

# KINGDOM STUDIES

God's Kingdom Program

Free Grace Bible Institute International

Studies in the Kingdom of God – A Three Hour Credit Course

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_

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### Before you begin....

If you do not know for sure about where you will spend eternity, the first issue for you is to place your faith alone in Christ alone and receive eternal life.

**John 6:47 (NKJV)** Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.

**John 5:24 (NKJV)** "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.

**John 3:36 (NKJV)** He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

**Ephesians 2:8-9 (NASB)** <sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; <sup>9</sup> not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

To believe is simply this: to be convinced that it is true. To believe in Jesus is to be convinced that it is true that He alone is the only one who can give you the gift of eternal life. Eternal life, first and foremost, means that one lives with God forever after this life is ended. Jesus Christ, who is God come in human flesh, died on the cross as our substitute bearing the penalty for our sin. When a person knows they cannot qualify for eternal life through the good works of self-effort or the rituals of any church or religion, and when a person knows that eternal life comes from believing in Jesus alone for that life, at that moment they receive eternal life absolutely free. This life can never be lost for any reason.

If you have received the gift of eternal life through faith alone in Christ alone, then before you begin any Bible study you must be sure you in fellowship with God and filled with the Holy Spirit. The method for this is to simply follow 1 John 1:9:

**1 John 1:9 (NASB)** If we confess our [known] sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our [known] sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness [any other sins we fail to recognize as sin or have forgotten about].

# Free Grace Bible Institute Course Syllabus

## Kingdom Studies

**I. A study of the Kingdom of God as taught in both the Old and New Testaments.**

**II. The Purpose of the Course**

- A. The student will discover the large and important place of the Kingdom of God in divine revelation, the magnificence of its design, its rich and many-sided nature, its vast sweep through history, and its outreach into the eternal state.
- B. The student will become familiar with the distinction between the Universal Kingdom of God and the Mediatorial Kingdom of God.
- C. The student will become familiar with the Mediatorial Kingdom in history, when and why it ended and the Biblical prophecies concerning its re-establishment after the interregnum.
- D. The student will understand the offer of the Kingdom to Israel by Messiah Jesus, why the Kingdom was not then established, along with why and when it will be inaugurated.
- E. The student will become familiar with the false ideas of certain other teachings about the Kingdom and why they are to be rejected.

**III. The Requirements of the Course**

- A. This is a self-paced study that includes two short studies by Pastor David Pearson with questions, eight articles in *Extra Readings for The Kingdom of God* with study questions, and the four articles entitled *The Greatness of the Kingdom* by Alva McClain and the High Cost of Reward by Scott Crawford.
- B. The student must complete all the material for the entire course before submitting it.
- C. A 2-3 page report is to be written on the Alva McClain articles and a 1-2 page report on the Scott Crawford article.

**IV. Required texts**

- A. Bible
- B. Kingdom Studies book from FGBI

## **V. Course Guidance**

- A. The student is to complete the two short studies by David Pearson answering the questions, the Tommy Ice articles with study guide then read the Alva McClain articles and Scott Crawford article and write the report.
- B. The student is to complete all the work required *before* submitting the materials for evaluation.
- C. The student may submit the course work by written or electronic means.

## **VI. Evaluation**

- A. There are no examinations. Completeness and accuracy in all work is the means of evaluation. The student is expected to perform all work thoughtfully and carefully and it will be evaluated on that basis.
- B. The student is to answer all the questions in the Pearson studies, all the questions in the *Extra Readings*, and provide the required reports.

Successful completion of this course earns four credit hours



# The Kingdom of God

Two Short Studies by  
Pastor-teacher David Pearson



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# The King and the Kingdom

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Luke 1:26-38

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Luke 1:33 (NASB) and He will reign  
over the house of Jacob forever, and  
His kingdom will have no end."

### Luke 1:26-38

The angel Gabriel is speaking to Mary about her selection to be the bearer of the Messiah Jesus. In verses **32-33** he says four critical things about the child. We will focus on these four things in this brief study.

**Luke 1:32-33 (NASB)** <sup>32</sup> "He will be great and (1) will be called the Son of the Most High; (2) and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; <sup>33</sup> and (3) He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and (4) His kingdom will have no end."

1. "He will be called the Son of the Most High": in Genesis 14:19 we read of "God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth." The Creator possesses all things created whether in heaven or on earth. The Son of the Most High, or the Son of God, possesses all that God possesses including the full attributes of deity. The emphasis in this phrase is the deity of the child, the Messiah.

Isaiah 9:6 says, "unto us a Son is given": the absolutely unique Son of the Most High, the Son of God, is the eternal uncreated God as the second member of the Triune Godhead. God the Son is the One who is coming into human existence through the virgin Mary.

**John 1:18 (NASB)** No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained *Him*.

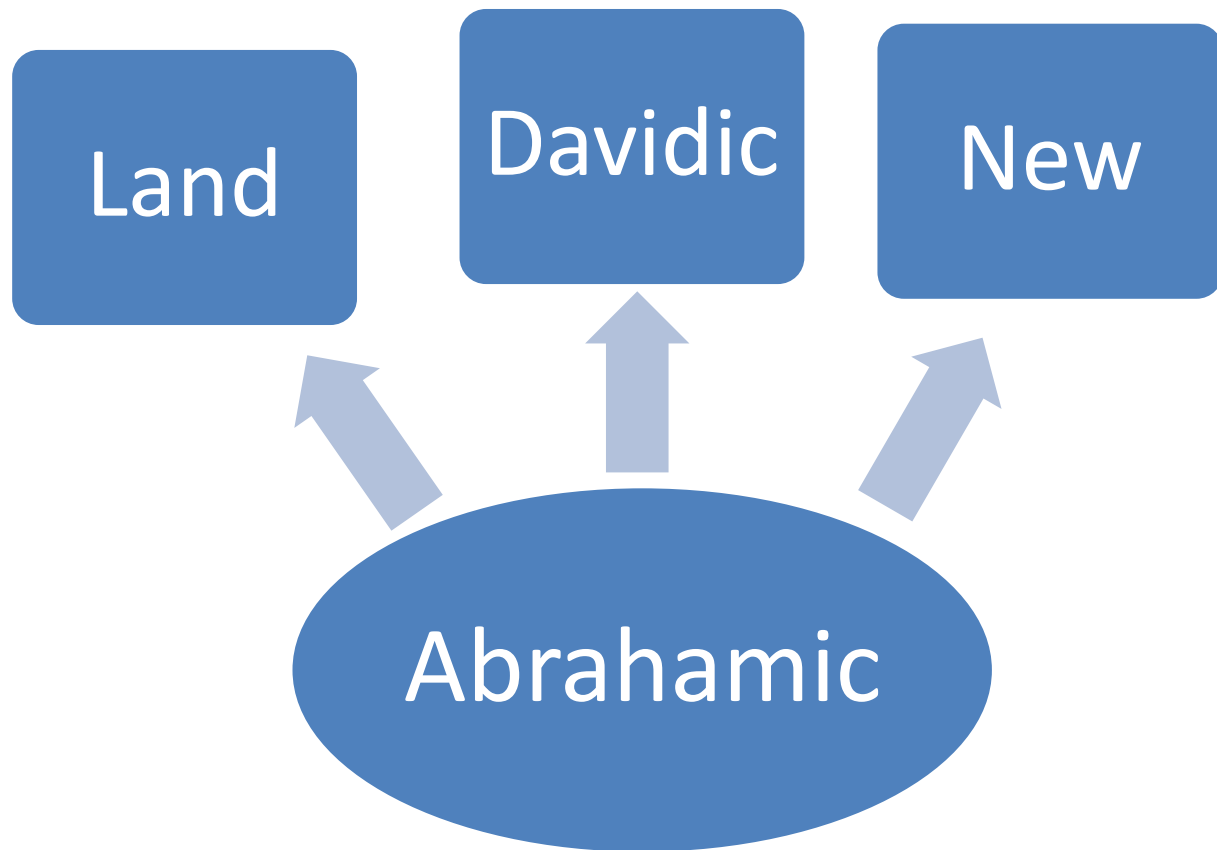
2. "The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David": the humanity of the child is here emphasized for he will be the physical descendant of King David who had lived about 1,000 years earlier. This lineage from King David is clearly seen in the genealogy of Matthew 1.
3. Statements 3 and 4: The focus of the announcement by Gabriel in statement two and the next two statements is the Davidic Covenant. To grasp the critical importance of this to the nation of Israel and to our correct understanding, we have to understand the four Jewish-only unconditional covenants that God made with the nation of Israel. **See the chart next page.**

### The Davidic Covenant: Four Eternal Things

**2 Samuel 7:11b-16.** In this passage and the parallel passage in **1 Chronicles 17:10b-14** we find God promising King David four eternal things:

#### 2 Samuel 7:11b-16

1. V.11: an eternal house - a dynasty of royal descendants. See v.16 where the house will be eternal.
2. V.12: an eternal kingdom – the first in line is David's son Solomon, but once again in v.16 we see that this kingdom will be eternal
3. V.13: an eternal throne – established forever called an eternal throne in v.16. There is a promise of a descendent on the throne, but he is not eternal. Point 4 is after the chart.



**Abrahamic Covenant:** Genesis 12:1-3:15:12-21. Repeated to Isaac: Genesis 26:2-5; Repeated to Jacob: Genesis 28:13-15

**Land Covenant:** Deuteronomy 29:1-30:20

**Davidic Covenant:** 2 Samuel 7:11b-16; 1 Chronicles 17:10b-14

**New Covenant:** Jeremiah 31:31-34

Land of Israel Covenant – the Land on which the Kingdom will exist

Davidic Covenant – the rulership of the Kingdom

New Covenant - will be a total national regeneration of Israel.

*All the promises and covenants are to be fulfilled in the prophesied future Messianic Kingdom.*



Vv.13-14 of this passage is a reference to King Solomon who built the First Temple which stood on what is today called the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. It says that God will discipline Solomon when he sins so we know it is talking about a purely human descendant of David.

### **1 Chronicles 17:10b-14**

Here we find the fourth eternal thing: an eternal person

4. V.14: this inspired rendering of the covenant looks past the Solomon's kingdom to a future eternal kingdom where there is an eternal person on the throne. **V.14, "Him...forever."** That this is not Solomon is found in two reasons

- A. Solomon died so he was not eternally able to sit on the throne and there is no mention ever of a resurrected Solomon on the throne.
- B. There is no mention of sin or divine discipline in this passage so it looks beyond to the eternal sinless Son of God, the Messiah Jesus.

v.11: "one of your descendants" is a reference to the Messiah, the one announced by Gabriel to Mary.

v.12: the temple referred to here is not the First Temple of Solomon; it is the last Temple, the Messianic Kingdom Temple that will be built by Messiah Jesus after the Second Coming.

v.14: the four eternal things: a person, a dynasty, a kingdom, and a throne.

**Luke 1:32-33 (NASB)** <sup>32</sup> "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; <sup>33</sup> and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end."

Notice the same four things: an eternal person, an eternal throne, an eternal dynasty (house of Jacob), and an eternal kingdom. The Davidic Covenant is exactly fulfilled by the Lord Jesus Christ!

"The eternalness of the dynasty, kingdom, and throne are guaranteed only because the seed of David culminated in the person who is himself eternal" (Arnold Fruchtenbaum, Israelology, p.803)

### **The Mediatorial Kingdom is a Literal, Earthly Kingdom**

The kingdom prophesied in the Old Testament was, first and foremost, a Jewish kingdom which was a literal physical kingdom on planet earth headquartered in the Land of Israel in Jerusalem. That this was the expectation of all the prophets can be seen everywhere in their writings. The Jews of Jesus' time were looking for just such a literal earthly kingdom over which would reign a literal physical descendant of King David as the Mediatorial ruler – a human king - under the rule of God.

They did not expect some "spiritual kingdom" nor did they think it was some "reign of the Messiah in the heart" as so many refer to the kingdom today. They did not think they were "building the kingdom" The kingdom they expected was literally and physically real.

## Kingdom Announcements

We already saw such an announcement to Mary in Luke 1:32-33.

Matthew 2:2: the wise men were looking for “the King of the Jews.”

Luke 2:11-14 the announcement to the shepherds: V.14 “Peace” – in Isaiah 9:6 the Messiah is the “Prince of peace” and such peace was a well-known Messianic kingdom expectation.

### *The Kingdom was near that generation of Jews*

Matthew 3:1-3 – John the Baptist preached the “kingdom of heaven is at hand.” The kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God refer to the same thing – the promised Messianic kingdom. While it is true that there is a universal rule of God over all created things that is NOT to what John is referring. He is preaching about the expected Messianic kingdom, the literal rule of the Messiah fulfilling the Davidic Covenant.

Matthew 4:17: when Jesus began His public ministry he preached the exact same message, “the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

“at hand”: Greek *ergizo* (#1448). A.T Robertson : “has drawn near”; Zodhiates: “to bring near, to come near, to approach”; Kenneth Wuest: :the kingdom was announced as at hand in that events were at that time moving toward a steady and final conclusion.”

The prophesied time was being fulfilled: the Messiah was present and the promised kingdom was ready to be inaugurated.

Alva McClain states in The Greatness of the Kingdom, “In truth, the long-awaited kingdom of Old Testament prophecy had come so close to the men of that generation that they had actually seen the face of the King and also had witnessed the supernatural works which were the predicted harbingers of His kingdom” (p.273).

Matthew 4:23-24; 9:35 – His miracles demonstrated Messiah was Jesus and validated his message that he was the Promised One. The kingdom was theirs if and when they would accept Him as the Messiah.

4:23; 9:35: “the gospel of the kingdom” includes (1) the message of individual eternal life by faith alone in Christ (the Messiah) alone through grace alone (the Message of Life) to enter the Kingdom; (2) It further includes the reward aspects of the Kingdom: that is, how to inherit the Kingdom and be a victorious ruler in the coming Messianic Kingdom; (3) It includes the promise of the literal rule of God – Jesus Christ – on the planet and on into eternity; and (4) that the Kingdom was imminent, that is, it was about to be established if they accepted Jesus as their Messiah.

Unger’s Bible Dictionary says about the fourth aspect: “The gospel of the kingdom was the good news that God’s purpose is to establish an earthly Mediatorial kingdom in fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant.”

Matthew 24:14: The Message of the Kingdom is still to be preached today. The main difference between what was proclaimed by John the Baptist, Jesus, and the Apostle during Jesus' ministry, is that after the ascension no one is authorized to proclaim that the Kingdom is "at hand" – that is, that the inauguration of the Kingdom is imminent. This aspect of the Gospel of the Kingdom will be presented again during the Tribulation especially by the 144,000 Jewish evangelists (compare Matthew 24:14 with Revelation 7).

Luke 17:21: the proper translation is NOT "within you" (KJV) – after all He was talking to the unbelieving Pharisees! The best translation is, "in the midst of you." Jesus Christ, the King of the kingdom, was present and as such the kingdom was present in the midst of the people of that time.

His presence on the planet at that time did NOT establish the promised kingdom in any form: not some "spiritual kingdom" or some "rule of Christ in the heart." Jesus was offering the same literal kingdom of the Old Testament prophets if they would only accept the King! The Church is not the kingdom!

### **The King Rejected by the Jewish Leaders**

Matthew 12:22-24 - The Jewish leaders could not deny the reality of His miracles; but instead of recognizing them as the divine proof of Jesus as the Messiah, they attributed his power to Satan.

Matthew 12:14; 26:3-4 – Both before and after this the Jewish leaders began to plot to kill Him.

### **The Official Presentation to the Nation of Israel**

**Matthew 21:1-11** – this was the official presentation by the King to the nation of Israel. The so-called "Triumphal Entry" (Palm Sunday) was a Messianic fulfillment of prophecy:

**Zechariah 9:9 (NASB)** Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout *in triumph*, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, Humble, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Matthew 21:10: "stirred": About this Stanley Toussaint writes in his excellent commentary on Matthew, Behold Your King,

The city was shaken as by an earthquake.... The movement (of praise and homage by the people) was of such size as to shake the city. But the people are only aroused enough to inquire, "Who is this?" they go no further.

The shouting multitude answers, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee." This answer is a vivid portrayal of the blindness of Israel. It is not said that He is Messiah; He is recognized only as a prophet and that from miserable Nazareth. The very people among whom He had performed His many marvelous miracles own Him only as a prophet (Matthew 16:13-14; 21:46) (p.241).

Not long after this event the leaders and the people together had Messiah Jesus crucified.

## The Kingdom Postponed

Matthew 21:43 – The kingdom was not going to be established in that generation – it was taken from them; it will be given to a future generation of Jews who will accept Jesus as Messiah from the leadership down to the people. Today we live in the time period between these two events.

### *The Kingdom is postponed until the nation accepts Jesus as their Messiah*

Matthew 23:39 – this acceptance by the Jewish leaders and people will happen in the future near the end of the Tribulation period that is coming on the whole earth. Under intense pressure from the antichrist and having seen some two-thirds of their fellow Jews killed, they will call upon the Lord Jesus Christ who will then return to rescue them – this is the Second Coming of Christ.

See Leviticus 26:40-42 – the “iniquity” is the sin of rejecting and killing the Messiah; Jeremiah 3:11-18

**Zechariah 12:10 (NASB)** "I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn.

**Hosea 5:15 (NASB)** I will go away *and* return to My place Until they acknowledge their guilt [of rejecting the Messiah] and seek My face; In their affliction they will earnestly seek Me.

In Hosea 6:1-3 the Jewish leaders are encouraging the people to believe in the Lord Messiah Jesus:

**Hosea 6:1-3 (NASB)** <sup>1</sup> "Come, let us return to the Lord. For He has torn *us*, but He will heal us; He has wounded *us*, but He will bandage us. <sup>2</sup> "He will revive us after two days; He will raise us up on the third day, That we may live before Him. <sup>3</sup> "So let us know, let us press on to know the Lord. His going forth is as certain as the dawn; And He will come to us like the rain, Like the spring rain watering the earth."

See **Romans 11:25-27**: this is the spiritual salvation of Israel resulting in a physical salvation to which Paul refers.

## The Return of the King

When they return to Him, the One the previous generation of Jews rejected at His first coming, then He returns to establish the Messianic kingdom:

**Matthew 24:29-31 (NASB)** <sup>29</sup> "But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. <sup>30</sup> "And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. <sup>31</sup> "And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

**Revelation 19:11-16 (NASB)** <sup>11</sup> And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it *is* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. <sup>12</sup> His eyes *are* a flame of fire, and on His head *are* many diadems; and He has a name written *on Him* which no one knows except

Himself. <sup>13</sup> *He is* clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. <sup>14</sup> And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white *and* clean, were following Him on white horses. <sup>15</sup> From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. <sup>16</sup> And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."

## The Messianic Kingdom Inaugurated

**Revelation 20:4 (NASB)** Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I *saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

**Zechariah 14:9 (NASB)** And the Lord will be king over all the earth; in that day the Lord will be *the only* one, and His name *the only* one.

**Psalms 72:7-11 (NASB)** <sup>7</sup> In his days may the righteous flourish, And abundance of peace till the moon is no more. <sup>8</sup> May he also rule from sea to sea And from the River to the ends of the earth. <sup>9</sup> Let the nomads of the desert bow before him, And his enemies lick the dust. <sup>10</sup> Let the kings of Tarshish and of the islands bring presents; The kings of Sheba and Seba offer gifts. <sup>11</sup> And let all kings bow down before him, All nations serve him.

**Daniel 7:13-14 (NASB)** <sup>13</sup> "I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. <sup>14</sup> "And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations and *men of every* language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed.

**Revelation 11:15 (NASB)** Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become *the kingdom* of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever."

For a snapshot of the eternal kingdom which will follow the earthy Messianic kingdom see **Revelation 21-22**

AMEN!

Revelation 22:20-21 (NASB) <sup>20</sup> He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. <sup>21</sup> The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.

## Question and answer sheets for Bible Institute credit

Take your time and learn!

### Study Questions

1. Write out below the four statements about Jesus found in Luke 1:32 – 33:
  - A. \_\_\_\_\_
  - B. \_\_\_\_\_
  - C. \_\_\_\_\_
  - D. \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is the importance of the term used of Jesus “Son of the Most High”? It shows that the Son possesses \_\_\_\_\_ and that Jesus has the full attributes of \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Write out John 1:18: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. While the first descriptive phrase emphasizes the deity of Jesus, the second phrase emphasizes His \_\_\_\_\_

5. Statements three and four are related to what covenant? \_\_\_\_\_
6. List the four Jewish Covenants below with their Scripture locations:
- A. \_\_\_\_\_
  - B. \_\_\_\_\_
  - C. \_\_\_\_\_
  - D. \_\_\_\_\_
7. Write "True" or "False" in the blank: All of the Jewish Covenants have been fulfilled in the past \_\_\_\_\_
8. According to the Davidic Covenant found in 2 Samuel 7:11 – 16 and 1 Chronicles 17:10b – 14 we find God promising King David four eternal things. List them below with the Scripture reference:
- A. \_\_\_\_\_
  - B. \_\_\_\_\_
  - C. \_\_\_\_\_
  - D. \_\_\_\_\_
9. Who is the one who fulfills all four eternal aspects of the Davidic Covenant?
- \_\_\_\_\_
10. What is the Mediatorial Kingdom for which the Jews were waiting? \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
11. Write "True" or "False" in the blank: The Jews thought of the promised Kingdom in purely spiritual terms and knew that the Kingdom was simply the Messiah's "rule in their hearts." \_\_\_\_\_
12. List the three Scriptures given of Kingdom announcements (page 5)
- A. \_\_\_\_\_
  - B. \_\_\_\_\_
  - C. \_\_\_\_\_

13. Circle the correct answer: The terms “kingdom of heaven” and “kingdom of God” refer to

- A. The same thing
- B. Two different things

14. John the Baptist and Jesus both stated that “the kingdom of God is at hand.” What does that statement mean? \_\_\_\_\_

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15. What did the Jews of the time of Jesus have to do in order for the kingdom to be established by Jesus (page 5)? \_\_\_\_\_

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16. What are the four aspects of the “Gospel of the Kingdom”?

- A. \_\_\_\_\_
- B. \_\_\_\_\_
- C. \_\_\_\_\_
- D. \_\_\_\_\_

17. From the above list, write down the letter of the part of the Gospel of the Kingdom we do NOT present today: \_\_\_\_\_

18. The Kingdom offer was rejected by the Jewish leaders and people of that day. This rejection is found in Matthew 12:22 – 24. In their rejection they attributed Jesus’ miracles to the work of \_\_\_\_\_

19. Give the Scriptures that show that both before and after this rejection the Jewish leaders plotted to kill Jesus: \_\_\_\_\_

20. Matthew 21:1-11: What Messianic prophecy was fulfilled and where is the Scripture located when Jesus rode into Jerusalem? \_\_\_\_\_

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21. Write "True" or "False" in the blank: The people watching the event of the so-called "Triumphal entry" of Jesus recognized and accepted Jesus as the Messiah \_\_\_\_\_
22. Referring to Matthew 21:43, we live in the time period between which two events?
- A. \_\_\_\_\_
- B. \_\_\_\_\_
23. If a friend were to ask you, "If Jesus was the Messiah, how come the Kingdom did not come?" what would you tell them? \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
24. In answer to the above, what are two Scriptures in Matthew that indicate some future generation of Jews will accept Jesus as the Messiah? \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
25. In Zechariah 12:10 who is the one referred to when it says "they will look on me whom they have pierced"? \_\_\_\_\_
26. Think and make a deduction: Explain how Hosea 5:15 refers to Jesus: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
27. What are the two key Scriptures referred to in this study about the return of the King: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
28. In Revelation 20:4 we discover the reign of Jesus and the victorious believers on earth will last for \_\_\_\_\_ years.
29. What passage given in the study shows that Jesus will be King over all the earth? \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
30. What passage(s) given in the study show that this Kingdom will last forever into eternity? \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

31. The following Scriptures refer to the coming Messianic Kingdom. Read Isaiah 2:2 - 4, 11:1 – 9, 65:17 – 25 (The New Heavens and New Earth here are not that of Revelation 21 – 22 but refer to the 1,000 year reign of Messiah Jesus); Micah 4:1 – 5. Write below some things you learned about the coming Messianic Kingdom: \_\_\_\_\_

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32. Read Revelation chapters 21 – 22. If a friend were to ask you to tell them a little about what eternity with God will be like, what are some things you could tell them and in what verses are these found? \_\_\_\_\_

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33. What are at least three important things you have learned from this study?

A. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

B. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

C. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# When the King Arrived

King Jesus and the Two Aspects of the One Kingdom of God



**A SHORT STUDY FOR THE BIBLE STUDENTS AT  
WEST SIDE BAPTIST CHURCH AND  
THE FREE GRACE BIBLE INSTITUTE OF PENNSYLVANIA**

*By Pastor-Teacher David Pearson*

# When the King Arrived

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## King Jesus and the Two Aspects of the One Kingdom of God

### Introduction

#### Acts 1:1-3 (NASB)

- <sup>1</sup> The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach,  
<sup>2</sup> until the day when He was taken up *to heaven*, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen.  
<sup>3</sup> To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over *a period of forty days* and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.

