather the Remnant of Israel
4:1-5	The Peoples Stream to Zion
4:6-8	I Will Gather the Outcasts
4:9-13	Arise and Thresh, Daughter of Zion
5:1-6	He Will Be Great to the Ends of the Earth
5:7-8	A Remnant Among the Nations

7:7–13	A Day for Building Your Walls
7:14–20	Unchanging Love to Abraham's Seed
Nahum	
1:15	Good News for Judah
Habakkuk	
3	God Will Go Forth for His People's Salvation
Zephaniah	
3:12-20	Israel Will Be Restored
3:9-13	A Humble People in the Land
3:14-20	Sing Aloud, O Daughter of Zion!
Haggai	
2:5–9	The Latter Glory of God's House
2:20-23	Zerubbabel, My Signet Ring
Zechariah	
1:12–17	Jerusalem Will Be Restored
2	Jerusalem Measured for Blessing
3:1–7	A Brand Plucked from the Fire
3:8-10	The Coming Branch
4	Grace, Grace to It!
5:5–11	Iniquity Removed from the Earth
6:9–15	A Man Whose Name is Branch
8	Zion's Future Peace
9:9–17	The Coming Warrior King
10	I Will Bring Them Back
11	Jerusalem, a Cup that Causes Reeling
12:1–9	Strong in the Lord
12:10–14	Before Strength, Tears

13:1–6	After Tears, Cleansing
13:7–9	The Stricken Shepherd, the Gathered Flock
14:1–2	The Last Battle
14:3-5	The Day of the LORD
14:6–11	The World to Come
14:12–15	The Judgment to Come
14:16–21	The Worship to Come
Malachi	
1	From the Rising of the Sun
2:17-3:5	The Messenger of the Covenant Will Come
4	The Sun of Righteousness Will Rise

*DF = Double Fulfillment. In OTKPs where this occurs the prophecy has both a historical fulfillment under the Old Covenant and an eschatological fulfillment under the New Covenant in the (two-staged) Kingdom of God.

NOTE: For a list of OTKPs cited in the NT see *The High King of Heaven*, pages 667–670.

APPENDIX II

NEW TESTAMENT TEXTS TOUCHING ON THE PAROUSIA/CONSUMMATION

There is a fulsome list of NT texts touching on the Parousia and the Consummation. In our journey we have closely examined some of the most important. As you use this chart to study the rest, I trust you will find that each one confirms the central thesis of this book: God has planned a single Christ-centered Consummation for the end of the present evil age, when, at the Lord's Parousia, he raises the dead, judges the world in righteousness, destroys the present earth and its works by fire, and creates new heavens and a new earth, the eternal home of the redeemed.

Text	Gist of Text
Matthew	
12:18–20	Till He Sends Forth Judgment to Victory
13:37–43	The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares
13:47–50	The Parable of the Dragnet
16:27–17:8	A Glimpse of the Consummated Kingdom
19:27–28	Judging the Twelve Tribes of Israel
21:43–44	The Stone That Will Fall
22:23–33	The Resurrection Affirmed
24–25	The Olivet Discourse
26:29	Until the Day I Drink it New
26:64	Coming on the Clouds of Heaven
Mark	
4:26–29	The Harvest at the End of the Age

8:38	When the Son of Man Comes
9:1-8	The Transfiguration
12:18–27	The Resurrection Affirmed
13:1–37	The Olivet Discourse
Luke	
9:27–36	The Transfiguration
12:35–41	Let Your Loins Be Girded
17:22–36	Remember Lot's Wife
18:1-8	Will the Son of Man Find Faith?
19:11–27	The Parable of the Talents
20:27–40	The Resurrection Affirmed
21:5–36	The Olivet Discourse
John	
5:21–28	Resurrection and Judgment at the Hand of Christ
6:39–40, 44, 54	The Resurrection on the Last Day
14:3	I Will Come Again
Acts	
3:19–26	The Restoration of All Things
10:42	The Judge of the Living and the Dead
24:15	A Resurrection of the Just and the Unjust
Romans	
2:1–16	Judgment on the Day of Christ
8:16–25	Cosmic Restoration at the Resurrection
11:11–15	Life from the Dead at Israel's Conversion
16:20	Satan Crushed at the Parousia
1 Corinthians	
1:4-8	Waiting for the End at the Revelation of Christ