One of the primary doctrines in Scripture is the doctrine of the Kingdom of God. In his classic work on the subject of the Kingdom of God, George N.H. Peters wrote in his 1884 work:

1. The kingdom is the object designed by the oath-bound covenant.
2. It is the great theme, the burden of prophecy.
3. It is a subject which embraces a larger portion of Revelation than all other subjects combines; thus indicating the estimation in which it is held by God... (the) inspired writers say more respecting the kingdom of Christ than they do all other things treated or discussed in the Word.

The Kingdom deserves the first place in Biblical and the first rank in Systematic theology.<sup>1</sup>

It is of great interest to note that in the period of forty days between the resurrection of Jesus and His ascension He not only offered many proofs that He was alive but he taught on the Kingdom of God. Ten days after his ascension came the Day of Pentecost (fifty days after the Passover), the day the church actually began (see Acts 2).

That Jesus focused on the Kingdom of God during this final time of teaching of the Apostles on the earth then that ought to give us pause to consider the critical importance this doctrine plays in the plan of God as revealed in the Scriptures. It should be incumbent on every believer to properly understand this doctrine for it gives us an interpretive framework on which to properly handle the Word of God (2 Timothy 2:15).

Alva J. McClain, in his essential work entitled The Greatness of the Kingdom writes,

The Kingdom of God is, in a certain and important sense, the grand theme of all Scripture...."The Bible is *one book*. Had we to give that book a title, we might with justice call it 'The Book of the Coming Kingdom of God.'" [quoting Dr. John Bright]. In approving this affirmation we are not forgetting the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. For

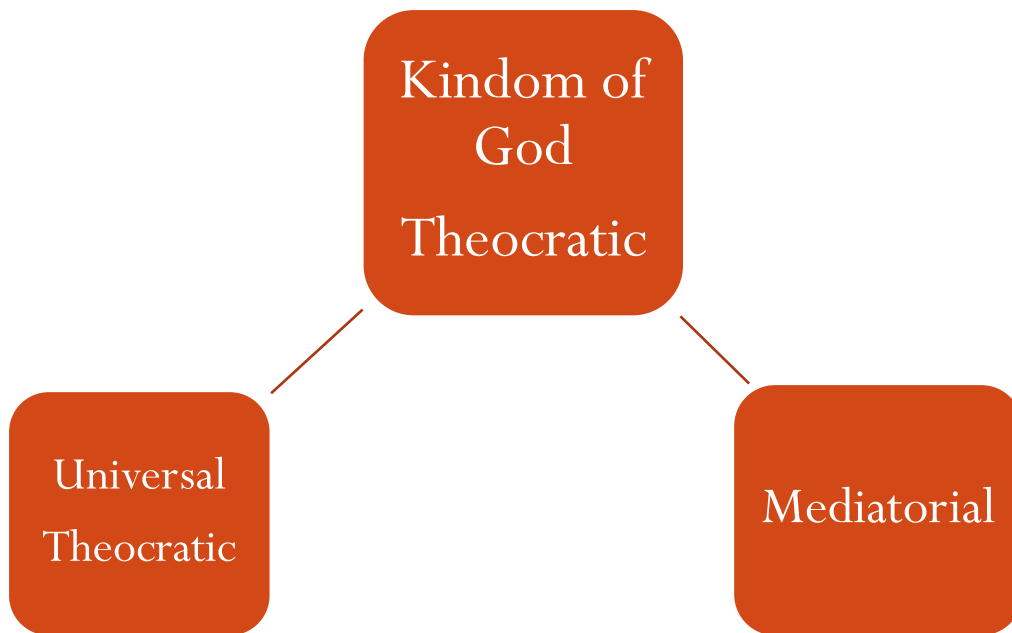
<sup>1</sup> George N. H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom*, (Grand Rapids: Kregal, 1972) 30-31. He lists some sixteen points as to why the kingdom of God is critical to the believer's understanding.

*He is the King eternal, and there could be no final Kingdom apart from Him and His work as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Surely the primary object of our faith must always be the One who is both Lord and Savior; but as we contemplate Him and His manifold glories as revealed in the Word of God, we shall inescapably come sooner or later to the Kingdom of which He is the divine center For it is in this Kingdom that the Father's eternal purpose in the incarnate Son shall be certainly and completely fulfilled.*<sup>2</sup>

While this short study cannot even begin to cover everything the Bible teaches on the subject of the Kingdom of God, we can give a basic presentation so that we are guided in our understanding.

## THE TWO ASPECTS OF THE ONE KINGDOM OF GOD

There are two aspects of the one Kingdom of God that must be kept in mind for proper interpretation:



The **Universal Kingdom of God** is seen as eternal, as far as *time* is concerned, in **Psalms 10:16** and it is over all God's creation in **Psalms 103:19**. This aspect is under the direct rule of God "with no intermediary standing between God and man"<sup>3</sup> (theocratic rule).

The **Mediatorial Kingdom of God** is seen as having a specific beginning later in time in **Daniel 2:44** and as having a local rule on earth in **Isaiah 24:23**. This aspect is "the rule of God through a mediator who serves as a channel between God and man."<sup>4</sup> This representative is by God's appointment and is never assumed by a man without this divine appointment.

<sup>2</sup> Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, (Tenth edition; Winona Lake: BMH Books, 2005), 4-5

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 19

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 20

It should be obvious that the reader of Scripture has to be able to recognize the two different aspects on the one Kingdom of God if confusion is to be avoided. To ascribe aspects of the Mediatorial Kingdom to the Universal Kingdom has tripped up many in their understanding of the Scriptures in regard to the yet future reign of Jesus on planet earth.

## Kingdom: Use and Definition

The term “kingdom” is in the Greek *basileia* and refers to a royal (*basileios*) administration or ruling over something and someone with a sphere or realm of authority. The word for “king” is *basileus*. Because of the close connection between the two often the word *basileia* is better translated as “kingship” or “rulership” in certain contexts.<sup>5</sup> The phrase “kingdom of God” is used 70 times in the New Testament and the word “kingdom” some 160 times (NASB). Of these 160 uses, 125 of these are in the Gospels. Obviously, the biblical doctrine of the Kingdom is no small matter!

A most basic definition of the phrase “kingdom of God” is this: God’s rule over his creation. The term “kingdom” has the same meaning when referring to God’s rule, His royal reign.

For there to be a kingdom four things have to exist:

1. A realm over which to rule
2. A group who is ruled over
3. A ruler with the right, ability, and power to rule
4. The ruler exercises his right, ability, and power to rule

Until all four are present there is no actual kingdom in existence. It may be stated that when point three is met it does not automatically mean that the other two points have been met. When the first three conditions have been met but the right, ability, and power is not yet *exercised* by the ruler then there is not yet a kingdom in existence. “Even if a sovereign has the right to rule and a realm in which to rule, there cannot be an actual kingdom apart from the active exercise of that authority.”<sup>6</sup>

The reality of this is seen in **Luke 19:11-17**. While this parable refers to the second aspect of the Kingdom of God, the Mediatorial rule by Jesus on planet earth that is yet to come, it will give us insight into the establishment of the Universal Kingdom.

Jesus in a parable tells of a nobleman who goes off to a far country *to receive a kingdom* (an authority over a realm) but does not exercise that kingdom right, ability, and power until he returns exercising his authority over a specific group. This is critical to understanding that the Mediatorial Messianic Kingdom promised to Israel (Jesus’ rulership as the Davidic King) *is not yet in effect in any form*. It further states that *it is the ruler’s return that initiates this aspect of the Kingdom* and it is not brought into being by any other means.

We see in the parable that the first three conditions are, in fact, *met*; however, point four is not. The king awaits a time when the right to exercise the royal authority is granted. **V.15**: we know prophetically that Jesus will be called upon by Israel to be their Messianic King at the end of the

<sup>5</sup> Marty Cauley *The Outer Darkness* (Sylva: Mithological Press, 2012), 55-56

<sup>6</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1990), 14

Tribulation. It is at this time Jesus receives the Kingdom by exercising His right, ability, and power to rule with the Second Coming.

## The Universal Kingdom of God

**Psalm 103:19; Psalm 139:7-10; Psalm 145:13; Amos 9:2;** Nothing and no one lies outside of the Universal Kingdom of God: all the material creation in the entire universe; all good angels, all fallen angels; all believers of all time (including the Church Age), and all unbelievers of all time. All those beings wherever they are be it heaven, hell (torments), the bottomless pit, the New Heavens and the New Earth in the future creation, or in the Lake of Fire in the eternal future – all are in this universal Kingdom of God.

King David describes this Universal Kingdom in **1 Chronicles 29:11-12**.

So when people say that by bringing people to Jesus Christ for eternal life they are “building the Kingdom” it cannot possible refer to the Universal Kingdom of God. Everyone is already in it whether they like it or not and whether they submit to the authority of the Ruler or not!

## *The Beginning of the Universal Kingdom*

Some argue that the Universal Kingdom of God is always existed “because of the relationship existing among the members of the Trinity.”<sup>7</sup> This understanding of the kingdom sees it as eternal as God is eternal with no beginning. Obviously if this idea is correct then this kingdom was already in existence when the creation occurred.

However, I agree with Alva McClain that the “the creation of the universe and the establishment of the Universal Kingdom must be regarded as contemporaneous events.”<sup>8</sup> I find two reasons why this is true:

1. The Scriptures that teach about the eternal kingship of God all seem connected to the created order (see Psalm 10:16, 29:10, 74:12; Jeremiah 10:10). This *use* of the word “eternal” is in connection with time and not timelessness (as it is used in other Scriptures). The Hebrew word *olam* (Strong’s Hebrew #5769), as translated “everlasting” in Jeremiah 10:10, “point(s) to something that seems long ago, but rarely if ever refer(s) to a limitless past.”<sup>9</sup> This is part of the connection of His Kingship with the created order and does not speak to the limitless existence of “the living God” as being a “King.” The context determines the meaning of the word *olam*.
2. The priority of the Son of God in relation to the rule of the Universal Kingdom (see below).

<sup>7</sup> Pentecost, *ibid.* 19

<sup>8</sup> McClain, *ibid.* 31-32

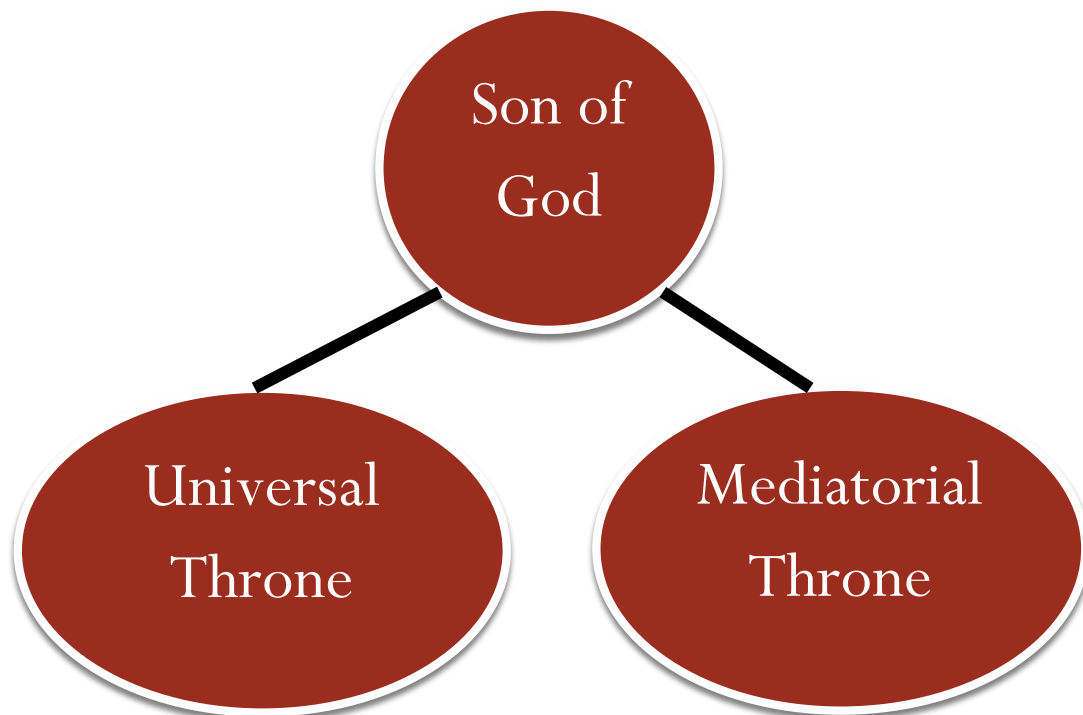
<sup>9</sup> R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Bruce K. Waltke *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1980), word #1631, 672

### ***The Son of God in Relation to the Universal Kingdom***

1. The Creator of all things (which would include the Universal Kingdom) – **John 1:3; Colossians 1:16-17; Hebrews 1:3. Isaiah 9:6** Jesus is referred to as the “Eternal Father” (NASB) which is more literally translated the “Father or Originator of the Ages,” that is, the succession of the ages of time. **1 Timothy 1:17** is described as “the King eternal” yet the original Greek is better translated (as noted by many scholars) as “King of the Ages”<sup>10</sup>
2. The Co-equal Ruler of the Universal Kingdom – the first of His two thrones. Although God the Son in *function* is subordinate to the Father, the Father establishes the priority of the Son in all things – in **John 17:2** Jesus states, “You [God the Father] have given Him [God the Son] authority over all flesh.” Jesus is the King of the Ages (above) and as such is seen as seated with the Father on the throne of the universe. **John 17:5** speaks of the gloriousness of this position He had “before the world was”; **Ephesians 1:20-22** As the God-man Jesus is at the right hand of the Father, a royal ruling position, with all things under his feet (see also Psalm 8:6; Romans 8:34; Colossians 3:1); **Colossians 1:18b** “He Himself will come to have first place in everything”; **Revelation 3:21** Jesus resumes His position but now as the God-man.

## ***THE TWO THRONES OF JESUS IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD***

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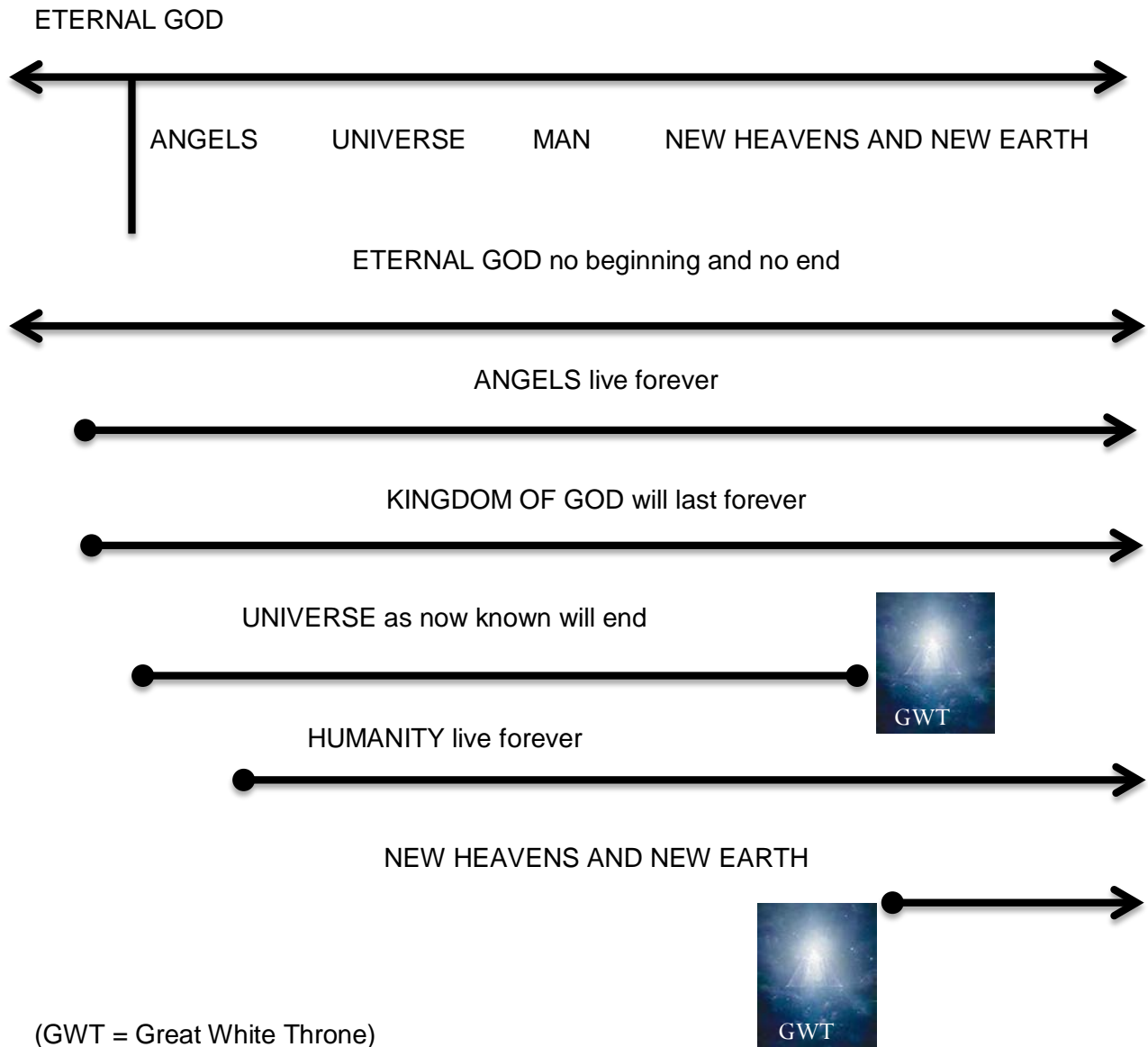
<sup>10</sup> For example: A. T. Robertson *Word Pictures in the New Testament*; Kenneth Wuest, *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*; Marvin Vincent *Word Studies in the New Testament*; McClain, *ibid.* 33.



## ***The Universal Kingdom Begins with the Angels and then Expands***

**Job 38:4-7** – the “morning stars” refers to angels. They were created before the material world.

# THE ORDER OF CREATED BEGINNINGS



With the creation of the angels the Universal Kingdom of God started; it was expanded when the material universe was created; man entered this Kingdom upon his creation.

***When the eternal Son of God took on human flesh He was already the universal “King of the Ages.” With His arrival He came to offer the promised Messianic Kingdom and to take His rightful place upon His second throne – the earthly ruling throne of David (see below).***

## The Mediatorial Kingdom of God

The Mediatorial Kingdom of God may be defined tentatively as: (a) the rule of God through a divinely chosen representative who not only speaks for God but also represents the people before God; (b) a rule with especially reference to the earth; and (c) having as its mediatorial ruler one who is always a member of the human race.<sup>11</sup>

While the Mediatorial kingdom has existed on planet earth before in human history (with Adam and then with Israel from Sinai to the Babylonian captivity – Moses was the first Mediatorial ruler of Israel), the future aspect of this Mediatorial Kingdom is the primary focus of Scripture. This future aspect is the literal, physical, earthly, visible, religious, political reign of the Lord Jesus Christ (Messiah) on planet earth for 1,000 years reigning as the Mediatorial King.

### Micah 4:1-8 (NASB)

<sup>1</sup> And it will come about in the last days That the mountain of the house of the LORD Will be established as the chief of the mountains. It will be raised above the hills, And the peoples will stream to it.

<sup>2</sup> Many nations will come and say, "Come and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD And to the house of the God of Jacob, That He may teach us about His ways And that we may walk in His paths." For from Zion will go forth the law, Even the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

<sup>3</sup> And He will judge between many peoples And render decisions for mighty, distant nations. Then they will hammer their swords into plowshares And their spears into pruning hooks; Nation will not lift up sword against nation, And never again will they train for war.

<sup>4</sup> Each of them will sit under his vine And under his fig tree, With no one to make *them* afraid, For the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.

<sup>5</sup> Though all the peoples walk Each in the name of his god, As for us, we will walk In the name of the LORD our God forever and ever.

<sup>6</sup> "In that day," declares the LORD, "I will assemble the lame And gather the outcasts, Even those whom I have afflicted.

<sup>7</sup> "I will make the lame a remnant And the outcasts a strong nation, And the LORD will reign over them in Mount Zion From now on and forever.

<sup>8</sup> "As for you, tower of the flock, Hill of the daughter of Zion, To you it will come— Even the former dominion will come, The kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem.

We know that the One here described as both LORD and GOD and as reigning over all the earth is Messiah Jesus occupying the throne of David.

### Isaiah 2:2-5, 9:6; Zechariah 9:9; Psalm 2:6; Revelation 19:16

### Matthew 25:34

This earthy kingdom, the Messianic Kingdom, has been planned since the creation of the world. Of course, it has always been in the plan of God but the expression here ties it into being a part of God's divine creative activity.

It is this aspect of the Kingdom of God that receives the most attention in Scripture.

<sup>11</sup> McClain, *ibid.* 41

All of the Jewish people at the time of the first coming of Messiah Jesus would have understood that the Messiah-King would rule over a literal, physical, geographical, social, economic, religious, political kingdom on earth just like King David did. In all the predictions in the Old Testament of this promised future kingdom it is very literal and earthly; though it is world-wide, the focus is on Israel.

## **2 Samuel 7:10-17** (see also 1 Chronicles 17:10-14)

Here God is stating that He will build a “house” or a human kingly dynasty that will last forever. The reason it can and will last forever is because it has a “forever” person on the throne – the eternal God-man, a physical descendant of King David, on the throne.

***With the coming of the Millennium the theocratic and mediatorial aspects of the one Kingdom of God are merged in the person of King Jesus, the God-man.***

## **When the King Arrived**

### **Luke 1:26-33**

In verses **32 – 33** we see three very important aspects of the son that Mary would deliver: (1) He would have a throne, (2) He would have authority to reign over people, and (3) there will be a kingdom over which He would rule (and it would be eternal!). All three together demonstrate the reality that the son of Mary was born as a King to be a King over a specific Kingdom with the right, authority, and power to rule. The reference to the “throne of His father David” carries us back to the promises of the Covenant made with King David (see 2 Samuel 7:10 – 17; 1 Chronicles 17:10b – 14; Psalm 89:3-4, 28-29 – note the eternity of this kingdom) and all the promises made after this in the Old Testament that point to a ruling and reigning Messiah-King.

### **John 1:41**

In the New Testament it can accurately be stated that more is written to prove Jesus is the Anointed One (Hebrew, Messiah; Greek, Christ) and King of Israel than is written to prove He is God. By the way, remember that “Christ” or “Messiah” is a title, not a name. The “Anointed One” was predicted to come as the Messiah of Israel (see **Daniel 9:25-26** and **Psalm 2:2** with **Acts 4:26**). In John 1:41 Andrew told his brother Peter, “We have found the Messiah.” In Acts 2:36 Peter identifies Jesus as “both Lord and Messiah (Christ)”; in Acts 3:20 he again identifies Jesus as Israel’s Messiah (see also Acts 5:42, 9:22, 17:3, 18:5).



NOTE: for more study on the first coming of the Messiah, His offer of the Messianic Mediatorial Kingdom to Israel, His rejection, the postponement of the Kingdom, and the future establishment of the Kingdom on earth, please see the short study by WSBC / FGBI entitled, “The King and the Kingdom.”

## **The Second Coming of Messiah Jesus and the Mediatorial Kingdom** **Revelation 19:14-16; 20:4**

After the coming seven-year Tribulation period Messiah Jesus will return and establish the long-awaited Messianic Mediatorial Kingdom on planet earth (see above).

## The Eternal Kingdom of God

After the 1,000 reign this Kingdom will merge into the eternal Kingdom which will have no end.

The material aspects of this Kingdom will be newly created: **Isaiah 65:17, 66:18-23; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1-5**

**1 Corinthians 15:24:** The throne of the Universal Kingdom and the throne of the Messianic Mediatorial Kingdom are merged into one after the end of the Millennial Kingdom: Jesus will reign with the Father, in the continued order of the Trinity, forever and ever without end.

“In the final Kingdom there is but one throne, and it is ‘the throne of God and of the Lamb’ (22:3).”<sup>12</sup> The word “throne” is singular not plural in both the Greek and the English.

**Revelation 21:1 - 22:5** provides some additional insight into this future everlasting Kingdom of God.

## Are We Now in the Mediatorial Kingdom in Any Form?

### Colossians 1:13

Some people claim that when Jesus ascended into heaven He assumed the position of ruling on the Davidic Throne so that the promised Kingdom is already, to a certain extent, already present. These same people say that there is a future literal reign of Christ on earth but right now He reigns from heaven.

We do not have time to study and refute this idea which is referred to as “Progressive Dispensationalism.” Simply let it be stated that the Mediatorial Kingdom has not been inaugurated and it is not now present in any form.

### Psalms 110:1; Hebrews 10:12-13

Christ is not now ruling over the promised Kingdom: there are not two thrones in heaven, there is only one – the Father’s throne, the throne of the Universal Kingdom. As God Jesus is and has always been co-ruler with the Father and under His authority, as we have seen. So if Messiah Jesus is not ruling in the Mediatorial Kingdom, what is he doing? He is waiting until all His enemies are ‘Your footstool.’ The opening of the seven seals in Revelation six and all the judgments of the Tribulation that follow are the opening part of this process. It is finalized with the Second Coming and all the judgments associated with that event.

So what about **Colossians 1:13**? The passage speaks of positional truth. All believers are going to be in the Kingdom so they have been positionally transferred already, but the actual residency in the Kingdom under the rule of King Jesus is yet future. By the way, believers have been transferred into “the kingdom of His beloved Son” once and for all and can never be transferred back into the domain of darkness (Satan’s false kingdom)!

<sup>12</sup> McClain, *ibid.* 513

I further believe it is incorrect to say that the Mediatorial Kingdom exists now in some “mystery form.” Believers do not now live in the “mystery form” of the Kingdom.

Stanley Toussaint, writing on the parables of Matthew 13, states correctly:

The same kingdom is in view in Matthew 13 as the one which was proclaimed as being at hand in Matthew 3:2; 4:17, and 10:7. In chapter 13 the king is giving information concerning the kingdom of heaven, information which has never before been revealed. He is instructing His disciples regarding a hitherto unrevealed period of time prior to the establishment of the kingdom. This new age would not be the promised kingdom, nor would it be, strictly speaking, a kingdom in the so-called “mystery form.” Thus the mysteries of the kingdom relate to the span in which the millennial kingdom is being postponed....The kingdom exists in this intercalation only in the sense that the sons of the kingdom are present. But strictly speaking the kingdom of the heavens in Matthew 13 refers to the prophesied and coming kingdom on earth.<sup>13</sup>

## Inheriting the Kingdom

### Matthew 5:3, 5, 10, 12

All of these speak of future rewards that are given in heaven but (5:12) but experienced on earth during the future Kingdom (5:5). Inheriting the earth is the same thing as ruling over the earth and it is a reward for the believer who matures spiritually and becomes victorious in time.

### Romans 8:17

All believers are “heirs of God” by the fact of their reception of eternal life. They will enter the Kingdom. When Jesus steps into the position as the Mediatorial King for His Millennial reign (Matthew 25:31), that is His inheritance for His faithfulness. If a believer also is victorious (an overcomer) then he or she will be a co-heir with Him – that is, they will rule with Him in the coming Kingdom. Entering the kingdom and ruling in the Kingdom are two separate issues!

### Revelation 2:26, 3:21, 20:4

All of these verses clearly show that this ruling with Christ is a result of work and it is not a gift.

### 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:21; Ephesians 5:5

The unrighteous of 1 Corinthians 6:9 are those without practical righteousness; that is, they are living without spiritual transformation.

“It is significant that whenever the verb ‘to inherit’ is used in the future tense in the New Testament *it always refers to the inheritance by means of doing, not by faith alone*. In those cases it refers to that aspect of our inheritance which is conditioned on faithful endurance.”<sup>14</sup>

Beloved, now that you know more about the Kingdom of God, bend your every effort to inherit the Kingdom and enjoy the fullness of the time to come!

<sup>13</sup> Stanley D. Toussaint *Behold the King* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1980), 171-172

<sup>14</sup> Joseph Dillow *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings* (Monument: Paniym Group, 2012), 96

## Question and answer sheets for Bible Institute credit

Take your time and learn!

### Study Questions

1. According to Acts 1:3 Jesus taught of things concerning the \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ during the forty days after His resurrection.
2. Why is this important to recognize? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Who does Alva McClain call the “divine center” of the Kingdom of God? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Write “true” or “false” in the blank: There are two separate Kingdoms of God. \_\_\_\_\_
5. Define “theocratic rule”: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What is the Universal Kingdom of God? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Write Psalm 103:19 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. Define the Mediatorial Kingdom of God from page 2 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

9. That this Kingdom has a specific beginning is found in what Scripture verse? \_\_\_\_\_

10. What does the word "kingdom" mean? It is a royal \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

11. The most basic definition of the phrase "Kingdom of God" is \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

12. There are several things necessary for a kingdom to exist. **Cross out** below anything that is NOT necessary for a kingdom to exist:

- A. A ruler with the right, ability, and power to rule
- B. A ruler who can see what people are doing all the time
- C. A royal palace
- D. A realm over which to rule
- E. A group who is ruled over
- F. A place to hunt fox and small game
- G. A ruler who exercises his right, ability, and power to rule
- H. Fancy clothing

13. In your own words answer the following: What is important about what we read in Luke 19:11-17 as it relates to this portion of our study? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

14. Write "true" or "false" in the blank: Every created thing is part of the Universal Kingdom of God. \_\_\_\_\_

15. Write "true" or "false" in the blank: People in the eternal Lake of Fire have Satan as their King and they are not in the Kingdom of God. \_\_\_\_\_

16. What verse(s) listed in the study tells us that the people in “Sheol” (the place of the dead after this life) are still under God and thus in His Kingdom? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
17. In the Bible the teaching about the eternal kingship of God is connected to what? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
18. Write out a verse below that indicates this fact: reference \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
19. Does the Hebrew word for “everlasting” always mean “timeless”? Write “yes” or “no”: \_\_\_\_\_
20. What determines the meaning? \_\_\_\_\_
21. What two things were listed as showing the relationship between the Son of God (Jesus) and the universal Kingdom of God:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
22. Give at least two verses that show that Jesus is the Creator of all things:  
\_\_\_\_\_
23. In Isaiah 9:6 Jesus is referred to as “Eternal Father.” **Make a deduction:** Does this mean that God the Father and God the Son is the same person and that there really is no Trinity in the Godhead? Answer “yes” or “no” \_\_\_\_\_
24. What does the term “Eternal Father” mean? \_\_\_\_\_
25. What New Testament verse was given that supports this same meaning? \_\_\_\_\_
26. Write “true” or “false” in the blank: Jesus has two thrones in the one Kingdom of God  
\_\_\_\_\_



27. Where is Jesus seated today? \_\_\_\_\_. Give one verse that tells us this fact: \_\_\_\_\_

28. What does Job 38:4-7 tell us about when the angels were created? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

29. Using the numbers 1 – 4 place the following in the order of their creation: Caution: one number is used twice!

\_\_\_\_\_ Mankind

\_\_\_\_\_ The Kingdom of God

\_\_\_\_\_ The New Heavens and the New Earth

\_\_\_\_\_ Angels

\_\_\_\_\_ Material Universe

30. Fill in the blank: Although the Mediatorial Kingdom of God has existed on earth before in human history the \_\_\_\_\_ aspect of the Kingdom is the focus of Scripture.

31. Micah 4:1-8 teaches us that the one who will be reigning over all the earth is both \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

32. In Isaiah 2:2-5 and Psalm 2:6 we learn the exact center of the government of the future Mediatorial Kingdom. Where will it be on planet earth? \_\_\_\_\_

33. Write “true” or “false” in the blank: The Jews at the time of the first coming of Messiah Jesus expected the Messiah to establish a spiritual kingdom in their hearts and did not expect a literal physical kingdom. \_\_\_\_\_

34. What does God promise King David in 2 Samuel 7:10-17 and in 1 Chronicles 17:10-14?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

35. What three things are said about Jesus in Luke 1:26-33?

A. \_\_\_\_\_

B. \_\_\_\_\_

C. \_\_\_\_\_

36. What did Andrew say to his brother Simon Peter in John 1:41? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

37. The Hebrew word "Messiah" is what word in the Greek? \_\_\_\_\_

38. What event do we see happening in Revelation 19:14-16?

\_\_\_\_\_

39. How long will Messiah Jesus reign on planet earth in the Mediatorial Kingdom?

\_\_\_\_\_ years

40. What major event happens after the Great White Throne Judgment? It is described in

several verses including Revelation 21:1-5. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

41. After reading through Revelation 21:1 – 22:5, what are one or more things that excite you most about your participation in this future eternal Kingdom?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

42. Are we in any form of the Mediatorial Kingdom now? Answer "yes" or "no." \_\_\_\_\_

43. Write "true" or "false" in the blank: Jesus is ruling now in heaven on the Throne of David.

\_\_\_\_\_

44. If you had to explain to someone the meaning of Colossians 1:13, what would you tell them?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

45. The various verses listed in Matthew 5 all point to future \_\_\_\_\_ for the believer.

46. Write out Romans 8:17: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

47. What is the difference between being an “heir of God” and being a “co-heir” with Jesus Christ? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

48. What reward(s) are promised to the overcomer in Revelation 2:26, 3:21, 20:4? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

49. What does the term “practical righteousness” mean? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

50. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:21; Ephesians 5:5 speak of the believer who fails to advance in the faith to spiritual maturity and instead persistently practices unrighteousness. The passages say that this failure believer will not \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

51. What are some practical steps you need to take to inherit the Kingdom with the Lord Jesus Christ? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

By signing my name I state that I have listened to the teaching, read all these notes, and read all the verses listed: \_\_\_\_\_

# The Free Grace Bible Institute

Sharpville, Pennsylvania, USA

[www.DoctrinePastor.com](http://www.DoctrinePastor.com)

Extra Readings For

*The Kingdom of God*

Required course readings by Tommy Ice [www.pre-trib.org](http://www.pre-trib.org)

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## WHAT IS DISPENSATIONALISM?

by Thomas Ice

Many evangelicals and liberals believe that dispensationalism is either downright heresy or close to it. In fact, few years ago, while pastor of a church, a lady in my congregation ask me, “Why is dispensationalism bad?” I asked what provoked her question. She had recently talked to a woman who knew that our church was dispensational. The women spoke harshly against dispensationalism to my congregante and warned her that it was unscriptural and no biblically responsible Christian should be involved in such heresy. For many, dispensationalism is a Christian cuss word! The lady in my church ask: “What is dispensationalism?” That is a good question. I hope to answer it in this article.

### A CLUSTER OF ITEMS

Actually dispensationalism is a cluster of items joined together to form a system of thought. Just as terms like Calvinism, Arminianism, Anglicanism, Catholicism, or Lutheranism are historical labels that represent, not a single idea, but a group of items joined together to form a multifaceted scheme, so is dispensationalism. Dispensationalism is a term that arose in church history to label certain Christians who believe a group of certain things that are taught in the Bible.

Dispensationalists are those who believe the following things:

- The Bible is God’s inspired, inerrant (i.e., without any errors) revelation to man. Scripture provides the framework through which to interpret history (past and future). God’s written Word tells us of His plan for His creation and this will surely come to past.
- Since the Bible is God’s literal Word of His plan for history, it should be interpreted literally and historically (past and future).
- Since the Bible reveals God’s plan for history, then it follows that there is an ebb and flow to His plan. Therefore, God’s plan includes different dispensations, ages, or epochs of history through which His creatures (man and angels) are tested. Therefore, God is instructing His creatures through the progress of history, as His creation progresses from a garden to a city.
- Since all humanity fell into sin, each person must individually receive God’s provision of salvation through the death of Christ by believing the gospel. Thus, Jesus Christ is the only way to a relationship with God.
- Because of mankind’s fall into sin, Scripture teaches that all humanity is naturally rebellious to God and the things of God. This is why only genuine believers in Christ are open to the teachings of the Bible. Thus, salvation through Christ is a prerequisite to properly understanding God’s Word.
- God’s plan for history includes a purpose for the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—that is Israel. This plan for Israel includes promises that they will have the land of Israel, will have a seed, and will be a worldwide blessing to the nations. Many of the promises to national Israel are yet future, therefore, God is not finished with Israel.

- God's plan from all eternity also includes a purpose for the church, however, this is a temporary phase that will end with rapture. After the rapture, God will complete His plan for Israel and the Gentiles.
- The main purpose in God's master plan for history is to glorify Himself through Jesus Christ. Therefore, Jesus Christ is the goal and hero of history.

In a nutshell, Christians who believe like this are known throughout Christendom as dispensationalists. I am a dispensationalist. We believe that it is the same as saying that I believe what the Bible literally teaches. Millions of Christians throughout the world are dispensationalists. In fact, the word "dispensation" occurs four times in the King James Version of the Bible (1 Cor. 9:17; Eph. 1:10; 3:2; Col. 1:25).

### A DEFINITION OF DISPENSATIONALISM

Most likely, the leading spokesman for dispensationalism is retired Dallas Theological Seminary professor, Dr. Charles Ryrie. Many know Ryrie through his books and articles, but he is best known for his popular *Ryrie Study Bible*. Ryrie's book, *Dispensationalism*,<sup>1</sup> and some additional items are the reference point to look for an understanding of dispensationalism. Since Dr. Ryrie is the expert on this subject, we will let him speak as we summarize his material.

He notes that *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines a theological dispensation as "a stage in a progressive revelation, expressly adapted to the needs of a particular nation or period of time . . . also, the age or period during which a system has prevailed."<sup>2</sup> The English word "dispensation" translates the Greek noun *oikonomía*, often rendered "administration" in modern translations. The verb *oikonoméō* refers to a manager of a household.<sup>3</sup> "In the New Testament," notes Ryrie, "dispensation means to manage or administer the affairs of a household, as, for example, in the Lord's story of the unfaithful steward in Luke 16:1-13."<sup>4</sup>

### Scriptural Use of Dispensation

The Greek word *oikonomía* is a compound of *oikos* meaning "house" and *nómos* meaning "law." Taken together "the central idea in the word *dispensation* is that of managing or administering the affairs of a household."<sup>5</sup>

The various forms of the word *dispensation* appears in the New Testament twenty times. The verb *oikonoméō* is used once in Luke 16:2, where it is translated "to be a steward." The noun *oikonómos* appears ten times (Luke 12:42; 16:1, 3, 8; Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 4:1, 2; Gal. 4:2; Titus 1:7; 1 Pet. 4:10), and is usually translated "steward" or "manager" (but "treasurer" in Rom. 16:23). The noun *oikonomía* is used nine times (Luke 16:2, 3, 4; 1 Cor. 9:17; Eph. 1:10; 3:2, 9; Col. 1:25; 1 Tim. 1:4). In these instances it is translated variously ("stewardship," "dispensation," "administration," "job," "commission").<sup>6</sup>

### Features of Dispensationalism

<sup>1</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Press, [1966], 1995).

<sup>2</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *What Is Dispensationalism?* (Pamphlet published by Dallas Theological Seminary, [1980], 1986), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, a translation and adaptation by William F. Arndt & F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 562.

<sup>4</sup> Ryrie, *What Is Dispensationalism?* p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, p.25.

<sup>6</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, p.25.

Examination of *oikonomos* in the Gospels finds Christ using the word in two parables in Luke (Lk. 12:42; 16:1, 3, 8). Ryrie notes that in Luke 16 we find “some important characteristics of a stewardship, or dispensational arrangement.”<sup>7</sup> The characteristics are:

(1) Basically there are two parties: the one whose authority it is to delegate duties, and the one whose responsibility it is to carry out these charges. The rich man (or manager) play these roles in the parable of Luke 16 (v. 1).

(2) These are specific responsibilities. In the parable the steward failed in his known duties when he wasted the goods of his lord (v. 1).

(3) Accountability, as well as responsibility, is part of the arrangement. A steward may be called to account for the discharge of his stewardship at any time, for it is the owner’s or master’s prerogative to expect faithful obedience to the duties entrusted to the steward (v. 2).

(4) A change may be made at any time unfaithfulness is found in the existing administration (“can no longer be steward.”).<sup>8</sup>

Further features can be gleaned in the other occurrences of the “dispensation” word group. All other uses, except 1 Peter 4:10, are found in the writings of Paul. Ryrie cites the following features:

(1) God is the one to whom men are responsible in the discharge of their stewardship obligations. In three instances this relationship to God is mentioned by Paul (I Cor. 4:1-2; Titus 1:7).

(2) Faithfulness is required of those to whom a dispensational responsibility is committed (I Cor. 4:2). This is illustrated by Erastus, who held the important position of treasurer (steward) of the city (Rom. 16:23).

(3) A stewardship may end at an appointed time (Gal. 4:2). In this reference the end of the stewardship came because of a different purpose being introduced. This reference also shows that a dispensation is connected with time.

(4) Dispensations are connected with the mysteries of God, that is, with specific revelation from God (I Cor. 4:1; Eph. 3:2; Col. 1:25).

(5) Dispensation and age are connected ideas, but the words are not exactly interchangeable. For instance, Paul declares that the revelation of the present dispensation was hidden “for ages” meaning simply a long period of time (Eph. 3:9). The same thing is said in Colossians 1:26. However, since a dispensation operates within a time period, the concepts are related.

(6) At least three dispensations (as commonly understood in dispensational teaching) are mentioned by Paul. In Ephesians 1:10 he writes of “an administration [dispensation, KJV] suitable to the fullness of the times,” which is a future period. In Ephesians 3:2 he designates the “stewardship [dispensation, KJV] of God’s grace,” which was the emphasis of the content of his preaching at that time. In Colossians 1:25-26 it is implied that another dispensation preceded the present one, in which the mystery of Christ in the believer is revealed.<sup>9</sup>

It should be noted that dispensationalists have developed the theological term “dispensation” in a way similar to the biblical use of the term. Therefore, we believe that the system of theology we know today as dispensationalism is consistent with biblical teaching.

<sup>7</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, p.26.

<sup>8</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, p.26.

<sup>9</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, pp. 26-27.



## Definitions

Building upon the above biblical observations, we are now able to define dispensationalism. According to Ryrie, “a dispensation is a distinguishable economy in the outworking of God’s purpose.” In addition to a definition of a dispensation, Ryrie notes that if “one were describing a dispensation, he would include other things, such as the ideas of distinctive revelation, testing, failure, and judgment.”<sup>10</sup> Finally, he notes concerning a dispensation that,

The distinguishing features are introduced by God; the similar features are retained by God; and the overall combined purpose of the whole program is the glory of God. Eric Sauer states it this way:

a new period always begins only when from the side of God a change is introduced in the composition of the principles valid up to that time; that is, when from the side of God three things concur:

1. A continuance of certain ordinances valid until then;
2. An annulment of other regulations until then valid;
3. A fresh introduction of new principles not before valid.<sup>11</sup>

In his classic work, *Dispensationalism*, Ryrie formulates the following extensive definition of dispensationalism:

Dispensationalism views the world as a household run by God. In this household-world God is dispensing or administering its affairs according to His own will and in various stages of revelation in the process of time. These various stages mark off the distinguishably different economies in the outworking of His total purpose, and these different economies constitute the dispensations. The understanding of God’s differing economies is essential to a proper interpretation of His revelation within those various economies.<sup>12</sup>

Another dispensational scholar, Paul Nevin, summarized dispensationalism as follows:

God’s distinctive method of governing mankind or a group of men during a period of human history, marked by a crucial event, test, failure, and judgment. From the divine standpoint, it is an economy, or administration. From the human standpoint, it is a stewardship, a rule of life, or a responsibility for managing God’s affairs in His house. From the historical standpoint, it is a stage in the progress of revelation.<sup>13</sup>

Dispensationalist, Renald Showers, emphasizing a dispensational view of history, gives the following definition:

Dispensational Theology can be defined very simply as a system of theology which attempts to develop the Bible’s philosophy of history on the basis of the sovereign rule of God. It represents the whole of Scripture and history as being covered by several dispensations of God’s rule.

<sup>10</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, p. 28.

<sup>11</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, p. 29.

<sup>12</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, p. 29.

<sup>13</sup> Paul David Nevin, “Some Major Problems in Dispensational Interpretation” (Th. D. dissertation, Dallas Seminary, 1965), p. 97.

... the term *dispensation* as it relates to Dispensational Theology could be defined as *a particular way of God's administering His rule over the world as He progressively works out His purpose for world history*.<sup>14</sup>

### ESSENTIALS OF DISPENSATIONALISM

Who is a dispensationalist? Essentials are needed by which to gauge a theology. What are the essentials that characterize a dispensationalist? Ryrie has stated what he calls the three essentials or *sine qua non* (Latin, "that without which") of dispensationalism.

The essence of dispensationalism, then, is the distinction between Israel and the church. This grows out of the dispensationalist's consistent employment of normal or plain or historical-grammatical interpretation, and it reflects an understanding of the basic purpose of God in all His dealings with mankind as that of glorifying Himself through salvation and other purposes as well.<sup>15</sup>

The three essentials are not a definition or description of dispensationalism, instead they are basic theological tests which can be applied to an individual to see whether or not he is a dispensationalist.

#### ***First Essential: Literal Interpretation***

Ryrie's first essential of dispensationalism is not just literal interpretation, but more fully, a *consistent* literal hermeneutic. "The word *literal* is perhaps not so good as either the word *normal* or *plain*," explains Ryrie, "but in any case it is interpretation that does not spiritualize or allegorize as nondispensational interpretation does."<sup>16</sup> Literal interpretation is foundational to the dispensational approach to Scripture. Literal interpretation is foundational to the dispensational approach to Scripture. Earl Radmacher went so far as to say that literal interpretation "is the 'bottom-line' of dispensationalism."<sup>17</sup>

The dictionary defines literal as "belonging to letters." It also says literal interpretation involves an approach "based on the actual words in their ordinary meaning, . . . not going beyond the facts."<sup>1</sup> "Literal interpretation of the Bible simply means to explain the original sense of the Bible according to the normal and customary usages of its language."<sup>2</sup> How is this done? It can only be accomplished through the grammatical (according to the rules of grammar), historical (consistent with the historical setting of the passage), contextual (in accord with its context) method of interpretation. Literalism looks to the text, the actual words and phrases of a passage. Nonliteral interpretation imports an idea not found specifically in the text of a passage. To some degree, all Bible interpreters interpret literally. However, dispensationalists *consistently* handle the text literally from Genesis to Revelation.

Literal interpretation recognizes that a word or phrase can be used plainly (denotative) or figuratively (connotative). In modern speech, as in the Bible, we talk plainly—"Grandmother died" (denotative), or more colorfully, "Grandmother kicked the bucket" (connotative). An important point to make is that even though we may use a figure of speech to refer to death, we are using that figure in reference to an event that literally happened. Ryrie says:

Symbols, figures of speech and types are all interpreted plainly in this method and they are in no way contrary to literal interpretation. After all, the very existence of any meaning for a

<sup>14</sup> Renald E. Showers, *There Really Is A Difference! A Comparison of Covenant and Dispensational Theology* (Bellmawr, N.J.: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 1990), pp. 27, 30.

<sup>15</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, p. 41.

<sup>16</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, p. 40.

<sup>17</sup> Earl D. Radmacher, "The Current Status of Dispensationalism and Its Eschatology," ed. Kenneth S. Kantzer and Stanley N. Gundry, *Perspectives on Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), p. 171.

figure of speech depends on the reality of the literal meaning of the terms involved. Figures often make the meaning plainer, but it is the literal, normal, or plain meaning that they convey to the reader.<sup>3</sup>

Some are mistaken to think that just because a figure of speech is used to describe an event (i.e., Jonah's experience in the belly of the great fish in Jonah 2), that the event was not literal. Such is not the case. A "Golden Rule of Interpretation" has been developed to help discern whether or not a figure of speech is intended.

When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise.<sup>4</sup>

E.E. Johnson (Dallas Seminary) notes that much of the confusion over literalism is removed when understanding the two ways it is used: "(1) the clear, plain sense of a word or phrase as over against a figurative use, and (2) a system that views the text as providing the basis of the true interpretation."<sup>5</sup> Thus, dispensationalists, by and large, use "literal" to refer to their *system* of interpretation (the consistent use of the grammatical-historical system), and once inside that system, *literal* refers to whether a specific word or phrase is used in its context figuratively or literally.

Johnson's second use of *literal* (i.e., systematic literalism) is simply the grammatical-historical system consistently used. The grammatical-historical system was revived by the Reformers and was set against the spiritual (spiritualized) or deeper meaning of the text common in the middle ages. The literal meaning was used simply as a springboard to a deeper ("spiritual") meaning, which was viewed as more desirable. A classic spiritualized interpretation would see the four rivers of Genesis 2—the Pishon, Havilah, Tigris and Euphrates—as representing the body, soul, spirit and mind. Coming from such a system, the Reformers saw the need to get back to the literal or textual meaning of the Bible.

The *system* of literal interpretation is the grammatical-historical or textual approach to hermeneutics. Use of literalism in this sense could be called "macroliteralism." Within macroliteralism, the consistent use of the grammatical-historical system yields the interpretative conclusion, for example, that *Israel* always and only refers to national Israel. The church will not be substituted for Israel if the grammatical-historical system is *consistently* used, because there are no textual indicators that such is the case. One must import an idea from outside the text by saying that the passage really means something that it does not actually say. This replacement approach is a mild form of spiritual or allegorical interpretation. So when speaking of those who do replace *Israel* with the church as not taking the Bible literally and spiritualizing the text, it is true, since such a belief is contrary to a macroliteral interpretation.

Consistently literal interpreters, within the framework of the grammatical-historical system, do discuss whether or not a word, phrase or the literary genre of a biblical book is a figure of speech (connotative) or is to be taken literally / plainly (denotative). This is Johnson's first use of *literal* which could be called "microliteralism."

Within microliteralism, there may be discussion by literalists as to whether or not a given word or phrase is being used in a literal or figurative way within a given passage. Some passages are quite naturally clearer than others and a consensus among interpreters develops, while other passages may find literal interpreters divided as to whether or not it should be taken as a figure of speech. This is more a problem of application than of method.