3:13	The One Day of Judgment
4:5	Universal Judgment at the Parousia
5:5	The Day of the Lord Jesus
15:20–28	The Resurrection and the Twofold Kingdom
15:50–58	The Death of Death at the Last Trumpet
2 Corinthians	
4:14	God Presents His People at the Resurrection
5:1-10	Resurrection, Judgment, House Eternal in the Heavens
Ephesians	
4:30	Sealed for the Day of Redemption
Philippians	
1:6–11, 2:16	Sincere and Blameless till the Day of Christ
3:9-11	That I May Attain the Resurrection
3:20-21	Cosmic Restoration at the Resurrection
Colossians	
3:4	Revealed with Him in Glory
1 Thessalonians	
1:10	Waiting for His Son from Heaven
2:19–20	Paul's Hope, Joy, and Crown at the Parousia
3:11–13	Established in Holiness at the Parousia
4:13–18	The Comfort of His Coming
5:1–11	Appointed for Salvation in the Day of the Lord
2 Thessalonians	
1:3–12	Rescue and Retribution at the Revelation of Christ
2:1–13	Christ vs. Antichrist at the Parousia
1 Timothy	
6:13–16	Be Faithful until His Appearing

2 Timothy	
1:12, 18	Guarded until That Day
4:1	Universal Judgment at His Appearing
Titus	
2:13	The Church's Blessed Hope
Hebrews	
6:1–3	The Resurrection, Followed by Eternal Judgment
9:23–28	Christ to Appear a Second Time, for Final Salvation
10:11–13	Waiting till His Enemies Are Made His Footstool
10:25	The Day Is Drawing Near
12:26–27	One More Shaking to Come
James	
5:7–9	Be Patient till the Judgment at His Return
1 Peter	
1:6–9	Be Patient till the Revelation of Christ
4:7–19	The End of All Things Is at Hand
2 Peter	
3:1–13	The Day of the Lord Will Come
3:18	Glory to Christ, Now and Till the Day of Eternity
1 John	
2:28	Confident at His Appearing/Coming
3:2-3	At His Appearing We Shall Be Like Him
Jude	
v. 6	The Judgment of the Great Day
vv. 14–15	Mockers to Be Judged at the Parousia
vv. 24–25	Believers to Stand with Great Joy

APPENDIX III

BIBLICAL PROPHECIES OF THE LAST BATTLE

the great eschatological contest between God and Satan, Christ and the Antichrist, the Church and the World. As these prophecies show, the Last Battle is predestined to occur shortly before the Parousia of the Lord Jesus Christ, and is therefore a major sign of the imminence of his return. In recent years the evangelical Church has largely neglected this doctrine, primarily due to the influence of Dispensationalism, which transforms the Last Battle into a local conflict between ethnic Israel and the nations. Now, however, Dispensationalism is in retreat and the historic Christian teaching on this theme is once again coming into view. This is timely, since the rising tide of lawlessness, rebellion, and persecution of Jews and Christians suggests that the Last Battle may be nearer than we think.

Text	Gist of Text
Ezekiel 38–39	"I Am Against You, O Gog!"
Daniel 7:1–28	A Vain War Against the Saints
Daniel 9:26-27	Even to the End There Will Be War
Daniel 11:36-12:13	A People Rescued in Time of Distress
Micah 4:11-5:1	God Gathers the Nations to His Threshing Floor
Zechariah 14:1-3	The LORD Will Go Forth and Fight
Matthew 24:9-28	Then There Will Be Great Tribulation (BP)*
2 Thessalonians 2:3–12	The Man of Lawlessness, Opponent of God
Revelation 11:7–10	The Beast at War with the Two Witnesses
Revelation 13:6–10	The Beast from the Sea Overcomes the Saints (BP)*
Revelation 16:12–16	The Kings of the Earth Gathered for the War

Revelation 19:17–21 The Nations Assembled for the Supper of God Revelation 20:7–10 A Fire from Heaven Ends the War

^{*} BP = Blended Prophecy: A prophecy that blends near and far historical events; that blends the preliminary and the ultimate, the historical and the eschatological.

APPENDIX IV

THE CREEDS OF CHRISTENDOM ON THE CONSUMMATION

his appendix cites the eschatological portions of some of the great creeds of Christendom, especially those in the Reformed tradition. Together they show that Amillennialism has indeed been the traditional eschatology of the universal Christian Church. I have written this book in hopes that all God's people will consider it afresh and, if necessary, come home.

1. The Apostles' Creed (Fourth Century)

Christ . . . sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

2. The Nicene Creed (AD 381)

And Christ shall come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead; whose Kingdom shall have no end.

3. The Athanasian Creed (Sixth Century)

He ascended into heaven, (and) sitteth on the right hand of the Father, God Almighty; at whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies, and shall give account for their works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire.

4. The Augsburg Confession (Lutheran, 1530)

(We) teach that at the Consummation of the World Christ will appear for judgment, and will raise up all the dead; He will give to the godly and elect eternal life and everlasting joys, but ungodly men and the devils He will condemn to be tormented without end.

(We) condemn (those) who are now spreading certain Jewish opinions, that before the resurrection of the dead the godly shall take possession of the kingdom of the world, the ungodly being everywhere suppressed.