Reconstructionist, Ken Gentry, in his attack on literalism, argues that "*consistent* literalism is unreasonable."<sup>6</sup> He attempts to prove his point by arguing that, since dispensationalists

take some words and phrases as figures of speech, they are not consistently literal.<sup>7</sup> He says, “the dispensational claim to ‘consistent literalism’ is frustrating due to its inconsistent employment.”<sup>8</sup> Gentry seeks to discredit the dispensational hermeneutic by citing examples of dispensationalists who interpret certain passages as containing figures of speech, citing this as inconsistent with the system of literal interpretation. According to Gentry, the dispensationalist has to abandon literal interpretation when he realizes that Jesus refers figuratively to Himself as a door in John 10:9.<sup>9</sup> Gentry is not defining literal interpretation the way dispensationalists do. Therefore, his conclusions about literal interpretation are misguided because he commonly mixes the two senses noted by Johnson. When speaking of the macroliteral, he uses an example from microliteralism, and vice versa, therefore appearing to have shown an inconsistency in literal interpretation. In reality, his examples fall within the framework of how dispensationalists have defined what they mean by literal interpretation.

This is the first essential of dispensationalism. A way of approaching Scripture that allows the Scripture, through the progress of revelation to interpret itself. It does not approach the Bible through some fantastic interpretational scheme, composed of complex symbolism which reduces Scripture to a mystical code book that requires a special decoding manual in order to figure it out. The second essential, flows from the first. It is a distinction between Israel and the Church.

### ***Second Essential: Distinction Between Israel and the Church***

“A dispensationalist keeps Israel and the church distinct,” declares Ryrie. He also notes that anyone “who fails to distinguish Israel and the church consistently will inevitably not hold to dispensational distinctions; and one who does, will.”<sup>18</sup> What does it mean to keep Israel and the church distinct? Dispensationalists believe the Bible teaches that God’s single program for history includes a distinct plan for Israel and a distinct plan for the church. God’s plan for history has two people: Israel and the church. John Walvoord says that “dispensations are rules of life. They are not ways of salvation. There is only one way of salvation and that is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.”<sup>19</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, founder and first president of Dallas Seminary has described the distinction as follows:

The dispensationalist believes that throughout the ages God is pursuing two distinct purposes: one related to the earth with earthly people and earthly objectives involved which is Judaism; while the other is related to heaven with heavenly people and heavenly objectives involved, which is Christianity. . . . Over against this, the partial dispensationalist, though dimly observing a few obvious distinctions, bases his interpretation on the supposition that God is doing but one thing, namely, the general separation of the good from the bad, and, in spite of all the confusion this limited theory creates, contends that the earthly people merge into the heavenly people; that the earthly program must be given a spiritual interpretation or disregarded altogether.<sup>20</sup>

If the unfulfilled promises given to Israel in the Old Testament literally refer to the Jews, which they do, then it is clear that many are yet unfulfilled. Therefore, it is clear that God’s plan for Israel, who is currently in dispersion (Deut. 4:27-28; 28:63-68; 30:2-4), is on hold until He completes His current purpose with the church, which is to take out from the Gentiles a people for His name (Acts 15:14), and Raptures His Bride to heaven. After the Rapture, God

<sup>18</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, p. 39.

<sup>19</sup> John F. Walvoord, “Biblical Kingdoms Compared and Contrasted” in *Issues In Dispensationalism*, edited by Wesley R. Willis and John R. Master (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), p. 88.

<sup>20</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Dispensationalism* (Dallas: Seminary Press, 1936), p. 107, as cited in Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, p. 39.

will then complete His unfinished business with Israel (Acts 15:16-18) during the seven-year Tribulation period. Thus, if one does not distinguish between passages in which God speaks to Israel from those intended for the church, then the results will be an improper merging of the two programs.

In the Old Testament God made certain promises to Abraham when He pledged to make him the father of a special people. Dispensationalists understand these promises, and other unconditional covenant promises (i.e., treaty grants) made by God to Israel as still in tact for Israel, even though the church currently shares in some of Israel's spiritual blessings (Rom. 15:27). Ultimately God will not only restore Israel to a place of blessing (Rom. 11), but will also literally fulfill the land and kingdom promises made to Israel in the Abrahamic (Gen. 12:1-3), Land of Israel (Deut. 30:1-10), and Davidic (2 Sam. 7:12-16) Covenants. In the present time, God has another plan for the church that is distinct from His plan for Israel (Eph. 2-3). Dispensationalists do not believe that the church is the New Israel or has replaced Israel as the heir to the Old Testament promises. Contrary to some who say that the church has superseded Israel, the New Testament nowhere calls the church Israel. Dispensationalist Arnold Fruchtenbaum says:

The conclusion is that the church is never called a "spiritual Israel" or a "new Israel." The term Israel is either used of the nation or the people as a whole, or of the believing remnant within. It is never used of the church in general or of Gentile believers in particular. In fact, even after the Cross there remains a threefold distinction. First, there is a distinction between Israel and the Gentiles as in 1 Corinthians 10:32 and Ephesians 2:11-12. Second, there is a distinction between Israel and the church in 1 Corinthians 10:32. Third, there is a distinction between Jewish believers (the Israel of God) and Gentile believers in Romans 9:6 and Galatians 6:16).<sup>21</sup>

Fruchtenbaum gives six reasons why the New Testament keeps Israel and the church distinct. They are:

- (1) the church was born at Pentecost, whereas Israel had existed for many centuries. . . .
- (2) certain events in the ministry of the Messiah were essential to the establishment of the church—the church does not come into being until certain events have taken place. . . .
- (3) the mystery character of the church. . . .
- (4) the church is distinct from Israel is the unique relationship between Jews and the Gentiles, called one new man in Ephesians 2:15 . . .
- (5) the distinction between Israel and the church is found in Galatians 6:16 [i.e., "the Israel of God"] . . .
- (6) In the book of Acts, both Israel and the church exist simultaneously. The term *Israel* is used twenty times and *ekklesia* (church) nineteen times, yet the two groups are always kept distinct.<sup>22</sup>

### ***Third Essential: Glory of God is the Purpose of History***

The third essential of dispensationalism also revolves around another important distinction. Showers says, this "indispensable factor is the recognition that the ultimate

<sup>21</sup> Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, "Israel and the Church" in *Issues In Dispensationalism*, p. 126.

<sup>22</sup> Fruchtenbaum, "Israel and the Church", pp. 116-18.

purpose of history is the glory of God through the demonstration that He alone is the sovereign God.”<sup>23</sup> Ryrie explains:

we avow that the unifying principle of the Bible is the glory of God and that this is worked out in several ways—the program of redemption, the program for Israel, the punishment of the wicked, the plan for the angels, and the glory of God revealed through nature. We see all these programs as means of glorifying God, and we reject the charge that by distinguishing them (particularly God’s program for Israel from His purpose for the church) we have bifurcated God’s purpose.<sup>24</sup>

This essential is the most misunderstood and often thought to be the least essential. When properly understood, I believe that this is a valid essential. Dispensationalists are not saying that nondispensationalists do not believe in God’s glory. We are making the point that the dispensationalist understanding of the plan of God means that He is glorified in history by more areas or facets, than those who see mankind’s salvation (probably the most important aspect of God’s plan) as the single area displaying God’s glory.

### A BIBLICAL PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

Showers notes that a dispensational view of the Bible provides a believer with a biblical philosophy of history.<sup>25</sup> This is important for a Christian, because when we understand God’s purpose for each era of history we are able to develop a worldview for living in accordance with God’s will for each dispensation. A believer who has a Divine perspective on the past, present and future is able to know what God expects of him in every area of life in our present day.

In the current church age, the New Testament instructs us in both private and public spheres of life. The dispensationalist, for example, does not live in this age of grace as if he was still under the rule of the Mosaic Law. Instead we understand that we are now under the hundreds of commands that the New Testament calls the Law of Christ (1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2). Current dispensational obligations are combined with responsibilities from previous ages, which continue in our own day, to provide a New Testament believer with a complete biblical framework for understanding how to please God in every area of our current lives.

### CONCLUSION

We believe that dispensationalism is a system of theology that has been properly developed from the Bible itself. Dispensationalism is essential to correctly understanding the Bible, especially Bible prophecy. No one will be able to rightly divide God’s Word without understanding these great truths. Instead of being a hindrance to correct understanding of God’s Word, as is regularly claimed by the opponents, dispensationalism is a human label for the correct approach and understanding of Scripture. We plead guilty to the critic’s charge that say we are dispensationalists. We only wish that they would properly come to understand what it is that we believe and quite misrepresenting dispensationalism as often occurs.

In this paper we have provided definitions, descriptions and essentials in an effort to answer the question: “What is dispensationalism?” Dr. Ryrie concludes:

If one does interpret the Bible this way, will it mean that he cuts out some of its parts? Not at all. Actually, the Bible comes alive as never before. There is no need to dodge the plain meaning of a passage or to reinterpret or spiritualize it in order to

<sup>23</sup> Showers, *There Really Is A Difference!*, p. 53.

<sup>24</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, p. 213.

<sup>25</sup> Showers, *There Really Is A Difference!*, pp. 49-52.

resolve conflicts with other passages. God's commands and standards for me today become even more distinct, and His program with its unfolding splendor falls into a harmonious pattern. The history of dispensationalism is replete with men and women who love the Word of God and promote its study, and who have a burden for spreading the gospel to all the world.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary, Unabridged, Second Edition, p. 1055

<sup>2</sup> Paul Lee Tan, *The Interpretation of Prophecy*, (Winona Lake, Ind.: Assurance Publishers, 1974), p. 29.

<sup>3</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, pp. 86-87.

<sup>4</sup> David L. Cooper, *The World's Greatest Library: Graphically Illustrated* (Los Angeles: Biblical Research Society, 1970), p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> Elliott E. Johnson, *Expository Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology* (Tyler, Tex.: Institute for Christian Economics, 1992), p. 148.

<sup>7</sup> For examples of his approach see *Ibid.*, pp. 153-58.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

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<sup>26</sup> Ryrie, *What Is Dispensationalism?* p. 7.

## WHAT IS AMILLENNIALISM?

*Tom's Perspectives*  
by Thomas Ice

Historically there have been three basic positions when it comes to the issue of the millennium and when it will occur in relation to Christ's return to planet earth. First, there is premillennialism, which is the oldest of the three and teaches that Jesus returns before He reigns for a thousand years on earth with His saints. Second, is amillennialism, which teaches that the current church age is a spiritual reign of Christ and there will be no thousand-year reign of Christ upon earth when He returns at the second coming. Third, postmillennialism, which is similar to amillennialism in that the current age is a spiritual reign of Christ through the church. Postmillennialism believes that a majority of people will become saved in the future and thus the church will reign victoriously at a future time before Christ returns to earth. I believe the Bible teaches premillennialism.

### DEFINITION OF AMILLENNIALISM

The terms amillennialism, premillennialism, and postmillennialism did not become theological vocabulary until the late 1800s. The term "amillennialism" is a compound of three words. First, is the Greek alpha privative "a" that negates a word in which it is attached as a prefix. Thus, a literal rendering of the word would mean "no millennium" or more specifically "no millennium after Christ returns." The next two terms are of Latin derivation. "Mille" means "a thousand" and "annum" means "year;" thus, millennium means "a thousand years." Amillennialists Sam Storms explains, "the 'millennium' that I believe John describes in the Apocalypse is concurrent with the church age in which we live and consists of the co-regency with Christ of those believers who have died and entered into the glory of the intermediate state."<sup>1</sup> Even though the term "amillennialism" literally means "no thousand years," it does not mean that. According to Storms, "amillennialists *do* believe in a millennium. The millennium, however, is *now*: the present age of the Church between the first and second comings of Christ in its entirety *is* the millennium."<sup>2</sup>

Anthony Hoekema, an amillennialist, believes the phrase "realized millennialism" is a better description of their actual views and admits that it "is a rather clumsy one, replacing a simple prefix with a three-syllable word. . . . I shall continue to use the shorter and more common term, *amillennialism*."<sup>3</sup> The millennial issue is generated by one's understanding of the six uses of "a thousand years" in Revelation 20:2-7. Hoekema describes his view further as follows:

Amillennialists interpret the millennium mentioned in Revelation 20:4-6 as describing the present reign of the souls of deceased believers with Christ in heaven. They understand the binding of Satan mentioned in the first three verses of this chapter as being in effect during the entire period between the first and second comings of Christ, though ending shortly before Christ's return. They teach that Christ will return after this heavenly millennial reign.<sup>4</sup>

Some "amillennialists interpret the millennium," adds Storms, "as encompassing all the inward spiritual triumphs experienced by the Church earth (i.e., Christ ruling in the believer's heart)."<sup>5</sup>



Traditional amillennialism believes that the first resurrection of Revelation 20:5–6 does not refer to a physical event but to a spiritual time when a believer becomes a Christian, in other words, the new birth. A spiritual first resurrection was taught by Augustine (A.D. 354–430), the father of amillennialism, in his book *The City of God* (20.9). This is significant because if the text refers to a literal resurrection (which it is), then this would be a strong support for premillennialism, which amillennialists of that era were reacting.

### HISTORY OF AMILLENNIALISM

Amillennialism as a system of theology did not come upon the Christian scene until around A.D. 400 when Augustine of North Africa developed it in his well-known work entitled *The City of God*. Around A.D. 180 opposition to a literal interpretation of Revelation 20:1–7 arose in North Africa in the city of Alexandria and led to what could best be called “antimillennialism.” Antimillennialism was simply a negative opposition to the common understanding in the early church that Christ would return in Revelation 19, which is then followed by the thousand-year kingdom on earth in chapter 20. One of the earliest of the church fathers Justin Martyr (A.D. 100–165) wrote the following:

But I and others, who are right-minded Christians on all points, are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be built, adorned, and enlarged, as the prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah and others declare.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, in the early years of the church, it was considered part of orthodoxy to be premillennial. So why did the church eventually become Augustinian amillennialists for over a thousand years?

By the time of Christ, the center of Greek philosophy had moved from Athens Greece to Alexandria Egypt. Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150–215) and his disciple Origen (A.D. 185–254) developed the allegorical approach to biblical interpretation in the early third century. “The fundamental criticism of Origen, beginning during his own lifetime,” notes Joseph Trigg, “was that he used allegorical interpretation to provide a specious justification for reinterpreting Christian doctrine in terms of Platonic philosophy.”<sup>7</sup> Since Origen believed that “the spiritual meaning belongs to a higher order of ideas than the literal,”<sup>8</sup> he was attracted to the spiritual or allegorical meaning of the text. Ronald Diprose explains the implications of an allegorical interpretation as follows:

He motivated this view by appealing to the principle of divine inspiration and by affirming that often statements made by the biblical writers are not literally true and that many events, presented as historical, are inherently impossible. Thus only simple believers will limit themselves to the literal meaning of the text.<sup>9</sup>

The Alexandrian school set the stage for the total abandonment of premillennialism until a couple of hundred years before the Reformation. Just as there were pre-Reformation stirrings about the doctrine of salvation, so there were also harbingers in the area of Bible prophecy. Therefore, by the time of Augustine amillennialism began to replace the original early church belief of premillennialism. “Latin fathers, Jerome and

Gregory the Great, and since antimillennialism reverberated in other ways,” notes Robert Lerner, “the scene was set for an enormous constraint on expressions of millennialism in the subsequent Western tradition.”<sup>10</sup>

### WHY AMILLENNIALISM IS WRONG

Amillennialism, even though it has been widely held throughout church history, is wrong simply because the Bible just does not teach it anywhere. One writer said, “The primary weakness of amillennialism lies in its exegesis of Revelation 20:1–10, especially its understanding of the two resurrections.”<sup>11</sup> Amillennialism is the official eschatology of the Roman Catholic Church and Eastern Orthodox Churches. Unfortunately it was adopted by the first generation of Protestant Reformers who did not do much in the area of Bible prophecy so they merely carried over Rome’s viewpoint in this area. However, later generations of Reformers, especially the Puritans, did look into these matters in-depth and most abandoned Rome in this area of theology.

About a decade ago I had a debate with one of the top academic amillennialists in the United States on amillennialism verses premillennialism. He has written a thousand-page plus commentary on Revelation from the amillennial perspective. During the debate, when I was given the opportunity to question him directly I ask the following question: “Premillennialists believe we have a biblical basis for our belief. We see Christ returning to planet earth in chapter 19 of Revelation and six times in chapter 20 it speaks of Him reigning for a thousand years. Could you provide a similar biblical text that at least appears *prima facie* to support you amillennial contention?” I do not recall the details of his answer, but he did not provide a specific passage to my question. Instead he went off on a speculative theological discourse without providing a biblical text for amillennialism. I believe he could not provide a biblical passage because there is not one anywhere in the Bible.

I have come to realize from my study of history and personal interactions with people today that the main reason for amillennialism is that many do not like the idea of a personal, physical reign of Christ on planet earth. Yet, salvation includes both the spiritual and physical realms of humanity. Redemption will be completed here on planet earth when Christ redeems us not only spiritually but also physically and reigns and rules on earth victoriously for a thousand years. Amillennialism implies that Christ does not need to be victorious within the realm of human history, which has been the theater for all other aspects of the human drama. Instead, they believe only in a victory in heaven when we escape human history in defeat.

Jesus Christ as the second Adam came to earth to start a whole new human race, a new humanity. The basis for this new humanity is the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension which He accomplished at his first coming. The current age is an elective phase in which He is calling out a people to reign with Him in His kingdom. The second coming is for the purpose of judging those who reject Him in order to prepare for His glorious reign on earth. Then, and only then, will we reign with Him forever in eternity. Maranatha!

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Sam Storms, *Kingdom Come: The Amillennial Alternative* (London: Mentor Imprint, 2013), p. 423.

<sup>2</sup> (italics original) Storms, *Kingdom Come*, p. 424.

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<sup>3</sup> (italics original) Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 174.

<sup>4</sup> Hoekema, *Bible and the Future*, p. 174.

<sup>5</sup> Storms, *Kingdom Come*, p. 425.

<sup>6</sup> Justin Martyr, *Dialogue of Justin, Philosopher and Martyr, with Trypho, A Jew*, chapter 80.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph W. Trigg, "Introduction," in R. P. C. Hanson, *Allegory & Event: A Study of the Sources and Significance of Origen's Interpretation of Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), p. vi.

<sup>8</sup> Ronald E. Diprose, *Israel in the development of Christian thought* (Rome: Instituto Biblico Evangelico Italiano, 2000), p. 87.

<sup>9</sup> Diprose, *Israel*, pp. 87–88.

<sup>10</sup> Robert E. Lerner, "Millennialism" in Bernard McGinn, editor, *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism: Apocalypticism in Western History and Culture*, 3 vols. (New York: Continuum, 2000), vol. 2; p. 329.

<sup>11</sup> J. Daniel Hays, J. Scott Duvall, C. Marvin Pate, *Dictionary of Biblical Prophecy and End Times* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), p. 26.

## WHAT IS POSTMILLENNIALISM?

*Tom's Perspectives*  
by Thomas Ice

Postmillennialism is the belief that Christ will return after the millennium. Thus, the name "post" (after) millennial (1000). All postmillennialists believe that the current age is the kingdom, while some believe that the millennial phase of the kingdom is present and others hold that it is yet future when the world has been Christianized. Postmillennialists also believe the Church is the agent through which this return to Eden will be mediated by Christ the King from heaven. Most postmillennialist have stressed the preaching of the gospel, resulting in a conversion of most of mankind as the means for Christianization. However, the more recent Reconstructionist version adds to evangelism obedience and faithfulness to biblical law as a condition for victory. Some postmillennialist believe that the conversion of the world will be a very slow and gradual process, taking perhaps thousands of years more. On the other hand, others believe that conversion could happen within a short period of time (about 10 years) as the result of a great revival. Systematic postmillennialism was the last of the three major eschatologies to develop. It was first taught within the church in the seventeenth century.

### POSTMILLENNIAL SELF-DEFINITION

Contemporary Reconstructionist, postmillennialist Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr. gives the following seven characteristics of evangelical postmillennialism:

- First, postmillennialism "understands the Messianic kingdom to have been founded upon the earth during the earthly ministry and through the redemptive labors of the Lord Jesus Christ. . . . the Church becomes the transformed Israel."
- Second, "the fundamental nature of that kingdom is essentially redemptive and spiritual . . . Christ rules His kingdom spiritually in and through His people in the world (representation), as well as by His universal providence."
- Third, Christ's "kingdom will exercise a transformational socio-cultural influence in history. This will occur as more and more people are converted to Christ."
- Fourth, "postmillennialism, thus, expects the gradual, developmental expansion of the kingdom of Christ in time and on earth. . . . Christ's personal presence on earth is not needed for the expansion of His kingdom."
- Fifth, "postmillennialism confidently anticipates a time in earth history (continuous with the present) in which the very gospel already operative in the world will have won the victory throughout the earth in fulfillment of the Great Commission. . . . During that time the overwhelming majority of men and nations will be Christianized, righteousness will abound, wars will cease, and prosperity and safety will flourish."
- Sixth, there are "two types of postmillennialism today: pietistic and theonomic postmillennialism. . . . Pietistic postmillennialism . . . denies that the postmillennial advance of the kingdom involves the total transformation of culture through the application of biblical law. Theonomic postmillennialism affirms this."
- Seventh, "possibly 'we can look forward to a great 'golden age' of spiritual prosperity continuing for centuries, or even for millenniums, . . .' After this . . . earth history will be drawn to a close by the personal, visible, bodily return of Jesus Christ (accompanied by a literal resurrection and a general judgment) to introduce His . . . consummative and eternal form of the kingdom."<sup>1</sup>

### LIBERALS AND CONSERVATIVES

While many of the basic elements of postmillennialism remain the same, distinction should be made between liberals who promote a postmillennialism through humanism (i.e., the social gospel of the past) and evangelical postmillennialism that promote progress through the church's preaching of the gospel and application of Mosaic Law. Both adhere to a gospel combined with social change as the agency of change and progress. Thus, in a sense, evangelical postmillennialists believe that many nineteenth century postmills went astray by adopting humanistic liberalism, instead they should have relied upon a more traditional, conservative approach.

### HISTORY

The historical rise and development of postmillennialism has been the object of some dispute, partly because of some similarities between it and amillennialism. Amillennialism and postmillennialism, for example, would have Gentry's point one, two, and four in common. Thus, because of points of similarity, some have confused amillennialism and postmillennialism. Because of these similarities, it may be difficult at times to clearly distinguish postmillennialism and amillennialism in history. It is the differences that are significant, in spite of similarities. Both are clearly anti-premillennial.

It is generally thought that Daniel Whitby (1638-1725) developed systematic postmillennialism, as a clearly distinct form of millenarianism. This does not mean that elements of systematic postmillennialism did not exist prior to Whitby, for they clearly did. However, it seems best to understand the maturity of postmillennialism into a distinct system as post-Reformational and in a sense an optimistic form of amillennialism. Thus, postmillennialism's development is dependent upon amillennialism.

Only a handful of partisan polemicists would attempt to argue that postmillennialism has a post-apostolic presence. "All seem to agree that postmillennialism is quite foreign to the apostolic church. There is no trace of anything in the church which could be classified as postmillennialism in the first two or three centuries."<sup>2</sup>

The rise of figurative interpretation and Augustine's millennial interadvent theory began to lay a foundation for the later development of postmillennialism. Augustine "held that the age between the first and second advents is the millennium of which the Scriptures speak and that the second advent would occur at the end of the millennium. This is definitely a postmillennial viewpoint as it places the second advent *after* the millennium."<sup>3</sup> However, it is also at the same time an amillennial viewpoint. Augustine and his eschatology is best classified as amillennial because he lacked the optimism required for a true postmillennial viewpoint, regardless of whatever similarities they may have in common.

Another development that contributed to the development of systematic postmillennialism is the rise of Christendom and the merger of church and state with Constantine's declaration that Christianity was the new religion of the Roman Empire (A.D. 313). Before Constantine it is estimated that only eight to ten per cent of the Empire was Christian. However, as the fourth century neared its end, virtually all identified themselves as Christian. This development lead to a form of victory and optimism about the spread of Christianity and its ability to overcome even a hostile state, like the previously evil Roman Empire. However, such optimism was tempered

with the lost to Christendom of North Africa in the fifth century and the rise of militant Islam a few centuries later.

Joachim of Floris' rise to prominence in the twelfth century certainly was a watershed event in the development of eschatology. He not only laid the foundation for the historicist interpretation of prophetic literature, but his optimism is seen by some as contributing to the development of postmillennialism. Whether or not he can be classified as a clear postmillennialist,<sup>4</sup> he certainly contributed to an optimistic view of history. E. Randolph Daniel notes,

the twelfth century was optimistic about history and the future. The Gregorian reformers certainly believed that they could dramatically reform and purify the Church on earth. Joachim, who was clearly Gregorian in his sympathies, believed that history was evolving toward the status of the Holy Spirit . . . when the Church would enjoy a historical era of peace and spiritual attainment that would far surpass anything achieved in the past.<sup>5</sup>

While Joachim helped prepare the way for the later development of postmillennialism, it is best not to classify him as a millennialist.

Joachim's third *status* has often been described as chiliastic or millennial, which implies that it constitutes a new beginning, the emergence of a spiritual church that would replace the corrupt clerical church. Certainly the millennium as depicted in Apocalypse 20 is a new beginning, but Joachim's status of the Holy Spirit is not millennial in this sense. . . . Joachim's thinking is evolutionary, not revolutionary. He was a reformer, not a millennialist.<sup>6</sup>

Joachim helped prepare the way for postmillennialism by contributing an idea of optimism that was to be continuous with the course of the present age. His belief that it was to be an age of the Holy Spirit was often adopted by later postmillennialists.

The Reformation sprang out of an attitude of pessimism and despair. Marjorie Reeves notes, "E. L. Tuveson has argued that the classical attitude of Protestant reformers towards history was one of pessimism: all things must decline; decay is the essential fact of history."<sup>7</sup> Robin Barnes says, "in the eyes of many Lutherans in the late sixteenth century, the entire social order appeared to be falling apart."<sup>8</sup>

John Calvin, while not reaching the depths of Luther's despair, cannot be claimed for postmillennialism as some have done<sup>9</sup>. just because he utters statements of optimism. Such statements need to be optimism within the context of a postmillennial creed. Calvin also made pessimistic statements: "There is no reason, therefore, why any person should expect the conversion of the world, for at length—when it will be too late, and will yield them no advantage."<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, "despite Calvin's Augustinian avoidance of historically oriented eschatology, the hint of progressivism in his thought left the way open for the frank meliorism and chiliasm of many later Calvinist thinkers."<sup>11</sup>

It would be left to the post-Reformation era for developments to spring forth into what can rightly be called postmillennialism. Joachim's idea of progress was recast into a "new interpretation of the Apocalypse and of the eschatological pattern which looked forward to some great transforming event rather than to inevitable decay."<sup>12</sup> Postmillennialism came into flower in the 1600's as the "idea of novelty rather than return is seen in the excited references to all the new manifestations of the age—the new

lands, the new learning, the new books, the new missionaries."<sup>13</sup> This was aided by the gains of Protestantism over Catholicism in Europe as the new continued to gain over the old.

The postmillennialism of the seventeenth century consisted mainly of those who believed in the success of the preaching of the gospel and correspondingly the conversion of the Jews. The later belief was one held in common with premillennialism. Yet, even though there were a few prominent postmillennialists in the seventeenth century, the position exploded into popularity as a result of Whitby's "new interpretation" of Revelation 20 at the dawn of the eighteenth century.

Contemporary reconstructionist postmillennialists usually bristle at the reminder of Whitby's key role in postmillennial history. Their defensiveness likely stems from the fact that Whitby was a less than orthodox Unitarian. Nevertheless, it was as result of the efforts of Whitby who provided exegetical and theological definition for postmillennialism that the position began to gain ground and become the dominate eschatology in Europe and eventually North America before its decline. Walvoord note the following concerning Whitby:

He was a liberal and a freethinker, untrammled by traditions or previous conceptions of the church. His views on the millennium would probably have never been perpetuated if they had not been so well keyed to the thinking of the times. The rising tide of intellectual freedom, science, and philosophy, coupled with humanism, had enlarged the concept of human progress and painted a bright picture of the future. Whitby's view of a coming golden age for the church was just what people wanted to hear. It fitted the thinking of the times. It is not strange that theologians scrambling for readjustment in a changing world should find in Whitby just the key they needed. It was attractive to all kinds of theology. It provided for the conservative a seemingly more workable principle of interpreting the Scripture. . . . Man's increasing knowledge of the world and scientific improvements which were coming could fit into this picture. On the other hand, the concept was pleasing to the liberal and skeptic. If they did not believe the prophets, at least they believed that man was now able to improve himself and his environment. They, too, believed a golden age was ahead.<sup>14</sup>

After gaining dominance in Europe and America among both conservatives and liberals, postmillennialism began a decline into near extinction. Fallout from the French Revolution in Europe dealt a severe blow to postmillennial optimism. Later, in the States, postmillennial decline awaited the turn of the century and was dealt a near-fatal blow by WWI and WWII and identification with the Social Gospel and Liberalism. Only in the 1970's has postmillennialism began to reassert itself, primarily through the reconstructionist movement. While postmillennialism has made some gains in recent years, it is still a minor position in the overall field of eschatology.

### **OBJECTIONS TO POSTMILLENNIALISM**

The greatest problem with postmillennialism is the fact that the Bible just does not teach it. Where is a specific passage that teaches the postmillennial concept? Not a passage that they think it their best, from which they attempt to develop a postmillennial theology. I am asking for a passage that teaches the idea of postmillennialism. It is nowhere to be found in the Bible. Lack of specific biblical

support is fatal to postmillennialism for any Bible believing Christian. This explains why their normal presentation approach is to first attack premillennialism and then present broad theological concepts that one must adopt as a framework with which one needs to approach biblical texts.

Basic to postmillennialism failure to match up with Scripture is its lack of a consistent hermeneutic. At key points, postmillennialism must abandon the literal hermeneutic of the historical, grammatical, and contextual approach for some degree of spiritualization.

Nowhere does the New Testament teach that the kingdom of God was brought into existence at Christ's first coming. The New Testament does say that the kingdom was "near" during Christ's ministry, but it stops short of saying that it arrived during Christ's first coming. Furthermore, while personal redemption is certainly an essential key to the kingdom, that fact should not be used to negate equally clear teachings concerning the physical nature of this kingdom.

The postmillennial idea of progress is not found in any particular text of the Bible. Rather, it appears to be an idea brought to the pages of Scripture. Postmillennialism is inconsistent with the biblical fact that the cataclysmic return of Christ brings in the kingdom (Rev. 19-20), not the preaching of the gospel and gradual human progress. Gospel preaching in the current age is for the purpose of gathering out the elect for the future kingdom. An increase in the number of Christian converts has not resulted in a transformational socio-cultural influence. Too often there has been cultural regression. Such thinking, by postmillennialists, falls far short of the Old Testament description of the actual conditions of the kingdom.

Postmillennialism confuses Israel and the church. The postmillennial view requires the church to take over the fulfillment of promises made to national Israel so that they may posit a present kingdom. Modern postmillennialism needs to posit replacement theology or supersessionism as a key plank in its theology. Thus, it denies that the modern state of Israel could have any place in God's future prophetic plan. Postmillennialism is anti-Zionist. The New Testament nowhere teaches that Israel has been replaced by the church. Paul says to these things, "God has not rejected His people [Israel], has He? May it never be!" (Rom. 11:1) The church is certainly a partaken in the Abrahamic promises, but not a taker over of Israel's promises.

While it is true that the Bible predicts an increasing spread of the proclamation of the gospel in the current age, this does not support the notion of postmillennial progress. All millennial positions—pre, post, and amillennialism—believe in a global preaching and spread of the gospel during the current age. In addition, the Bible speaks frequently in catastrophic and interventionist language of Christ's return to earth as the cause of millennial conditions. Specific statements of gradualism are lacking in the Bible. Postmillennialism also denies the New Testament teaching that Christ could return at any-moment, known as imminency. The Great Commission is being fulfilled, not by exercising a certain level of response to the gospel, but when the church is preaching the gospel and making disciples throughout all the nations. This is occurring in our own day.

Shifting from pietistic to theonomic will not make postmillennial sudden more effective in history. In fact, at least pietistic postmillennialism was much more evangelistic than is the current brand of theonomic postmillennialism. If the church were looking to theonomic postmillennialism to show the way in the area of evangelism, then it would become extinct within a generation.



If a viewpoint truly represents Scripture then it is not too much to ask it to be able to correspond to history. Postmillennialism teaches that this current age will be a time of steady and upward growth. However, this is impossible to defend from history. While the gospel frequently expands to new territories, at the same time so many areas where the gospel has dominated society and culture there has been regression and relapse, not progress. It appears that wherever Christianity has come to dominate the culture, and has lost that dominance, it has never been revived as a significant force. This is not progress it is regression. At this point in time, history supports the premillennial notion of the global spread of the gospel, while at the same time the church becomes increasingly apostate.

Postmillennialism fails to account for the fact that if there is going to be a fulfillment of millennial conditions predicted in the Bible, it is going to be only as a result of a revolutionary intervention of Jesus Christ at His second coming in order to introduce new factors which are discontinuous with the present age. It will require the personal presence of Jesus Christ Himself to roll back the curse and to rule with a rod of iron. Only the premillennial model provides the changes necessary to implement a millennial golden age.

Postmillennialism is taught nowhere in the Bible. The postmillennial model of historical expectations is also failing. It is therefore, more than reasonable to conclude that postmillennialism is a deviant and unbiblical aberration.

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<sup>1</sup>Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology* (Tyler, Tex.: Institute for Christian Economics, 1992), pp. 70-73.

<sup>2</sup>John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), p. 19.

<sup>3</sup>Walvoord, *Millennial Kingdom*, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup>D.H. Kromminga, *The Millennium in the Church: Studies in the History of Christian Chiliasm* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1945), p. 20f.

<sup>5</sup>E. Randolph Daniel, "Joachim of Fiore: Patterns of History in the Apocalypse" in Richard K. Emmerson and Bernard McGinn, editors, *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 73.

<sup>6</sup>Daniel, "Joachim," pp. 86, 87.

<sup>7</sup>Marjorie Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages: A Study of Joachimism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 501.

<sup>8</sup>Robin Bruce Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis: Apocalypticism in the Wake of the Lutheran Reformation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), p. 5.

<sup>9</sup>Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, pp. 88-89.

<sup>10</sup>John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, n.d.) Vol. XVII, p. 147.

<sup>11</sup>Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis*, p. 33.

<sup>12</sup>Reeves, *Influence of Prophecy*, p. 502.

<sup>13</sup>Reeves, *Influence*, pp. 502-03.

<sup>14</sup>Walvoord, *Millennial Kingdom*, pp. 22-23.

## New, Improved Postmillennialism

by Thomas Ice

Perhaps more than any area of theology, one's eschatology is molded by the spirit of the times in which they live. This goes a long way in explaining the unparalleled success of a book like *The Late Great Planet Earth*, by Hal Lindsey. It first appeared in 1970. This was a time when the secular world was preaching a doomsday message of their own. Especially younger people often felt a sense of desperation, which, to some extent, predisposed them toward the scenario given by Lindsey and many other similar messages. This "escapist" mentality has been expressed by the slogan: "I don't have a problem the Rapture wouldn't solve." This is not a comment on the truthfulness of Lindsey's message, just an example of how people are normally influenced by the framework of the thinking of the times in which they live.

By the end of the 1970's, the secular world began to increasingly trade in their pessimism for a new found "self-help-can-do" approach. Both individual and cooperate narcissism became the order of the day. A new rise of optimism had begun sweeping baby-boomers. The direction of the wind was coming from the East bringing with it a new yuppie "can-do" optimism, which has served to enliven the dead corpse of humanism. As witnessed in the 1984 presidential elections, when it became known that President Reagan held to a Hal Lindsey-type scenario of the future, it was perceived that he had given up on this world. It was the common secular understanding that this perceived fatalism could lead to a nuclear war, since many wrongly thought that someone like Reagan would view their role as helping God bring on Armageddon. Increasingly, in many circles the new optimistic New Age spirit of the '80's is the opposite of the despair of the '70's. This spirit holds that an individual can take control of their personal lives that could in the process transform and save the world.

In a similar way in which Karl Barth had scathingly rebuked old liberal theology for its bankruptness, so also current New Age Humanism is most severe in their renunciation of their own heritage—Rationalistic Humanism. Again, like Barth, the product which was produced is a synthesis between the old (Western Rationalism) and the new (Eastern Pantheism). Like the parent, the child believes that with the right amount of proper individual and cooperate development, Humanism (man-centeredness) has produced a new, improved version of optimism often called New Age Thought. It is the leakage of this secular optimism into some Christian circles which I believe has created a predisposition for the Reconstructionists "new, improved postmillennialism".

In 1984, Church Historian James H. Moorhead published two articles on the nature and decline of postmillennialism.<sup>1</sup> Moorhead began his first essay by saying, In 1859 an influential theological quarterly asserted without fear of contradiction that postmillennialism was the "commonly received doctrine" among American Protestants; but by the early twentieth century, it had largely vanished, and Lewis Sperry Chafer, with only slight partisan exaggeration, could claim in 1936 that it was without "living voice."<sup>2</sup> Moorhead goes on to note that it did not die a sudden death, rather it eroded away. He says the key to understanding its decline lies in properly evaluating the components of its make-up.

During its heyday in the mid-nineteenth century, this eschatology represented a compromise between an apocalyptic and an evolutionary

view of time, between a history characterized by dramatic upheavals and supernatural events and one governed by natural laws of organic development.<sup>3</sup>

So it is that Moorhead sees postmillennialism as a blend of what he calls the apocalyptic and the evolutionary view of time. Moorhead is saying that the spirit of the age accounted for the popularity of the way in which postmillennialism viewed the Bible--upward progress toward perfection. But at the same time, postmillennialism had to deal with the interventionist, apocalyptic language of the Bible that ran contrary to the spirit of the age and the postmillennial view of progress. As the upward development belief was increasingly shaken, beginning with the Civil War and progressing through World War II, the only way American Christians could envision anything approaching a golden age was through the intervening and apocalyptic Return of Christ, His cleansing judgment of the world, and His overwhelming presence to set-up and maintain such a period.

The remainder of this essay will center round Moorhead's analysis of "apocalyptic" and "an evolutionary view of time" as the key to understanding the two major ingredients of the older postmillennialism and how they are key to understanding the "new, improved" version of neo-postmillennialism being offered by the Christian Reconstruction Movement. All of this is happening at a time when we are witnessing the rising New Age optimism of the last decade and its corresponding influence within Christianity. This perception of New Age optimism most likely accounts for the mindset that is creating a surprising increase in interest toward neopostmillennialism.

Of course Reconstructionists are appalled by the suggestion that their view of progress could have anything to do with an evolutionary foundation. But when one surveys their writings for specific Scriptural support for upward progress, the best they are able to put forth is the parable of leaven of Matt. 13:31-32. There is no doubt that it speaks of an idea of progress, but a lexical study of "leaven" shows that it normally refers to an evil, not good concept. Their approach, even if they are right about this parable teaching upward progress, should also be questioned since it is shaky to build doctrine out of a parable.

Normally the approach taken by Reconstructionists can be seen in the recent book *The Reduction of Christianity*<sup>4</sup> as its authors argue that the historic church has always believed in progress and optimism. Other than the fact that progress and optimism are such broad categories, it is amusing to note the author's attraction for quoting non-postmillennialists examples in their attempted polemic for postmillennial thought. Some of the premillennialists noted include Justin, Irenaeus, and Tertullian from the early church; and Puritans Isaac Newton and Cotton Mather. Certainly the church has always believed in progress and optimism. Augustine believed in the progress of the City of God, but DeMar and Leithart fail to note that he also believed in the progress of the City of Man. This is why Augustine was optimistic that Christ would intervene in history by returning to judge evil and then sort out the wheat and the tares. Premillennialists are optimistic about the future, since it includes Christ return.

DeMar and Leithart's clever chapters on the history of postmillennialism does not even deal with the fact that the postmillennial system of eschatology did not begin to be put forth until the 1600's, at the earliest. Most historians hold that it became a distinct system of eschatology when the Unitarian Daniel Whitby developed what he called a "new hypothesis" in 1703. Postmillennialism was clearly the final major

system of eschatology to develop. It followed premillennialism by over 1500 years and did not surface until after the Reformation.

David Chilton in his two postmillennial works *Paradise Restored*<sup>5</sup> and *Days of Vengeance*,<sup>6</sup> along with DeMar and Leithart attempt to define postmillennialism in such broad strokes for the purpose of associating with amillennialism, in order to appear to have greater historic credibility. However, this cannot be done. If postmillennialism is a distinct eschatology (all agree it is), then it is different at points from the other systems of eschatology. Even though it relies upon other eschatologies at points, it is distinct from them at other points. Therefore, postmillennialism is not amillennialism and was a very late development, unless Reconstructionists are willing to sacrifice the distinctives of postmillennialism for an improved historical position.

Moorhead's observation that postmillennialism is a struggle between progress and apocalyptic gives us a basis for understanding why the new, improved postmillennialism has opted for the preterist hermeneutic, or what North recently labeled as "the fusion of covenant and symbol."<sup>7</sup> The preterist (lit. "past") interpretation of the Olivet Discourse and the Book of Revelation, as well as other selected passages, view these things as past, historically fulfilled events. The Reconstructionist version believes that "all these things" were fulfilled by the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

The preterist approach removes the apocalyptic obstacle by dumping all those passages into a 40-year dispensation ending in A.D. 70. Any time a Reconstructionist encounters texts that through normal exegesis negate their progress approach, they are (mis)handled by feeding them to their friendly preterist monster. Gulp! "Out of sight! Out of mind!" However, there are a number of major problems with this whole approach, which most of the eager, new followers of this movement seem totally ignorant of.

First, there is absolutely no record in all of church history of anyone who understood the prophetic Scriptures in this way until a Catholic, Jesuit named Alcazar gave birth to this approach in 1614. Alcazar argued that the Pope could not be the anti-Christ, as the Protestants were charging, since prophetic events and personalities had all been fulfilled by the Christianization of the Roman Empire in A.D. 313. It is strange that if this fulfillment was to be such a great comfort to the Apostolic Church, as Reconstructionists contend, that there is absolutely no record of their supposed comfort. Instead, extant writings indicate that they interpreted these texts to refer to future fulfillments, just as do modern premillennialists.

Second, Reconstructionists often scold other Christians for ignoring the lessons of Church History. They say, "We must listen to the voice of our mother—the Church." However, they are inconsistent in applying their belief when it comes to realizing that the two major aspects of their eschatology are very late developments within the history of the Church. Why did we have to wait until the 17th century for the Church to be given the preterist hermeneutic and the postmillennial system? In addition, the preterist hermeneutic did not really become popular until the 1800's and that was mainly within liberal, higher critical circles, which saw this approach as an excellent means for denying the veracity of Biblical predictive prophecy. The Reconstructionist pretension to listen to the voice of Mother Church, as with their approach to hermeneutics, is followed when it fits their preconceived theology and ignored when her voice cries out against their system.

Third, by the time the preterist monster has lumbered through the Biblical text, there does not remain a single passage that teaches the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. "Now wait a minute," the offended Reconstructionist cries, "We believe in the second

coming!" "The orthodox church has always believed in the second coming." This is my point. The church has always interpreted Christ's coming in the clouds to be a reference to the second coming. Therefore the Fathers believed that the Bible taught the futurist second coming and included it in their creeds. In other words, they arrived at their belief in the second coming by means of a non-preterist hermeneutic. Had they used the Reconstructionist approach there would be no basis for believing in a second coming, which had become the orthodox position. It is true that Reconstructionists deduce the second coming from 1 Thessalonians 4 and 1 Corinthians 15, based upon the future resurrection. But no passage within Scripture that contains the word "coming" teaches Christ's future second coming within their system. If the Early Church did not develop the doctrine of the second coming from passages using the word "coming," which they did, then they would have never labeled that future event the second coming.

Fourth, it appears to me that the only possible motive for adopting the preterist approach could be to remove the apocalyptic element from the Bible so that the Reconstructionist view of upward evolution can be inserted. This hermeneutic can in no way follow from comparing Scripture with Scripture. It is simply another chapter in the long history of allegorical interpretation.

Fifth, the ingredients that compose the postmillennial system of the current Christian Reconstruction Movement parallels the false notions Peter warned believers to look out for in the last days (2 Pet. 3:1-18). The "last days" of Peter cannot be limited to the few years prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Rather they characterize, at least, the whole of the current Church Age. Peter is not saying that these "mockers" will deny the second coming, instead, they will deny the promise of an "any-moment," sudden, or cataclysmic coming. The mockers attempt this by replacing the apocalyptic, any-moment nature of Christ's return with their false uniformitarian notion that "ever since the father fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation" (v. 4). This amounts to the replacement of an apocalyptic hope for a present process hope.

The mockers non-cataclysmic view of progress in this passage parallels the view of modern Reconstructionists. By teaching that Christ cannot return until the Church achieves some level of success, or that He most likely will not return for 36,000 or one million years fits the perspective of the mockers<sup>8</sup> who are saying that the Lord is slow and will not suddenly appear (v. 9). Also, by teaching that current processes and spiritual enablements, plus time and faithfulness are all that are needed to transform our current world into the Millennium, Reconstructionists parallel the mockers who denied that Christ will come suddenly—"like a thief" (v. 10). As North has recently said, "Victory in history is not going to be a discontinuous, unexpected event for God's people."<sup>9</sup> Once again, Holy Writ contradicts Reconstructionist wisdom when it says that the righteousness of the future age will come suddenly and in a moment (vv. 10-13).

Reconstructionists have attempted to put forth the idea that heavenly-minded Christians do not have present motivation in the "nasty now-and-now." However, Peter's futuristic prophetic theology, in keeping with the theme of the rest of Scripture, says that apocalyptic expectations furnish the motive for present-day ethics. "Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, . . . Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless" (vv. 11, 14).

Since Reconstructionists "distort" (v. 16) the texts of Scripture in this manner it gives them a distorted view of the future, resulting in misdirected action in the present. This defect blinds the development of their theology to pitfalls that are present within Satan's current arrangement of the world's system. Specifically, they seek a premature establishment of the Millennium. This has long been Satan's goal. He has tirelessly tried to preempt God by tempting man to help establish the Kingdom. His twofold tactics have been to get people to use false means and to try to establish a kingdom at a time of his choosing rather than God's.

The means that God has ordained for the establishment of Christ's Millennial Kingdom is through a cataclysmic interruption into history, like Creation and Noah's Flood. Reconstructionists hold that millennial blessings will be mediated through the present dynamics of the Church. It does not follow that the first phase of Christ's career, His humiliation, is spent immediately and physically upon the earth, and then for Him to not correspondingly display His great glory Himself by reigning directly upon this earth. We will reign with Christ, but only because of the status gained by His gracious provision for our sins.

The Reconstructionist view of a mediated reign results only in a watered down, spiritualized, even truncated, reduction of the true reign of Christ. Reconstructionists second-rate spiritualizations of millennial fulfillments have more in common with current non-Christian efforts than they are willing to admit. A friend of mine captured something of the greatness of Christ's premillennial reign when he wrote concerning the shortcomings of Reconstructionism.

[Postmillennialists] suppress the future millennial career of Jesus Christ, transferring to mortal mankind what belongs to Him. Control of the last thousand years of world history belongs to the Risen Christ, as immediate theocratic agent, and to His brethren, the "sons of the resurrection"—not to any combination of well-intentioned mortals in an ecclesiastical status quo development.<sup>10</sup>

False hopes concerning the means of bringing in Christ's Millennial reign make Dominionist theology open to intermingling with current false views of the Kingdom, both Christian and non-Christian. This has been their track record: devastatingly wrong movements that have tried to use the wrong means to subdue the world for Christ. Some of these movements include: the Munster Revolt, Fifth Monarchists, Oliver Cromwell, the Abolitionist of the Civil War, the Social Gospel, and according to Reconstructionist David Chilton, Nazism and Marxism.<sup>11</sup> Reconstructionists are naive to think that only premillennialists create an air of expectation by preaching their views of the any-moment return of Christ. Their own history is one of dashed false optimism often producing disastrous results.

The other main area in which Reconstructionists err is over the timing of Christ's coming. He does not return after millennial conditions have been mediated by the Church, but rather, it is His return which then produces such conditions. Much could be said concerning this matter, but space only permits this single point: Christ has promised to eat and drink with believers when He enters into His Kingdom (Luke 22:14-23). He instituted the Lord's Supper for us to practice "until the kingdom of God comes" (22:18). The fact that Christ instituted this to be observed during the interim demonstrates that we are not yet in His Kingdom, nor has He yet returned to set it up. Anyone who has only casual knowledge of Reconstructionists know the central place

which communion has in their practice. It is ironic that they weekly testify to the fact that their theology is deviant concerning the timing of the second coming as they eat the bread and drink the wine.

It is not surprising that the most unstable elements of the Charismatic movement, the optimistic, positive confession wing, have been attracted to Dominion Eschatology. Certainly hard-core Reconstructionists will not be deluded into integrating New Age Thought into their thinking, however, they are strengthening the hand of many less stable Christian "theologies" by providing them with a false eschatology. No matter how many "breakthroughs" or brilliant blendings of their theology their sophisticated spiritualizations of the Biblical text produce there still remains a major obstacle for "the 'new, improved' Christian Reconstruction movement"—the Bible does not teach it. The challenge remains: produce one passage of Scripture that teaches postmillennialism. It cannot be found within the apocalyptic nature of God's Holy Revelation. The Bible does command us to "gird your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Maranatha!

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> James H. Moorhead, "The Erosion of Postmillennialism in American Religious Thought, 1865-1925," *Church History*, (March, 1984) Vol. 53; pp. 61-77. "Between Progress and Apocalypse: A Reassessment of Millennialism in American Religious Thought, 1800-1880," *The Journal of American History*, (December, 1984) Vol. 71; pp. 524-42.

<sup>2</sup> Moorhead, "The Erosion of Postmillennialism", p. 61.

<sup>3</sup> Moorhead, "The Erosion of Postmillennialism", p. 61.

<sup>4</sup> Gary DeMar and Peter Leithart, *The Reduction of Christianity: Dave Hunt's Theology of Cultural Surrender*, (Ft. Worth: Dominion Press, 1988).

<sup>5</sup> David Chilton, *Paradise Restored* (Tyler, TX: Reconstruction Press, 1985).

<sup>6</sup> David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance* (Fort Worth: Dominion Press, 1987).

<sup>7</sup> Gary North, "Stones and Cornerstones in Christian Reconstruction," *Christian Reconstruction*, (Vol. XII, No. 2; March/April, 1988), p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> See Chilton, *Paradise Restored*, p. 221 and Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, p. 507.

<sup>9</sup> Gary North, *Is the World Running Down?* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economic, 1988), p. 111.