5. Belgic Confession (Reformed, 1561)

Finally, we believe, according to God's Word, that when the time appointed by the Lord is come (which is unknown to all creatures) and the number of the elect is complete, our Lord Jesus Christ will come from Heaven, bodily and visibly, as he ascended, with great glory and majesty, to declare himself the judge of the living and the dead. He will burn this old world in fire and flame in order to cleanse it.

Then all human creatures will appear in person before the great Judge: men, women, and children, who have lived from the beginning until the end of the world.

They will be summoned there by the voice of the archangel and by the sound of the divine trumpet. For all those who died before that time will be raised from the earth, their spirits being joined and united with their own bodies in which they lived. And as for those who are still alive, they will not die like the others, but will be changed in the twinkling of an eye from corruptible to incorruptible.

Then the books (that is, the consciences) will be opened, and the dead will be judged according to the things they did in the world, whether good or evil. Indeed, all people will give account of all the idle words they have spoken, which the world regards as only playing games. And then the secrets and hypocrisies of men will be publicly uncovered in the sight of all.

Therefore, with good reason the thought of this judgment is horrible and dreadful to wicked and evil people. But it is very pleasant and a great comfort to the righteous and elect, since their total redemption will then be accomplished. They will then receive the fruits of their labor and of the trouble they have suffered; their innocence will be openly recognized by all; and they will see the terrible vengeance that God will bring on the evil ones who tyrannized, oppressed, and tormented them in this world.

The evil ones will be convicted by the witness of their own consciences, and shall be made immortal—but only to be tormented in the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

In contrast, the faithful and elect will be crowned with glory and honor. The Son of God will confess their names before God his Father and the holy and elect angels; all tears will be wiped from their eyes; and their cause—at present condemned as heretical and evil by many judges and civil officers—will be

acknowledged as the cause of the Son of God.

And as a gracious reward the Lord will make them possess a glory such as the heart of man could never imagine.

So we look forward to that great Day with longing in order to enjoy fully the promises of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

6. The Heidelberg Catechism (Reformed, 1563)

Question: What comfort is it to thee that "Christ shall come again to judge the quick and the dead"?

Answer: That in all my sorrows and persecutions, with uplifted head I look for the very same Person, who before offered himself for my sake to the tribunal of God, and has removed all curse from me, to come as Judge from heaven: who shall cast all his and my enemies into everlasting condemnation, but shall translate me with all his chosen ones to himself, into heavenly joys and glory.

7. The Thirty-Nine Articles (Church of England, 1563)

Christ ascended into heaven, and there sitteth until he return to judge all Men at the last day.

8. Westminster Confession of Faith (Puritan/Reformed, 1647)

London Baptist Confession (1689)

Chapter XXXIII

Of the Last Judgment

- I. God has appointed a day, wherein He will judge the world in righteousness by Jesus Christ, to whom all power and judgment is given of the Father. In which day, not only the apostate angels shall be judged, but likewise all persons that have lived upon earth shall appear before the tribunal of Christ, to give an account of their thoughts, words, and deeds; and to receive according to what they have done in the body, whether good or evil.
- II. The end of God's appointing this day is for the manifestation of the glory of His mercy, in the eternal salvation of the elect; and of His justice, in the damnation of the reprobate, who are wicked and disobedient. For then shall the righteous go into everlasting life, and receive that fullness of joy and refreshing, which shall come from the presence of the Lord; but the wicked who know not God, and obey not the Gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast into

eternal torments, and be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power.

III. As Christ would have us to be certainly persuaded that there shall be a day of judgment, both to deter all men from sin; and for the greater consolation of the godly in their adversity: so will He have that day unknown to men, that they may shake off all carnal security, and be always watchful, because they know not at what hour the Lord will come; and may be ever prepared to say, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly. Amen."

9. Methodist Articles of Religion (1784)

Article 3: Of the Resurrection of Christ

Christ did truly rise again from the dead, and took again his body, with all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature, wherewith he ascended into heaven, and there sitteth until he return to judge all men at the Last Day.

10. New Hampshire Baptist Confession (1833)

We believe that the end of the world is approaching; that at the Last Day Christ will descend from heaven and raise the dead from the grave to final [reward and] retribution; that a solemn separation will then take place; that the wicked will be adjudged to endless punishment, and the righteous to endless joy; and that this judgment will fix forever the final state of men in heaven or hell, on principles of righteousness.

11. Baptist Faith and Message (Southern Baptist, 1963)

God, in His own time and His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end. According to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth; the dead will be raised, and Christ will judge all men in righteousness. The unrighteous will be consigned to hell, the place of everlasting punishment. The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in heaven with the Lord.

12. National Association of Evangelicals

We believe in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved unto the resurrection of life and they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation.

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