<sup>10</sup> John Pilkey, personal letter to Thomas D. Ice, March 23, 1988.

<sup>11</sup> David Chilton, *Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth: Dominion Press, 1987), p. 495.

## THE UNSCRIPTURAL THEOLOGIES OF AMILLENNIALISM AND POSTMILLENNIALISM

by Thomas Ice

The twentieth century has been a time dominated by the outworking of one's eschatology. In addition to the various eddies and movements within Christianity, just think of the impact that Communism and Islam had on the last hundred years. Both are corrupted forms of a Christian, postmillennial determinism. One's view of the future has tremendous impact upon what one believes an individual should do in the present.

Historically, only the Bible looks ahead to the future as a time when life will be better than in the past. All pagan religions look to the past and think, "If only we could return to the good old days, then that would be wonderful." "If we could just return the days of the Pharaohs of Egypt." "If we could bring back the wonderful days of Nebuchadnezzar." "If we could just get back to the 50s." Only the Bible says the best is yet to come.

Pagans think this way because all of their cultural experiences have started out on a relatively high plan and then declined from there. When you survey the all pagan cultures, you quickly realize that they usually experience their greatest success and development early in their history and encounter decline and stagnation after that. Only in the Bible does history go from a garden to a city where true progress is anticipated.

I believe that the Book of Job, the earliest book in the canon of Scripture, is a prolegomena of God's plan for history. In the life of Job we have played out the fate and destiny of God's elect people and the destiny of history itself. We see evil befalling Job in the first couple of chapters, followed by endless human viewpoint explanations, only to have the Lord intervene and set all strait with His sixty-two questions. In the end, Job was blessed with a two-fold blessing compared to his beginning blessing. This is where the future is headed. God gives greater blessing in the end than He provided at the beginning. One's view of eschatology matters! It is important to get it right.

### SHOW ME THE SCRIPTURE

Years ago in my first book, *Dominion Theology*, with Wayne House, I made the following statement in the introduction:

David Chilton once offered me the following exegetical support for postmillennialism:

That's why my book started in Genesis. I wanted to demonstrate that the Paradise Restored theme (i.e., postmillennialism) is not dependent on any one passage, but is taught throughout Scripture . . . . The fact is, postmillennialism is on every page of the Bible.<sup>1</sup>

My challenge is simply this: Since postmillennialism is on every page of the Bible, show me *one* passage that requires a postmillennial interpretation and should not be taken in a premillennial sense. After fourteen years of study it is my belief that there is not one passage anywhere in Scripture that would lead to the postmillennial system. The best postmillennialism can come up with is a position built upon an inference.<sup>2</sup>



Ken Gentry attempts an answer to my challenge in their book *House Divided*<sup>3</sup> by 1 Corinthians 15:20-28. However, he could not do that without making multiple false assumptions about the text. Thus, he proved my point that they could not come up with a distinctly postmillennial text. He only offered one. This strikes at the heart of the problem with amillennialism and its close cousin, postmillennialism. It is not taught in the Bible! On the other hand, premillennialism is, as has been demonstrated throughout this year's conference by previous speakers.

### THREE MAJOR VIEWS

There are three major views of *eschatology* or the study of last things. All three revolve around the return of Christ in relation to the millennium (Lat. *mille*--"thousand" plus *annus*--"year") or the kingdom of God. The three systems are known as *premillennialism*, *amillennialism* and *postmillennialism*. Every view of eschatology must fit into one of these three millennial categories.<sup>4</sup> While these terms are widely used and are the accepted labels for the three viewpoints, many think they can be misleading if not understood properly. Let us hear a brief description by a proponent of each category.

John F. Walvoord describes his *premillennial* faith as "an interpretation that the Second Coming of Christ will occur before His literal reign of one thousand years on earth."<sup>5</sup> After His victorious intervention into history, Christ will personally reign from Jerusalem producing a time of peace, prosperity and righteousness. Premillennialists see the present era as the Church Age, which is a separate and distinct work in God's plan from that of Israel. Christ's redemptive work is the only basis for salvation regardless of the period of time a believer lives under.

*Amillennialism* is described by Floyd E. Hamilton as a view "that Christ's millennial kingdom extends from His Resurrection from the tomb to the time of His Second Coming on the clouds at the end of this age".<sup>6</sup> At no time will Christ reign on the earth in Jerusalem. "On earth, Christ's kingdom 'is not of this world,' but He reigns esp. in the hearts of His people on earth, . . . for a 'thousand years,' the perfect, complete time between the two comings of Christ."<sup>7</sup> After the Second Coming of Christ, believers from all of history will enter into heaven for eternity immediately following the final and single judgment of all mankind.

Norman Shepherd defines postmillennialism as "the view that Christ will return at the end of an extended period of righteousness and prosperity (the millennium)."<sup>8</sup> Like the amillennialist, the post-millennialist sees the current age as the kingdom of God. However, they see the reign of Christ not just in the hearts of believers today, but as impacting society. Postmils believe that since the kingdom was established at Christ's first coming, it is currently being expanded through the preaching of the gospel, until an overwhelming major, though not all, will be converted to Christ. Such Gospel success will create a climate of reception to the things of Christ, like His mediated rule through the church of all the world. Shepherd further explains:

[The postmillennialist] expects a future period when revealed truth will be diffused throughout the world and accepted by the vast majority. The millennial era will therefore be a time of peace, material prosperity, and spiritual glory.

The millennium will be of extended duration though not necessarily a precise 1,000 years. Because it is established through means presently

operative, its beginning is imperceptible. Some postmillennialists provide for a gradual establishment of the millennium; others for a more abrupt beginning. Most, but not all, allow for a brief apostasy or resurgence of evil just prior to the advent and in preparation for the judgment. Even during the millennium, the world will not be entirely without sin, and not every person will be converted.<sup>9</sup>

#### AMILLENNIALISM AND POSTMILLENNIALISM ARE SIMILAR

Walvoord has observed that "Premillennialism is obviously a viewpoint quite removed from either amillennialism or postmillennialism."<sup>10</sup> This is so, he maintains because premillennialists are more consistently literal in their hermeneutical approach than the other two.

Some postmillennialists have noted their closer kinship with their amillennialist brethren as well. David Chilton links amillennialists and postmillennialists together because of their common belief that the kingdom or millennium is the current age. premillennialists see it as future. He declares, "*orthodox Christianity has always been postmillennialist. . . . At the same time, orthodox Christianity has always been amillennialist (i.e., non-millennarian).*"<sup>11</sup> More to the point Chilton has written:

What I'm saying is this: *Amillennialism and Postmillennialism are the same thing.* The *only fundamental difference* is that "postmils" believe the world will be converted, and "amils" don't. Otherwise, I'm an amil . . . Got it?<sup>12</sup>

In many senses, postmillennialism is simply an optimistic form of amillennialism. This is why some debate whether Augustine was an amillennialist or a postmillennialist. Or, whether he was an amillennialist with some incipient postmillennial strands. The same has been true for classifying people like B. B. Warfield and Oswald Allis. Both were technically postmillennialist, but many refer to them as amillennial.

I believe that the amillennial/postmillennial paradigm is what individuals come up with who do not take into account God's future for national Israel. This becomes clear when we look at the historical development of these three eschatological systems.

#### BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MILLENNIAL SYSTEMS

We need to focus on the historical development of the three systems since amillennialism and postmillennialism really to not have exegetical support for their views. Thus, this must mean that extra-biblical factors account for their rise and development.

It is generally conceded that premillennialism (known in the early church as chiliasm) is the oldest of the three systems. The other two systems developed, in my opinion, as a reaction to Ante-Nicene premillennialism.

#### *Chiliasm*

Premillennialism or chiliasm as it was called in the early church, was the pervasive view of the earliest orthodox fathers. This is the consensus of both liberal and conservative scholars who are experts in early Church theology. J. N. D. Kelly, acknowledged internationally as an authority on patristic Christian thought, is typical of the scholarly opinion on this question and notes that the early Church was chiliastic

or millenarian in her eschatology. Speaking of the eschatology of the second century he observes,

The clash with Judaism and paganism made it imperative to set out the bases of the revealed dogmas more thoroughly. The Gnostic tendency to dissolve Christian eschatology into the myth of the soul's upward ascent and return to God had to be resisted. On the other hand millenarianism, or the theory that the returned Christ would reign on earth for a thousand years, came to find increasing support among Christian teachers. . . . This millenarian, or 'chiliastic', doctrine was widely popular at this time.<sup>13</sup>

Kelly asserts further that premillennialism or chiliasm was dominate through the middle of the third century by observing the following: "The great theologians who followed the Apologists, Irenaeus, Tertullian and Hippolytus, were primarily concerned to defend the traditional eschatological scheme against Gnosticism. . . . They are all exponents of millenarianism."<sup>14</sup> Still another historian says,

Primitive Christianity was marked by great chiliastic enthusiasm, . . . By chiliasm, strictly speaking, is meant the belief that Christ was to return to earth and reign visibly for one thousand years. That return was commonly placed in the immediate future.<sup>15</sup>

Premillennialism was not contradicted by a single orthodox church father until the beginning of the third century, when Gaius (Caius) first launched an attack. Gaius is the first one in recorded church history who interpreted the thousand years symbolically. Additionally, he also rejected the Book of Revelation, holding that it was written by Cerinthus and should not be in the canon.<sup>16</sup> But even with Gaius' appearance, premillennialism was still very much the eschatology of the day.

### *Anti-Millennialism*

I always like to point out that before the actual rise of amillennialism or postmillennialism, there was anti-millennialism. What do I mean by anti-millennialism? Basically, people who just did not like premillennialism. Hans Bietenhard, after noting how the early church was solidly chiliastic in their interpretation of Revelation 20 and other Scripture until the time of Augustine, says,

Today, it is admitted on all hands—except for a few Roman Catholic exegetes—that only an eschatological interpretation [in the context meaning chiliastic one] is consistent with the text. If the question is still open whether the hope is to be maintained or not, it will now be decided by other than exegetical and historical considerations.<sup>17</sup>

The point needs to be made that anti-millennialism did not arise from the study of Scripture, but rather as a result of disturbed sensibilities of individuals who were already affected by pagan thought. The earliest reaction was not to come up with an alternate interpretation of Revelation 20, since it appeared to clearly teach premillennialism, but to claim that the book of Revelation did not belong in the inspired New Testament canon.

Premillennialism was attacked by the Alexandrian school in Egypt during the middle of the third century. In the East, Eusebius of Caesarea (263-339), the court theologian to Constantine and theological heir of Origen, was a strong leader in the rejection of apocalypticism. With the rise of Constantine and the adoption of Christianity as the empire's official religion, alternate perspectives fell into disfavor. Norman Cohn points out the following:

Millenarism remained powerful in the Christian Church so long as Christians were an unpopular minority threatened with persecution. When in the fourth century Christianity attained a position of supremacy in the Mediterranean world and became the official religion of the empire, the Church set out to eradicate millenarian beliefs.<sup>18</sup>

Ayer agrees with Cohn and says,

During the third century the belief in chiliasm as a part of the Church's faith died out in nearly all parts of the Church. It did not seem called for by the condition of the Church, which was rapidly adjusting itself to the world in which it found itself. The scientific theology, especially that of Alexandria, found no place in its system for such an article as chiliasm. The belief lingered, however, in country places, and with it went no little opposition to the "scientific" exegesis which by means of allegory explained away the promises of a millennial kingdom.<sup>19</sup>

Clement of Alexandria and his pupil Origen, popularized not so much another view, as much as an anti-chiliastic polemic. Harry Bultema quotes the Dutch amillennialist, H. Hoekstra, who accuses Origen and his viewpoint for having destroyed the Eastern churches.

The attack against Chiliasm by these dissenters cannot meet with our approval, for *they placed their speculation above the Word of God* and distorted it according to their grandiloquent ideas, denying the resurrection of the body and the future glorification of the material world, which was also created by God; for according to them the material world, matter, contained sin from which the spirit of man must liberate itself. It was only natural and a matter of course that they were very much against Chiliasm, but they threw away, as a German saying goes, with the bath water the baby also. They were a kind of Hymenaeus and Philetus who had departed from the truth, saying the resurrection was past already (2 Tim. 2:17). The success of the pernicious principles of this school was the first and chief cause of the decline of Chiliasm.<sup>20</sup>

Historically, allegorical interpreters have commonly looked down on literal interpreters as stupid or slow since they are unable to ascend to the deeper, spiritual insights of the allegorical approach. A classic example of this attitude is on display in the writings of the first historian of the early church, Eusebius when writing about one who interpreted prophecy literally named Papias (70-155).

Papias . . . says that there will be a millennium after the resurrections of the dead, when the kingdom of Christ will be set up in material form on this earth. I suppose that he got these notions by a perverse reading of the apostolic accounts, not realizing that they had spoken mystically and symbolically. For he was a man of very little intelligence, as is clear from his books. But he is responsible for the fact that so many Christian writers after him held the same opinion, relying on his antiquity, for instance Irenaeus and whoever else appears to have held the same views.<sup>21</sup>

### *Amillennialism*

In the Latin West, Jerome (347-420) and Augustine (354-430) also reacted strongly to prophetic interpretation. In his commentary on Daniel, written shortly before the year 400, Jerome argued that "The saints will in no wise have an earthly kingdom, but only a celestial one; thus must cease the fable of one thousand years."<sup>22</sup>

Jerome was not alone in his attack on literal interpretation and millennial expectations. In Augustine's *City of God*, any hope for an earthly or physical millennial kingdom is repeatedly dismissed.<sup>23</sup> Through the writings of men such as Jerome, Julian of Toledo, Gregory the Great, and most notably Augustine, literal interpretation of the Bible, and especially Daniel and Revelation, quickly faded.<sup>24</sup> The Augustinian influence in the West eclipsed many perspectives, some orthodox and some unorthodox or heretical. The result was that views deemed unacceptable were subsequently eradicated or ignored. Lerner observes that Augustine's influence was so strong that "it suffices to say that a prohibition against applying Apocalypse 20 to the future was established during the late patristic era and remained in force for centuries thereafter."<sup>25</sup>

Another hurdle that anti-millennialists needed to overcome was that Revelation 20:4-6 speaks of multiple resurrections. This cannot be if anti-millennialism was to gain a foothold. It was the Donatist theologian, Tyconius, who suggested an allegorical interpretation of Revelation 20.<sup>26</sup> Augustine adopted Tyconius' interpretation of Revelation 20 and produced the earliest form of amillennial theology. Thus, Augustine, in Book XX of *The City of God*, was the first to actually spell-out a positive statement of amillennialism, which at the same time produced some incipient principles upon which postmillennialism would later arise.

Pagan philosophy was evident in the denial of the resurrection in at least two instances in the ministry of Paul. The sermon on Mars Hill in Acts 17 shows their violent reaction as Paul preached "the resurrection of the dead" (v. 32). A more extensive defense of the Christian resurrection is given by Paul in I Corinthians 15. Because of the Greek denial of the importance of the physical realm, they denied the whole idea that resurrection was possible. This anti-physical bias was the basis for rejection of a future physical kingdom of God on earth, and Greek philosophy was the conduit. Eric Sauer notes:

In the early Christian centuries Chiliasm first weakened with the strengthening among the Christians of Greek philosophical thought. Especially through Clement and Origen . . . it came in the West, for the official Church, to the extinction of Chiliasm, and the doctrine of the last things came to be a vacuum for official Church theology. Greek sentiment and thought opposed even the conception of a final historical drama and a real Millennial kingdom on this earth.<sup>27</sup>

### *Postmillennialism*

The final theology that developed is that of postmillennialism. As noted earlier, it too is built upon anti-millennialism, but with a positive twist. Since the foundation of postmillennialism requires a kingdom-now base, which it shares with amillennialism, it was logically the last system to develop. As noted earlier, postmillennialism is positive amillennialism. When people become optimistic about the progress of the church age they usually gravitate to postmillennialism. Eschatological optimism does not necessarily relate to current events. I think one of the sociological reasons why there began to be a revival of postmillennialism is because of the rise of new age optimism in the 1970s to the present.

Postmillennialism almost died out after the two world wars left only a handful of advocates. However, the last 25 to 30 years have witnessed a renewed emphasis on postmillennialism.<sup>28</sup> The Christian Reconstruction movement of the last three decades has been the primary catalyst for the recent resurgence of postmillennialism.<sup>29</sup> "Indeed, it is no accident," declares a Reformed writer explaining the recent rise of postmillennialism, "that both postmillennialism and theonomy . . . have sprouted in the soil of a strong Reformed revival."<sup>30</sup>

Current postmillennialist Gary North admits:

Optimism is not enough! In fact, optimism alone is highly dangerous. The Communists have a doctrine of inevitable victory; so do most Muslims. So did a group of revolutionary communist murderers and polygamists, the Anabaptists who captured the German city of Munster from 1525–35, before they were defeated militarily by Christian forces. Optimism in the wrong hands is a dangerous weapon.<sup>31</sup>

This misguided optimism is a major error in postmillennialism. In the last century postmillennialism provided the optimistic climate in which the social gospel grew. Gary Scott Smith has argued that evangelicals were perhaps the leading force in many of the social gospel issues.

Evangelical Christians provided the example, inspiration, and principles for much of the Social Gospel. . . . the evangelical ideology of the millennium merged without a break into what came to be called the social gospel in the years after 1870. . . . these evangelicals worked as vigorously for social betterment as did the Social Gospel leaders.<sup>32</sup>

Evangelical postmillennialism is to be distinguished from the liberal form. However, one cannot overlook the role that postmillennialism in general played in the rise and development of the "social gospel." Postmillenarians blame dispensationalism for creating a climate of retreat from social and political issues. Are they denying that postmillennialism, an eschatology which they say has had great effect on Western culture, contributed to the optimism of the 1800s? David Chilton does admit to some postmillennial heresy. "Examples of the Postmillenarian heresy would be easy to name as well: the Munster Revolt of 1534, Nazism, and Marxism (whether 'Christian' or otherwise)."<sup>33</sup> Nazism and Marxism are undesirable movements. Why then does Chilton not admit the relationship of postmillennialism to the "social gospel" movement?

## HERMENEUTICS

Dr. Walvoord was asked a few years ago “what do you predict will be the most significant theological issues over the next ten years?” His answer included the following: “the hermeneutical problem of not interpreting the Bible literally, especially the prophetic areas. The church today is engulfed in the idea that one cannot interpret prophecy literally.”<sup>34</sup> Such is the trend ten years later. Today too many evangelicals want to blend so-called “literal” and non-literal hermeneutics. According to Dr. Walvoord, it cannot be legitimately done, without producing a confused and contradictory mix of eschatology.

The real reason why amillennialist and postmillennialists believe what they do is because of a refusal to interpret the entire Bible, especially prophecy, literally. This is it! In some of their more candid moments, opponents of the literal interpretation of prophecy admit that if our approach is followed then it does rightly lead to premillennial theology. Floyd Hamilton said the following:

Now we must frankly admit that a literal interpretation of the Old Testament prophecies gives us just such a picture of an earthly reign of the Messiah as the premillennialist pictures. That was the kind of Messianic kingdom that the Jews of the time of Christ were looking for, on the basis of a literal interpretation of the Old Testament promises.<sup>35</sup>

In the same vein, Oswald Allis admits, “the Old Testament prophecies if literally interpreted cannot be regarded as having been yet fulfilled or as being capable of fulfilment in this present age.”<sup>36</sup>

Further, the fact that people want to mix hermeneutics in the area of eschatology demonstrates to me that they do not rightly understand literal interpretation to begin with. If one follows proper hermeneutics, then recognizing symbols and figures or speech will become obvious through the literal approach. Instead, it is because people don’t like what the text says. Thus, they have to front-load the interpretive process with all kinds of ideas that they bring from outside of the text of Scripture.

## ANTI, ANTI

In their presentations of their views, amillennialism and postmillennialism both spend a lot of time explaining why they are opposed to premillennialism, especially dispensational premillennialism. Just as in the early church, so modern amillennialists and postmillennialists always start by setting their views against premillennialism. Yet many premillennial presentations can be found that do not even mention amillennialism and postmillennialism. Why? A positive presentation for premillennialism can be made from the Bible, while amillennialism and postmillennialism cannot.

The best defense is a good offense. This is especially true in relation to combating the false theologies of amillennialism and postmillennialism. By simply presenting a detailed exposition of the Scriptures, it will naturally follow that premillennialism is the perspective taught in the Bible—both Old and New Testaments.

A number of years ago, one of our original members of the Pre-Trib Study Group, Dr. Gerald Stanton,<sup>37</sup> gave me a syllabus that he had prepared for teaching the overall field of eschatology called *Prophetic Highways*. Dr. Stanton summarized support for premillennialism with the following points:

- Consistent literal interpretation
- Unconditional nature of the covenants (Abrahamic)
- The Abrahamic Covenant
- The Old Testament teaches a literal earthly kingdom
- The kingdom is carried unchanged into the New Testament
- Christ also supports and earth kingdom
- There are multiple resurrections in Scripture
- Revelation 20 teaches premillennialism
- The early church was premillennial
- The failure of amillennialism and postmillennialism
- Premillennialism harmonizes the entire Bible
- Only premillennialism provides a satisfactory conclusion to history

### CONCLUSION

Obviously much more can be said about amillennialism and postmillennialism, but suffice it to say that neither is taught in the Bible. Show me a single text that teaches it. Premillennialism can be inductively gleaned from Revelation 20. In fact, there is why we have the terms premillennialism, amillennialism and postmillennialism; because Revelation 20 speaks of a thousand year reign of Christ in Revelation 20 that will take place after His return in Revelation 19. Since sound theology should be developed from the Bible itself, and since the Bible teach only a single viewpoint on any issue, amillennialism and postmillennialism are nowhere to be found, but premillennialism is found on every page of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. The strength of premillennialism is the text of Scripture. Study it! Teach it! Proclaim it! Hope in it! Live it! Maranatha!

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<sup>1</sup> Personal letter from David Chilton to Thomas Ice, December 2, 1986, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> H. Wayne House and Thomas Ice, *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse? An Analysis of Christian Reconstructionism* (Portland: Multnomah, 1988), p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Greg L. Bahnsen and Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *House Divided: The Break-Up of Dispensational Theology* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), p. 214.

<sup>4</sup> With the rise of preterism, there are some who truly do not fit into one of the three historic views and that is those who could be classified as transmillennialists. Transmillennialists are those who believe that we are currently beyond the millennium of Revelation 20 and into the new heavens and new earth. Some partial preterists believe this, while it appears that all full preterists would fall into this classification.

<sup>5</sup> John F. Walvoord, s.v. "Premillennialism" in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Editor Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House: 1975), Vol. 4, pp. 845-6.

<sup>6</sup> Floyd E. Hamilton, s.v. "Amillennialism" in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol. 1, p. 129.

<sup>7</sup> Hamilton, "Amillennialism," Vol. 1, p. 129.

<sup>8</sup> Norman Shepherd, s.v. "Postmillennialism", in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Editor Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House: 1975), Vol. 4, p. 822.

<sup>9</sup> Shepherd, "Postmillennialism," Vol. 4, p. 822.

<sup>10</sup> Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House: 1959), p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> David Chilton, *Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth: Dominion Press, 1987), p. 494.

<sup>12</sup> Chilton, Letter to Thomas Ice dated December 17, 1986, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), p. 465.

<sup>14</sup> Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, pp. 467 & 469.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Cullen Ayer, *A Source Book for Ancient Church History: From the Apostolic Age to the Close of the Conciliar Period* (New York: AMS Press, 1970), p. 25.

<sup>16</sup> *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Editor F.L. Cross (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), s.v. "Gaius", p. 535.



- <sup>17</sup> Hans Bietenhard, "The Millennial Hope in the Early Church", *Scottish Journal of Theology*, (No. 6, 1953), p. 30.
- <sup>18</sup> Norman Cohn, "Medieval Millenarism: Its Bearing on the Comparative Study of Millenarian Movements," in *Millennial Dreams in Action: Essays in Comparative Study*, ed. Sylvia L. Thrupp (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1962), p. 33.
- <sup>19</sup> Ayer, *Source Book*, p. 219.
- <sup>20</sup> (emphasis added), H. Hoekstra, cited in., Harry Bultema, *Maranatha! A Study of Unfulfilled Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1985), p. 296.
- <sup>21</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, vol. I, translated by Kirsopp Lake, *Loeb Classical Library*, vol. 153 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), pp. 295, 297.
- <sup>22</sup> Quoted by Robert E. Lerner, "The Medieval Return to the Thousand-Year Sabbath," in *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. Richard K. Emmerson and Bernard McGinn (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 51.
- <sup>23</sup> See Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 18.52-53; 20.7, 9, 19.
- <sup>24</sup> For a summary of this shift, especially as related to Revelation, see E. Ann Matter, "The Apocalypse in Early Medieval Exegesis," in *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. Richard K. Emmerson and Bernard McGinn, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 38-50.
- <sup>25</sup> Lerner, "The Medieval Return," p. 53. Further confirmation of the duration of this influence is given by Matter, who writes, "All the Apocalypse commentaries from the Carolingian world thus show the continuing assumption of the text as an allegory of the Church, and a continuing process of filtering specific interpretations from earlier commentaries to support that assumption," p. 49.
- <sup>26</sup> For an in depth presentation of the views of Tyconius on this matter see Paula Fredriksen, "Tyconius and Augustine on the Apocalypse," in Emmerson and McGinn, *Apocalypse*, pp. 20-37.
- <sup>27</sup> Erich Sauer, *From Eternity to Eternity* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954), p. 141.
- <sup>28</sup> According to a survey of *Christianity Today* readers, nine percent of those who responded said they think Christ will come after the millennium (February 6, 1987, p. 9-I).
- <sup>29</sup> For an extensive presentation and critique of the Reconstructionism see House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*.
- <sup>30</sup> Aiken Taylor, "Postmillennialism Revisited," *Presbyterian Journal*, September 6, 1978, p. 11.
- <sup>31</sup> Gary North, "Chilton, Sutton, and Dominion Theology," an essay in the January 1987 Institute for Christian Economics monthly mailing, p. 4.
- <sup>32</sup> Gary Scott Smith, "The Men and Religion Forward Movement of 1911-12," *Westminster Theological Journal*, Vol. 49 (Spring 1987), pp92-93.
- <sup>33</sup> David Chilton, "Orthodox Christianity and the Millenarian Heresy," *Geneva Review*, No. 19 (June 1985), p. 3.
- <sup>34</sup> "An Interview: Dr. John F. Walvoord Looks at Dallas Seminary," *Dallas Connection* (Winter 1994, Vol. 1, No. 3), p. 4.
- <sup>35</sup> Floyd E. Hamilton, *The Basis of Millennial Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1942), p. 38.
- <sup>36</sup> Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, [1945] 1947), p. 238.
- <sup>37</sup> Dr. Stanton has made one of the best contributions to pretribulationism in his book, *Kept From the Hour: Biblical Evidence for the Pretribulational Return of Christ*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Miami Springs, FL: Schoettle Publishing Company, [1956] 1991).

## What Is Progressive Dispensationalism?

by Thomas Ice

Two Dallas Theological Seminary professors have edited a major new book calling into question previous formulations of dispensationalism, while at the same time attempting to develop a new kind of dispensationalism. This new approach has been labeled by its advocates “Progressive Dispensationalism” (PD) in 1991. PD is often critical of older dispensationalism while incorporating elements from theological systems which in the past have been in opposition to traditional dispensational understandings of the Bible.

Dr. Craig Blaising teaches Systematic Theology at Dallas and Dr. Darrell Bock is in the New Testament Greek Department. Their new book is *Dispensationalism, Israel and The Church: The Search For Definition, (DIC)* (Zondervan, 1992), which was released in late September 1992. It will not take those attempting to read this new book long to find that this book is difficult to read because of its erudite and technical style. This is a marked change from a previous generation of dispensationalists, often typified by Dr. Charles Ryrie, who were known for their clear, direct, and concise brand of scholarship. In *DIC* it is sometimes hard to get a grip on what is being said, even after reading a passage several times.

### CHANGES IN DISPENSATIONALISM

No one can debate that some are proposing radical changes within the dispensational camp. The questions that arises relates to the nature and virtue of the change. While I do not agree with most of the changes being put forward by the advocates of PD, I do want my disagreement to be irenic, since I know through personal discussion with many who are proposing these changes believe that they are doing the right thing. Also, I do not believe that their writings, nor my personal discussions evidence a personal dislike for dispensationalism as is often evident in many of the attacks by “outsiders.” However, at the same time I believe that these men are in the process of destroying dispensationalism. In personal discussions with many of the older dispensationalists their either believe that they have gone as far as one could go and still be said to be a dispensationalist (if they good any further then they will have left dispensationalism, they say), or some believe that they have already gone too far and should not be viewed as a true dispensationalist.

I am not opposed in any way to scholars attempting to discuss and sharpen a system of theology, or even suggesting changes. As Craig Blaising has argued, change has always occurred within dispensationalism. However, I also reserve the right to say that I believe someone has gone too far. I believe that to be the case with PD. There is a need for the changeless truths of the theology of the Bible to be articulated to each new generation, taking into account the particular ethos and questions produced by successive age groups.

My experience within the dispensational movement has paralleled Stan Gundry’s statement of self-examination from the book’s Foreword.

At its best, within dispensationalism has always been a dynamic that drives it to be constantly correcting itself in the light of Scripture. . . .

Critics of dispensationalism have always found it easier to identify the simplistic approaches of Scofield, to criticize the excesses of Lewis Sperry Chafer, and to poke fun at the charts of Clarence Larkin than to understand

and appreciate the self-critical and self-corrective drive that has characterized dispensationalism at a deeper level.<sup>1</sup>

However, just because dispensationalism does have a history of development, does not mean that all proposals for change are necessarily correct or necessarily wrong. I know PD would agree. So in the same spirit in which those within the PD camp felt free to voice their criticism of older dispensationalists, I want to interact with these newer ideas.

My goal in this article will be to give some of the background leading up to the development of the PD movement; to explain PD in contrast with what older dispensationalists have believed; and to interact with specific PD viewpoints. Since I will not have enough space in this article, I hope to continue interaction in future articles in the coming year.

### **A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW**

If a father of the PD movement can be identified, it would most likely be Dr. Robert Saucy of the Talbot Graduate School of Theology in Southern California. Dr. Saucy wrote a number of articles throughout the 1980's (beginning in 1984), dealing with dispensational themes. In some of these articles Dr. Saucy began to moderate a few of his dispensational views. At the same time (during the 80's), other dispensationalists wrote articles in books and journals often disagreeing with older dispensational interpretations of Scripture or theology. Yet these writers still considered themselves to be dispensationalists.

Within this environment of flux and redefinition, it is not surprising that an organization arose meeting in conjunction with the annual Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) convention in 1985, held at Talbot Seminary in California. (These yearly conventions usually meet in late October.) The "dispensational study group" (DSG) grew out of this informal meeting at Talbot for the purpose of discussing "current trends and ideas relating to the topic of dispensationalism."<sup>2</sup> It is the DSG which has been a leading forum for PD.

The first public gathering of the DSG was in conjunction with the ETS gathering in Atlanta in 1986. Format of the meetings have revolved around a major presentation followed by discussion. Craig Blaising made the first presentation of a paper in Atlanta,<sup>3</sup> in which he argued that dispensationalism has changed over the years. This is the foundational apologetic used to justify many of the major changes being suggested for dispensationalism.

The DSG meet at Gordon-Conwell Seminary in Massachusetts in 1987. Darrell Bock of Dallas Seminary presented his ground-breaking paper entitled "The Reign of Christ."<sup>4</sup> Bock's suggestion that Christ is now reigning (spiritually but not yet physically) on David's throne, which constitutes an inaugural fulfillment of the Davidic covenant of 2 Samuel 7 is a tenet of PD which presents the greatest difficulty for older dispensationalists to agree with. Traditionally dispensationalists have distinguished between Christ's ascension to the right hand of the Father's throne and the future time when He will descend from heaven, thus leaving the right hand of the Father's throne, and reign literally from David's throne in Jerusalem during the millennium. However, Bock has admittedly borrowed the "already / not yet" dialectic from the late George E. Ladd (and other European theologians) to support his view of the reign of Christ.

In 1988 the meeting was held in Wheaton, Illinois. Mark Bailey, who teaches Bible Exposition at Dallas Seminary, presented a paper entitled "Dispensational Definitions

of the Kingdom.” Bailey is not a PD, but instead fits into the older dispensational mode. Dr. John Master of Philadelphia College of the Bible (also not a PD) notes<sup>5</sup> that during the discussion period varying views were presented in attempts to define the essentials of dispensationalism. Dr. Charles Ryrie’s three-part “*sine qua non*” was discussed,<sup>6</sup> since his definition has dominated discussion since 1965. Master noted that it did not appear that the audience could agree on the importance of these items in defining dispensationalism. In fact, at the conclusion of the meeting, there was no agreed upon definition of dispensationalism.

Dr. Vern Poythress of Westminster Seminary, an millennial covenant theologian, presented material from his book *Understanding Dispensationalists*<sup>7</sup> at the 1989 meeting in San Diego. This meeting signaled a desire to open a dialogue with nondispensationalists, yet without coming to a consensus within dispensationalism regarding the matter of essentials.

New Orleans was the site of the 1990 meetings. Dialogue with amillennial covenant theologians continued as Dr. Tremper Longman of Westminster, presented a paper, as did Dr. Elliot E. Johnson of Dallas, both dealing with hermeneutics. Both men, from differing theological perspectives, claimed to be using a grammatical, historical, and contextual approach to the Scriptures. This is important in light of the fact that dispensationalists have long boasted of using a *consistently* literal hermeneutic, while accusing others of spiritualizing things like Israel and the church. This has lead to a belief by PD that there is not really a hermeneutical distinction between dispensationalists and nondispensationalists as Ryrie had declared in his *sine qua non*. “As evangelicals have worked together exploring these developments,” said Blaising, “the old divisions of spiritual versus literal interpretation have been left behind” (DIC:32).

In 1991 they meet in Kansas City. Dr. Doug Oss presented a paper on dispensationalism from the perspective of one committed to the Pentecostal/charismatic movement. A major focus of the paper dealt with the question of the cessation of gifts in the present dispensation. This meeting did not appear to have produce noticeable development of PD. However, the term “progressive dispensationalism” surfaced as a term which many following the PD agenda began using to describe their new position. I will provide a description/definition later in this paper.

At the time of this writing, the most recent engagement (1992) took place in San Francisco. This meeting involved a presentation by Bock and Blaising of their new book *DIC*. I attended this meeting and the significance seemed to be that this new formulation called PD finally has a written expression. It was also interesting to informally observe that while PD have dominated the agenda surrounding the DSG, there is far from overwhelming support from the rank and file at the meeting. Many questions and concerns remain to be discussed in the days to come. Further development of PD surely seems to be in the works with Robert Saucy coming out with a book on the subject scheduled for a 1993 release date. Bock and Blaising also plan a follow up book for late 1993 or 1994.

Blaising and Bock have been the major forces behind the discussions of the DSG and in formulating PD. Their material has provided the framework for the discussions that have taken place over the last few years. I have spent many hours in personal discussion during these years with them (mainly with Blaising) in an effort to understand what they are saying. I appreciate the time spent discussing these issues and do not want to misrepresent their views. However, it is difficult at times to

understand just what they are really saying. I have made every effort to properly present their views. Now I will attempt to describe PD.

### WHAT IS PROGRESSIVE DISPENSATIONALISM?

It is hard to define exactly what PD is for a number of reasons. First, it is still in the development stage. Second, it is easier to say what they don't believe and how they are different than older dispensationalists, than what they actually believe since it appears that some of their thought is tentative. Third, even though the final chapter of *DIC* includes a section called "Progressive Dispensationalism" (380-85) there is not really a definition or a list of things that are essential to this new brand of dispensationalism. There is only a listing of "patterns" (379) of those who claim to be dispensationalists.

Even though *DIC* is said to be "The Search for Definition," apparently the journey has not yet reached its destination. Blaising does not think that anyone can isolate essentials of dispensationalism, instead they can only observe patterns which those calling themselves "dispensationalists" have put forth (379). By avoiding essentials and providing only descriptive patterns, Blaising has in effect made it impossible (using his terms) to evaluate whether or not one is truly a dispensationalist. (How can a definition be formulated if there are no discernible essentials?) Therefore, an issue becomes whether or not to accept Blaising's terms for the discussion or not. If one uses an older form of dispensationalism as a standard, then there would be a reasonable basis to question whether or not PD is really a modified form of dispensationalism or whether or not it is closer to a modified form of Covenant Theology, thus not really dispensationalism at all. One current professor at Dallas Seminary who is strongly opposed to this new formulation of dispensationalism has described the issue to me as follows: One has to decide whether or not PD is merely rearranging the furniture in the room (*i.e.*, development of dispensationalism), or whether or not they are removing key pieces of furniture from the room (*i.e.*, abandonment of dispensationalism).

#### *A Description of Progressive*

PD's tell us they are using the word "progressive" to refer to a progressive fulfillment of God's plan in history (380-82). They see a progressive relationship of past and present dispensations as well as between the present and future dispensations. PD sees a greater continuity than did older forms of dispensationalism. This continuity is viewed as progress between the dispensations, thus the term PD. "It is continuity through progress: the progress of promissory fulfillment." "This continuity is variously expressed in terms of one (new) covenant that unifies both dispensations" (381). Blaising and Bock give the following explanation:

The label *progressive dispensationalism* is being suggested because of the way in which this dispensationalism views the interrelationship of divine dispensations in history, their overall orientation to the eternal kingdom of God (which is the final, eternal dispensation embracing God and humanity), and the reflection of these historical and eschatological relations in the literary features of Scripture. (380)

#### *Features of Progressive Dispensationalism*

**Hermeneutics:** Blaising is clear in his rejection of Ryrie's insistence that an essential element of "dispensationalism claims to employ principles of literal, plain or normal, interpretation consistently."<sup>8</sup> Blaising says of Ryrie:

He is quite insistent that the difference between a dispensational and a nondispensational hermeneutic is that the former is consistent in the employment of literal or normal interpretation. The presence of spiritual or allegorical interpretation to any extent "in a system of interpretation is indicative of a nondispensational approach." (26)

Blaising and Bock do not believe that dispensationalists practice a unique approach to hermeneutics.

The issue is not a distinct hermeneutic but debate about *how to apply the hermeneutic that we share that we share*. The question most simply put is, How does "new" revelation impact "old" revelation and expression? (392)

Blaising and Bock want to put forth what they call a "complementary hermeneutic." Complementary hermeneutics appears to be a synthesis of the two older approaches which have battled each other for years—the spiritual and literal approaches—in their handling of how the New Testament uses the Old Testament.

Third, does the New Testament *complement* Old Testament revelation? According to this approach, the New Testament does introduce change and advance; it does not merely repeat Old Testament revelation. In making complementary additions, however, it does not jettison old promises. The enhancement is not at the expense of the original promise. (392-3)

This hermeneutical approach is used to support their "already / not yet" interpretation of the Davidic Covenant.

**Davidic Covenant:** Bock's contribution to PD is the notion that there is an unanticipated inauguration of the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant with Christ currently reigning on David's throne spiritually. Bock uses a dialectical phrase "already / not yet" (46) to support his form of realized eschatology. In the past, dispensationalists have seen the current Church Age as distinct in purpose and administration from the future Kingdom Age or Millennium. Dispensationalists have made a distinction between Christ's current reign at the right hand of the Father (Rev. 3:21) and His future reign on earth in Jerusalem during the Millennium upon David's Throne, thus fulfilling the blessings of the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam. 7). In the past, nondispensationalists have seen the present Church Age as a realized form of the Kingdom. They do not make a distinction between Christ's present session at the Father's right hand and the rule of Christ on David's throne. Thus, creating a conflict between dispensationalists and nondispensationalists over the timing of the Kingdom.

Bock has attempted to merge the two views by creating out of thin air (in my opinion), an artificial view that the Kingdom is both present and future at the same time. Thus, the current Church Age is not distinct from the future Kingdom. Instead Bock views our current age as "the 'already,' the 'sneak preview,' or the 'invisible' kingdom rule of Jesus" (65). Bock explains:

Thus the new community, the church, is the showcase of God's present reign through Messiah Jesus, who inaugurates the fulfillment of God's promises. . . . Jesus reigns from heaven invisibly but powerfully, transforming people

through his Spirit. . . . He invites all into God's kingdom, where promises are beginning to be realized, a kingdom that functions *distinct from* and *in the midst of* the kingdoms of earth. The current phase of the kingdom has continuity with the kingdom to come, because it shares the call to reflect the activity and presence of God's righteousness in the world. (65-6)

Rather than following traditional logic that reasons if the church is currently in the Messianic Kingdom, then it is present and not future. Instead Bock says that there is also a future phase of the Kingdom, yet to be fulfilled. Bock explains:

In the second stage, the promise moves to ultimate consummation. . . . When Jesus returns, he will do all that the prophets of the Old Testament promised. The language chosen specifically ties itself to the concept of Israel's restoration, which is an element that is totally absent in the current activity of Jesus. . . . There is no indication that earthly and Israelitic elements in Old Testament promises have been lost in the activity of the two stages. In the "not yet," visible, consummative kingdom, Jesus will rule on earth. He will rule before and over all. (66)

In a future issue I hope to deal more in depth with Bock's views, but some problems with his view include: 1) His use of an invalid spiritual hermeneutic at key points to support his "already" view of the Kingdom. 2) After reading the presentation of his view I do not see where Bock gets from the Bible the dialectic of "already/not yet." This is simply an arbitrary device to allow him to support a realized kingdom and at the same time hold to a premillennial futurism. I think a dialectical approach is employed by both theologians when they attempt to blend elements of contradictory ideas. Bock and others like him simply need to make up their minds. 3) As John Master pointed out at ETS this year, how can something be both fulfilled and yet not fulfilled? This is an amazing use of a word that has a clear sense of finality to it. 4) If Bock's exegetical approach can be used to support a current spiritual Davidic fulfillment (even though partial) then why can't the same approach be used to apply an "already" fulfillment to Israel's land promises found in the Palestinian Covenant? Put another way, why stop where PD has stopped thus far in breaking down distinctions? Why not apply this wonderful new development of dispensationalism across the board?

**Israel and the Church:** PD blunts distinctions between Israel and the Church, while the older forms of dispensationalism highlight distinctions. Even though some distinctions are maintained by PD I wonder how long it will be before this new form of "dispensationalism" will become the highway leading one totally away from most, if not all, of the distinctions of dispensationalism? Blaising explains that their search for a new dispensationalism

has led many dispensationalists to abandon the *transcendental distinction* of heavenly verse earthly peoples in favor of a *historical distinction* in the divine purpose. The unity of divine revelation, of the various dispensations, is found in the goal of history, the kingdom of God. (33)

One of the few distinctions which PD has maintained from older dispensationalism is their rejection of replacement theology. If a full replacement of Israel for the church were to start to happen, then no one could successfully argue that this could be a valid

form of dispensationalism. PD current commitment to a futurist eschatology keeps them from totally commingling the church and Israel. But there is no question about their overall tendency to stress unity of the dispensations at the expense of diversity when compared to older dispensationalism.

Some of the problems created by PD's de emphasis on distinctions between God's plan for Israel and His plan for the church include: 1) The church loses its distinctiveness as a special work of God apart from Israel. Thus, the church is reduced to a second rate expression of the Kingdom lacking the fullness of God's power that will accompany the future "phase" of the Kingdom. 2) Since much of the theological support for the pretribulational rapture is based upon the exegetical conclusion that God's plan for the church is totally distinct from His plan for Israel, then this change will only undermine support for the pretrib position.

### BLAISING'S HISTORICAL JUSTIFICATION

*DIC* begins with a historical polemic in the Introduction by Craig Blaising in an apparent attempt to justify the need for their new brand of dispensationalism and most likely to lay a groundwork for those who might suggest that PD has gone too far and is no longer a valid form of dispensationalism. In the final chapter of the book Blaising and Bock deny that an *essential* of dispensationalism is the distinction between Israel and the church (they still hold to distinctions, they just do not believe that they are *essential*) and conclude that if this were the case "then any change or modification of that view is departure" (377). They then show why they interpret the history of dispensationalism as a futile attempt to locate essentials when they declare:

The problem with this is that it ignores the fact that *essentialist* dispensationalism that which found its dispensational identity in the *sine qua non*) was only one form of a tradition in which other forms preceded it. This in itself raised the possibility that other forms may also follow. . . . It leads us to search for a new definition of dispensationalism, one that embraces the various historical manifestations of the tradition and that places the emergence of this postessentialist form of dispensationalism in perspective. (377-8)

Their search did not lead them to find a new *sine qua non* for dispensationalism, instead they only observed "patterns" of what dispensationalists in the past have believed. This agnostic conclusion serves their purpose. If essentials cannot be clarified then their new PD cannot be viewed as a departure from dispensationalism. So the matter of dispensationalism's history is of central importance in evaluating their case for PD.

At least two items are important to Blaising's interpretation of American dispensationalism. First, is his classification and interpretation of the stages of American dispensationalism. Second, his conclusion that Ryrie has been wrong to see historic essentials that have given definition to dispensationalism. Instead he believes that dispensationalism has always been in flux and void of true universal characteristics. These two items, if true, would lend support to Blaising's claim that PD is simply another turn of the wheel in the development of dispensationalism, instead of a departure from dispensationalism as some have charged. It should also be pointed out that Blaising's historical interpretation is an attack upon Ryrie's brand of dispensationalism and his view of the history of dispensationalism. If Ryrie's dispensationalism or view of dispensationalism's history is correct, then PD would



have to be judged from that framework to be a departure from dispensationalism. Thus, Blaising's historical arguments are crucial to making the case for PD as a new development in dispensationalism and not a departure.

### *Overview of American Dispensationalism*

Blaising begins his historical argument by dividing the development of American dispensationalism into four stages of development: 1) Niagara premillennialism, 2) Scofieldism, 3) essentialist dispensationalism of Charles Ryrie, and 4) progressive dispensationalism or postessentialist dispensationalism. I do not have any particular problem with these categories, other than with the title essentialist dispensationalism. The essentialist label implies that Ryrie invented the *sine qua non* late in the game, instead of observing and distilling the essence of historic dispensationalism. Since Blaising's interpretation of the history of dispensationalism is used by him to put a spin upon the development of dispensationalism that allows advocates of PD to justify their radical changes, I will interact with key elements of each era of American dispensationalism.

### *Niagara*

The annual gathering of the Niagara Bible Conference (1883-1897) was spearheaded by the father of American dispensationalism—James H. Brookes—with the aid of A.J. Gordon. Niagara grew out of earlier Bible Study conferences that were being held as early as 1878 in Clifton Springs, New York.<sup>9</sup> Blaising correctly notes that these conferences were “the forum for introducing and developing American dispensationalism.” “Two features of the conference,” continues Blaising, “especially lent themselves to the development of dispensationalism” (16). The first feature “a view of the church that went beyond local churches and denominations” (16). “The second feature of the Niagara Conference that lent itself to the development of dispensationalism was its emphasis on the Bible” (17).

The first point Blaising makes regards the ecumenical nature of the Niagara Bible Studies. “Niagara sought a visible experience of unity among those who belonged to and continued in different churches and denominations,” notes Blaising. *DIC* gives the impression that PD is restoring dispensationalism to the ecumenical unity of Niagara that was fractured by the narrow dogmatism of essentialist dispensationalism. While it is true that Niagara dispensationalism featured a certain kind of ecumenical unity, I think that there are significant differences between the “community of scholars” (385) assembled around PD in our day and the dynamics responsible for earlier dispensationalism.

The differences between the unity of Niagara and that of the modern movement is more like two high-speed trains, on separate tracks, passing each other, going in opposite directions. Further explanation of this first point moves us into discussion of Blaising's second feature, the emphasis on the Bible. Niagara was a Bible Study conference that met together to inductively study the Bible with an eye on answering attacks on the Bible coming from a growing modernist movement. Ryrie's disagreement with Kraus' understanding of the purpose behind Niagara supports this point:

His [Kraus] attempt to link the prophetic conferences with dispensationalism is in reverse gear. He tries to show that since there was some dispensational teaching in the conferences this was the cause of their being convened. The

truth is that the calling of prophetic conferences as a protest to modernism was the cause, and a gradual understanding of dispensationalism was the effect. The conferences led to dispensationalism, not vice versa. To be sure there was an inevitable and eventual link between the conferences and dispensationalism, but dispensationalism grew out of the *independent* study which resulted from the interest in prophecy.<sup>10</sup>

Niagara's unity was the product of those from within liberal denominations who meet together for Bible Study to counter the lack of biblical input they were not receiving from their mainline churches. The result was that they saw in dispensationalism an answer to modernism's approach to tearing down the biblical faith. PD is not made up of those who are dissatisfied with liberal denominations, instead they are Evangelicals who are dissatisfied with the dispensationalism of their forefathers and have met together to change it. Our Niagara fathers were premillennialists and they did not include amillennialists and postmillennialists (for the main part) in their formulations. Today, however, PD's are including nonpremillennialists in their "community" which helps explain why they are arriving at a synthesis between premillennialism and "an inaugurated eschatology"<sup>11</sup> (i.e., an amillennial or postmillennial view that the current age is the Davidic kingdom or millennium) as stated in their "already / not yet" dialectic. The Niagara fathers meet for inductive Bible Study and the result was the formulation of dispensationalism. However, today, PD has been the product, in my opinion, of ideas that need to be supported by study of the Bible. Niagara stressed distinctions found in Bible Study, while PD stresses continuity and unity in the Bible. Niagara used as its standard for resolving differences an appeal to the Bible, while PD seems to place great weight up theological dialogue between opposing theological systems.

Blaising says "Niagara dispensationalism was inclusive; it had no distinct identity as 'dispensationalism.' But dispensations and dispensational ideas were present in the study of premillennialism" (20, f.n.). This is an interesting statement. How could "Niagara dispensationalism" be classified as dispensationalism and yet not be considered dispensationalism? I believe a better understanding of Niagara dispensationalism would see their view of dispensations (the early term for dispensationalism) as more dispensational than Blaising would admit. Like the perspective of many modern television shows and movies, Blaising wants to project the modern ethos upon a previous generation that viewed their concerns from a different perspective. About half of Kraus' book *Dispensationalism In America* covers the Niagara period in which he believes that their views of dispensations clearly constituted dispensationalism. There was just as much talk during the Niagara period about learning to distinguish the dispensations as there has been since Ryrie's day where similar interests have been expressed in term of distinguishing between Israel and the Church.

Blaising's desire to have his readers view Niagara as a time of strong ecumenical sentiment, I believe, is to overrate and misinterpret the true place of unity at the conference. It was a feature of Niagara, but to emphasize it as one of the two or three key elements at Niagara goes to far. Instead, it appears that Blaising is stressing this feature because he wants it to be an aspect of the current dialogue on dispensationalism. This would cast PD in a better light if he can compare today's noble efforts with those of our natal past. An ecumenical impulse such as this could be one of the hidden motives explaining the rise of PD.

The leadership of Niagara developed a detailed doctrinal statement of essentials (clearly an essentialist mentality which Blaising opposes) that served to narrow and eliminate those who did not want to unite under such a restrictive banner. The attitude at Niagara, while opposing harsh and inflammatory rhetoric, was that they would stand for what they believed the Bible taught regardless of the impact upon the “community of scholars.” On the other hand, PD’s unity is based upon an inclusive, “don’t-let-doctrinal-differences-stand-in-our-way” kind of unity. Blaising and Bock have concluded that, “this is the nature of theological dialogue in the context of community” (394). The following statement clearly indicates that they place unity, at least on this matter, above Biblical conviction.

This work indicates where many dispensationalists are today, while recognizing that it is part of a larger theological community that is the body of Christ. Our discussion should continue, but not at the expense of our unity. (394)

Niagara’s “promotion of a nonpartisan method of Bible study” (18) often known today as the inductive approach, consisted of three features, according to Blaising. They are 1) Christocentricity, 2) piety, and 3) an inductive or scientific approach to Bible Study (18).

Christocentricity is said by Blaising to mean that “[a]ll Scripture points to Christ and is interpreted correctly only with respect to Christ” (18). Contrary to Blaising this is a feature that has been an emphasis universally recognized by all dispensationalists (Luke 24:27, 44). Yet Blaising and Bock want to give the impression that PD has returned to the Christocentricity of Niagara and that the Scofield and Ryrie (essentialist) eras had abandoned this principle with their alleged “anthropologically centered” (383) and “doxological unity” (27).

What is needed today is a new approach to defining dispensationalism. . . . one that may rehabilitate and revise features that were central to an earlier dispensationalism but may have been eclipsed by the concerns of an intervening generation [such as Scofield and Ryrie—TDI] (such as the factors of exclusivity and Christocentricity, which present-day dispensationalists share more closely with the Niagara dispensationalists than they do with their immediate predecessors). (30)

Scofield and Ryrie demonstrate that they are just as Christocentric as Niagara:

The Central Theme of the Bible is Christ. It is this manifestation of Jesus Christ, his Person as “God manifest in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16), his sacrificial death, and his resurrection, which constitute the Gospel. Unto this all preceding Scripture leads, from this all following Scripture proceeds. . . . etc. (*The Scofield Reference Bible*, 1917 edition: vi; 1967 edition: xi)

The outstanding theme that ties those sixty-six books together is God’s provision of a Savior in Jesus Christ. The Old Testament predicts His coming, and the New Testament announces the good news of His coming. Not every verse, of course, directly mentions Him, but He is the theme that ties the Bible together. (*Ryrie’s Concise Guide to the Bible* Here’s Life Publishers, 1983:13)

Blaising and Bock use this point about Christocentricity as their integrating principle between Old and New Testament theology. (382)

The dispensationalism of this book distinguishes itself from the immediately preceding dispensationalism [i.e., Ryrie—TDI] and Scofieldism by the fact that instead of being anthropologically centered on two peoples, it is Christologically centered. (383)

It appears to me that Blaising and Bock are using Christocentricity in a different way than Niagara and other dispensationalists. They seem to be using it as a mechanism to break down dispensational distinctives (hardly the same direction that those of the Niagara era were moving). They seem to be using Christocentricity in the same way that a Covenant Theologian uses the covenant to argue against distinctions seen by dispensationalists. Christocentricity is one of the devices they use to argue for a present form of a Davidic rule for Christ.

The movement from the past to the present and then to the future dispensations is not due to a plan for two different kinds of people but rather is due to the history of Christ's fulfilling the plan of holistic redemption in phases (dispensations). (383)

For Blaising to describe PD as Christocentric, as set against the characterization that Scofield's dispensationalism is anthropologically centered or Ryrie's is defectively theocentric is an arbitrary judgment. I could just as likely say (I am not saying this, just illustrating) that Blaising and Bock's dispensationalism is influenced by Karl Barth, since Barth often is described as having a Christocentric theology. It would be better to see each brand of dispensationalism as having a certain view of each aspect of theology. Each view has an anthropological dimension. Each view has a Christological position, etc. So it does not make one form of dispensationalism any better or more heroic (better able to explain the Bible) to say that PD is Christocentric, as set against other forms of dispensationalism.

In the next issue I want to deal with Blaising's attempt to cast a bad light upon inductive Bible study and literal hermeneutics. I am not saying that Blaising rejects inductive Bible study and a form of literal hermeneutics, but that he wants to taint older systems of dispensationalism as having been influenced for the bad by secular thought from the culture. With all the current discussion of preunderstanding and the need to be aware of cultural influences upon how we view the Bible, I did not see a self-examination in this area by Blaising. Has the existential idealism of modern America influenced their hermeneutics and theology causing them to devalue *consistent* literal interpretation for an element of spiritualization? These matters will have to wait until next issue, since as finite creatures we are limited by boundaries such as space and time.

**NOTE:** This was the first in a series of articles on PD, but no other articles were ever produced.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley N. Gundry, Foreword to Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, Editors *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition* (Zondervan Publishing House, 1992):11-12.

<sup>2</sup> Ronald T. Clutter, "Dispensational Study Group: An Introduction," *Grace Theological Journal*, 10:2 (1989):123.

<sup>3</sup> Blaising paper, while later published in Dallas Seminary's *Bibliotheca Sacra* (145, 1988), his introductory chapter in *DIC* is a later edition of his paper.

<sup>4</sup> The essence of this paper can be found in *DIC*, chapter 1 "The Reign of the Lord Christ."

<sup>5</sup> John Master in a private discussion with Thomas Ice, December 1992.

<sup>6</sup> Ryrie's much quoted statement is as follows: "The essence of dispensationalism, then, is [1] the distinction between Israel and the Church. This grows out of the dispensationalist's consistent employment of [2] normal or plain interpretation, and it reflects an understanding of [3] the basic purpose of God in all His dealings with mankind as that of glorifying Himself through salvation and other purposes as well." *Dispensationalism Today* (Moody Press, 1965):47.

<sup>7</sup> Vern S. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists* (Zondervan Publishing House, 1987).

<sup>8</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* :20.

<sup>9</sup> For one of the most extensive, though not always reliable, accounts of Niagara and the development of the Bible Study movement see C. Norman Kraus, *Dispensationalism in America: Its Rise and Development* (John Knox Press, 1958):71-110.

<sup>10</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* :81, f.n. 28.

<sup>11</sup> Kenneth L. Barker's statement in *DIC*:295.

## What is Dominion Theology?

by Thomas Ice

But it is dominion that we are after. Not just a voice.

It is dominion we are after. Not just influence.

It is dominion we are after. Not just equal time.

It is dominion we are after.

World conquest. That's what Christ has commissioned us to accomplish.

Dominionist—Reconstructionist

George Grant

Some of the strongest fundamental churches still preach that Christ will return to gather national Israel unto Himself, and I say that is deception and will keep the Kingdom of God from coming to pass! Likewise, those who are waiting for Christ to catch a few people away so God can judge the world are waiting in vain!

Jesus Christ has now done all He can do, and He waits at the right hand of His Father, until you and I as sons of god, become manifest and make this world His footstool. He is waiting for us to say, "Jesus, we have made the kingdoms of this world the Kingdom of our God, and we are ruling and reigning in Your world. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

Dominionist—Charismatic

Earl Paulk

The 1980's have witnessed the rise to prominence of a unique blend of theology often called Dominion Theology (DT). DT is the product of two major streams of thought. One from the Reformed, Calvinist camp, the other from the Pentecostal/Charismatic tradition. Before the development of DT, it would have been hard to imagine two more diverse expressions of Christianity. Even though each group has traveled a different path, they have arrived at similar conclusions, at least concerning two major issues. First, their handling of the Old Testament (OT). Second, the common belief that the current age is the full expression of the Kingdom of God, and that Christ cannot return to earth until a certain level of maturity and development is reached by the Church.

### DEFINING DOMINION

DT advocates believe that dominion over every area of life has been restored by the first coming of Christ. Since we are now in the Kingdom (this is where the synonym for DT "Kingdom Now" arose), they believe the present task of the Church is to call believers to reclaim the rule of Christ on planet earth by whatever means their particular brand of DT advocates. For Reconstructionists, this is accomplished through the ethical means of obeying the Word (Biblical law). Charismatics often teach that it is achieved through the metaphysical means of confessing the Word. Both believe that dominion is to be taken by Christians (not immediately by Christ, but mediately through believers) over all mankind, before Christ physically returns to planet earth. The major passage which Dominionists believe teach their view is Genesis 1:28, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

This verse clearly teaches that dominion has been given over the animals and the earth, which mankind has clearly fulfilled and continues to fulfill (Ps. 8:6-8). However,

it does not give justification, as DT teaches, that we are to take dominion over other human beings. The Scriptures do teach that Christ has dominion over all mankind (Jude 25), and that believers will reign and rule with Him (Rev. 5:10), but the question is when. Rule with Christ will take place in the future Kingdom. This is why it is important to understand that the current age is not yet Christ's Kingdom, but the Church Age.

### THE DOMINIONIST ERROR

The Scripture teaches that this current age is not Christ's Kingdom. Believers are not yet reigning and ruling with Christ, although it is their future destiny; similar to the way a Crown Prince is born to rule, but does not exercise that rule until a future stage in his life. In fact, Paul rebuked the errant Corinthian Dominionists saying that "you have become kings without us; and I would indeed that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you" (1 Cor. 4:8). Instead he went on to speak of the suffering, humiliation, and persecutions he endured for Christ (4:9-13) as he preached the gospel. Humiliation is the calling of all believers during this present age before the return of Christ. This is seen in Paul's admonition to "be imitators of me" (4:16).

The current Church Age is a time of humiliation for believers as we call people to Christ. This current destiny is similar to the career of Christ. At His first advent, Christ came into a hostile world in order to die, as well as to call out of the world a band of disciples to continue His ministry after He went victoriously into heaven following the resurrection. Christ's humiliation and abasement to the Father's will serves as a stark contrast to Adam's pride and grasping after dominion (Phil. 2:5-11). Since the Church--the Body of Christ--is being prepared as Christ's bride, she too experiences a time of humiliation during the present age as Christ is calling out from among the Gentiles a people for God's name (Acts 15:14) through the Church. Since Christ suffered rejection and hatred in this world, so also His body experiences the same (John 15:18-27). Just as Christ endured to the end and was then glorified (John 17), so rulership will be given to all believers in the future Kingdom as they overcome (Rev. 2:25-27; 3:21).

Modern Dominionists make a mistake similar to those to whom Christ spoke in Luke 24:26: "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" So it is true of His Church. She must first suffer humiliation, during this age, and then she will be exalted and exercise dominion after the return of Christ in His Kingdom.

A major disagreement exists between Dominionists and non-Dominionists over whether or not the Church will be able to achieve millennial conditions during this age before Christ returns. Here we see the error of trying to impatiently reach ahead and prematurely introduce paradise upon earth in a way that is out of sync with God's plan. Even though Dominionists say that they are accomplishing their Kingdom building, not through human efforts, but by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, the simple fact is that if the Bible does not teach their view (which it does not) then they are striving in vain by the arm of the flesh. This misguided effort will only lead to a waste of resources and wrong participation with the goals and directives of the world. The question of the timing of the Millennium affects the goals and objectives of believers today. Therefore it is extremely important that we correctly understand Scripture on this important subject.

## DOMINIONIST BELIEFS

Like many issues, no two Dominionists believe exactly the same on every point. However, there are specific things which most Dominionists do believe. If I were to say that there were 20 items which characterize DT (I am not saying there are), I would not expect every advocate to hold them all. One might believe 5 items, another 10, while yet another 16. Only a few people attempt to be consistent in what they believe. Most tend to pick up bits and pieces of different beliefs and blend them together. Therefore, we will attempt to inform the reader of overall characteristics so that they will be able to spot even minor influences of DT. First the Christian Reconstruction movement (CRM) will be outlined, followed by the Positive Confession/Manifest Sons of God Charismatics (PC).

## RECONSTRUCTIONISM

Reconstructionists believe that Adam lost his God-given dominion over the earth to Satan when he sinned. The God-Man, Jesus Christ, gained this authority back at His first coming and established the Kingdom. Jesus Christ is now at the right hand of the Father mediating this regained dominion through the Church. As the Church evangelizes the world it will gradually expand to cover the whole earth before Christ's return. Gary North has summarized the distinctives of the CRM as follows:

- 1) The sovereignty of God; 2) Cornelius Van Til's Biblical presuppositionalism as a framework for defending the faith; 3) Biblical law or theonomy (lit. Greek: theos means "God" & nomos means "law," thus "God's law"); 4) Covenant Theology; & 5) an optimistic view of prophecy called Postmillennialism.

I have no problem with the way the CRM teaches the first two items, however, the last three points lead Christians away from God's Word.

## THEONOMY

Reconstructionist, Greg Bahnsen describes theonomy as follows: "The Christian is obligated to keep the whole law of God as a pattern for sanctification and that this law is to be enforced by the civil magistrate where and how the stipulations of God so designate" (Theonomy, p. 34). This would mean that Christians should seek to directly apply the whole Mosaic Law, except in those instances where the New Testament (NT) explicitly does away with a command. For example, Israel's sacrifices would no longer be required since Hebrews 8 says they are fulfilled in Christ. Or, the Sabbath has been changed from Saturday to Sunday because of the Resurrection. Theonomists insist that Christians should use their influence to restore the death penalty for such OT sins as blasphemy, rebellion to parents, homosexuality, kidnapping, incest, unchastity (adultery), witchcraft, sacrifice to a false god, and propagation of false doctrine. Reconstructionists believe that:

- (1) God is changeless.
- (2) God's law is a reflection of His perfect character.
- (3) God's laws are, therefore, changeless and binding on all human endeavor from the time the laws were given to the present.

Further, they believe that this is supported by Matthew 5:17-19, which reads in part, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law . . . but to fulfill." Bahnsen concludes that



"fulfill" means "confirm," therefore, the OT law is still in force and binding upon all men today.

While all Scripture is profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16), and the law is good if used lawfully (1 Tim. 1:8); it does not follow that Theonomy squares with the teachings of the Bible for the following reasons: First, the law was given to Israel and Israel alone. "He declares His words to Jacob, His statutes and His ordinances to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any nation" (Ps. 147:19-20a). It is true that Christians are wise to gain insight and wisdom from God's revelation of Himself to Israel, but the Church is not obligated to keep the Mosaic Law. The Church is obligated to keep Christ's commandments (John 14:15) and the Law of Christ (Gal. 6:2).

Second, the nations are under the obligation of the Adamic Covenant (Gen. 1:15-17) and its post-flood renewal, the Noahic Covenant (Gen. 8:20-9:17). Paul appeals to this relationship in the NT (Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:21-22) as the legal basis for Gentile judgment for their sin. Theonomists are correct to note God's changeless character. However, this does not mean that the details concerning the stipulations of all of His covenants apply to all people. Only those who are party to a covenant are obligated to obey the laws of that covenant. Since all men are party to the Noahic Covenant, then all are obligated to obey rulers (Rom. 13). Those who are believers in Christ are party to the New Covenant and are obligated to obey the Law of Christ.

Third, "fulfill" in Matthew 5:17 does not mean "confirm." Jesus was unlike the Pharisees who made void God's law by their traditions, rather He fulfilled or kept the law. Matthew stresses the fact that Christ fulfilled OT prophecies as can be seen in 4:14-16.

But it is dominion that we are after. Not just a voice.  
It is dominion we are after. Not just influence.  
It is dominion we are after. Not just equal time.  
It is dominion we are after.  
World conquest. That's what Christ has commissioned us to accomplish.

Dominionist--Reconstructionist  
George Grant

Some of the strongest fundamental churches still preach that Christ will return to gather national Israel unto Himself, & I say that is deception & will keep the Kingdom of God from coming to pass! Likewise, those who are waiting for Christ to catch a few people away so God can judge the world are waiting in vain!

Jesus Christ has now done all He can do, & He waits at the right hand of His Father, until you & I as sons of god, become manifest & make this world His footstool. He is waiting for us to say, "Jesus, we have made the kingdoms of this world the Kingdom of our God, & we are ruling & reigning in Your world. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

Dominionist--Charismatic  
Earl Paulk

The 1980's have witnessed the rise to prominence of a unique blend of theology often called Dominion Theology (DT). DT is the product of two major streams of

thought. One from the Reformed, Calvinist camp, the other from the Pentecostal/Charismatic tradition. Before the development of DT, it would have been hard to imagine two more diverse expressions of Christianity. Even though each group traveled a different path, they have arrived at similar conclusions, at least concerning two major issues. First, their handling of the Old Testament (OT). Second, the common belief that the current age is the full expression of the Kingdom of God, & that Christ cannot return to earth until a certain level of maturity & development is reached by the Church.

### COVENANT THEOLOGY

Covenant is the instrument by which God carries on a relationship with man. All Christians believe that the Biblical Covenants are central to understanding the Bible. However, that branch of theology known as "Covenant Theology (CT)," which the CRM is built upon, believes that the Church replaces Israel within God's plan. It is this feature of CT, often called "Replacement Theology" (RT), which I believe is in error. RT teaches that God is finished with Israel as a special nation and will not one day in the future restore Israel, convert Israel to Jesus as their Messiah, and fulfill the promises made to Israel. They believe that the Church is the "New Israel" or the "Israel of God."

This errant view ignores or mishandles the scores of OT passages teaching future & final blessing for God's elect nation, as well as Paul's teaching in Romans 9-11. Paul brings his argument to a climax as he demonstrates in Chapter 11 that even Israel's current state of partial rejection is not final, but only temporary. In answering the question he raised in 11:1 as to why God has not rejected His people (Israel), Paul gives the following response:

- (1) There is a present election, which proves that God has not cast off Israel (1-10).
- (2) There will be a future reception (11-24).
- (3) There will be a future & final salvation of Israel (25-32).

The best way to understand the teaching of Scripture concerning the relationship of Israel and the Church is that both have a special place within God's master plan. CT is correct to note that Israel is under God's discipline for rejecting Jesus as Messiah and that God has established a new work with the Church. However, I believe that God has given a special place to both the Church and in the future, His restored people--Israel--during the Millennium. The CRM believes that almost all prophecies have already taken place, in contrast to most Christians who have for 2,000 years understood these events to await future fulfillment. Now let's look at the Postmillennialism of the CRM.

### POSTMILLENNIALISM

Postmillennialism believes that Christ established His Kingdom at His first coming. However, the glory of the Kingdom has yet to reach its climax. Therefore, as the Church preaches the gospel and is faithful in applying Biblical law, then the Kingdom expands to gradually fill the whole earth. The CRM believes that Deuteronomy 28--the blessings and cursings given to Israel--explains both personal and institutional success and failure in terms of how well the people of the world obey its commands. This is the means by which disease and death will be all but eliminated before Christ returns to earth at the end of His rule, which the CRM says will have been mediated through the Church.

Before I look at other features of the CRM's Postmillennialism, let's look at their misuse of Deuteronomy 28. First, the text clearly says that it is given to Israel (29:1). How could God scatter the "Church" among the nations (28:64), since the Church has always existed among the nations? This is but one example of how the language of the passage does not fit into the role and calling of the Church.

Second, Israel was given this blessing and cursing scheme following their redemption from Egypt as a "cause / effect" mechanism for blessing the nation. This "obey in order to be blessed" approach is not the one given to the Church in the NT. Ephesians 1:3 says that NT believers have already been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. This approach is not a "cause / effect" basis for motivation, rather it is a "caused / effect" appeal. Throughout the NT we are told to "walk in a manner worthy of our calling in Christ" (Rom. 12: 1-2; Eph. 4:1; Col. 3:1-5; 1 Thess. 4:1). The New Covenant (NC) approach appeals to our love and gratitude for the blessings Christ has already given as the motive to obey His commandments. The Old Covenant (OC) functioned differently; "you will be blessed if you obey." Reconstructionists are motivating believers with an OC imperative, ignoring the gracious advancements of the NC.

Third, the NC speaks only of changing individuals during the current age, while the OC dealt with both individuals and institutions. Institutional change will occur in the future Millennium, building upon the foundation of individual change of the present age. Since the CRM understands the present age to include the Millennium, therefore they misplace the timing of God's plan for changing institutions.

#### PRETERIST INTERPRETATION

The preterist (Latin for "past") approach to interpreting prophecy believes that about 95% of the events which most Christians understand to be future, were fulfilled in the past, between A.D. 30 and A.D. 70. This is the viewpoint of the CRM.

Reconstructionist, David Chilton, has said concerning the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24-25; Mk. 13; Lk. 17 and 21) and the Book of Revelation the following:

... is not about the Second Coming of Christ. It is about the destruction of Israel and Christ's victory over His enemies ... the word coming as used in the Book of Revelation never refers to the Second Coming. Revelation prophesies the judgment of God on apostate Israel; and while it does briefly point to events beyond its immediate concerns, that is done merely as a "wrap-up," to show that the ungodly will never prevail against Christ's Kingdom (Days of Vengeance, p. 43).

If the above statement is true, then the CRM has taken away all of the passages in the NT which teach the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. They would have no passages from the Bible which teaches the Second Coming. The CRM does believe in the Second Coming, however, they cannot support their belief from specific passages in the Bible. Reconstructionists are eager to place all of the "coming passages" into the past, so that they can hopefully cast a different light upon Scripture which would teach views different than their Postmillennialism.

One Reconstructionist observed that the Preterist approach places an emphasis on the middle of history, rather than the end of history. Theologians have labeled the study of prophecy "eschatology" (from the Greek word *eschatos* meaning "last"), since most have traditionally believed that the Bible places these events at the end of history. Perhaps Reconstructionists should label their view of prophecy middleology, to give a more accurate impression of their position. The following explanations of specific items demonstrate how the CRM's middleology differs from eschatology.

- The Great Tribulation took place in the Fall of Israel in A.D. 70.
- The Great Apostasy happened in the first century. Therefore, we should expect increasing Christianization of the world, not increasing apostasy.
- The Last Days are a term which apply to Israel only. They occurred between Christ's first coming and the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem.
- The Antichrist is a term to describe the widespread apostasy of the Church prior to the Fall of Jerusalem. The word does not refer to a future person.
- The Rapture is the same as the Second Coming. There is no distinction between the two events.
- The Second Coming will take place at the end of the Millennium or Kingdom. It may not occur for thousands of years or even a million years.
- The Beast of Revelation was a symbol of both Nero and the Roman Empire.
- The False Prophet of Revelation was the leadership of apostate Israel.
- The Great Harlot of Revelation was apostate Jerusalem.
- The Millennium is the present reign of Christians as kings on earth in the Kingdom established by Christ at His First Coming.
- The Thousand Years of Revelation 20 is a large, rounded-off number containing the idea of a fullness of quantity, standing for manyness. Amazingly, the thousand years may require a million years.
- The First Resurrection of Revelation 20:5 is a spiritual resurrection: our justification & regeneration in Christ.
- The New Heaven and Earth has already begun as our salvation in Christ, both now and in eternity.
- The New Jerusalem is the Church, now and forever.
- Armageddon will never be a literal battle, since the CRM says there is no such place. It signifies the defeat of those who set themselves against God.

These snapshots should help the reader get an idea of what it means to view prophecy from a preterist perspective. It should be clear that this approach produces numbers that don't count, people who will not exist, places that do not exist, and events that will not occur. If this allegorical method was applied to all of Scripture, we would have a creation that did not occur, a sinless fall, and a Christ who never came. It is a blessing that the CRM is inconsistent in their application of this approach to interpreting the Bible since they tend to apply this method mainly to future prophetic events.

### PEOPLE & PLACES

The founder and leading patriarch of the CRM is Rousas John Rushdoony. Rushdoony's son-in-law, Gary North, is probably the most well-known next to "Rush." It should be noted that these two men, who claim to have the answers to the church's and the world's problems, have not spoken to one another for almost a decade, because of a theological dispute. Greg Bahnsen coined the term "theonomy" for the movement. Other leaders and spokesmen include: David Chilton, Joe Morecraft, Ray Sutton, Jim Jordan, Otto Scott, Gary DeMar, Peter Leithart, Ken Gentry, Michael Gilstrap, John Lofton, Samuel Blumenfeld, George Grant, R. E. McMaster, Joe Kickasola, Francis Nigel Lee, and Jay Grimstead. Others who have been influenced by the movement include: Pat Robertson, John Whitehead, Francis and Frankie Schaeffer, Jerry Falwell, Everett Sileven, Ron Jenson, D. James Kennedy.

The places where the CRM has had its greatest impact would be politics and education. The New Religious Right and Republican politics have had a significant input by the CRM. Christian Day Schools and even more the Home Schooling movement tend to have many who advocate views of the CRM. I will now turn my attention to the Charismatic wing of DT.

### **THE CHARISMATIC CONNECTION**

CRM pastor, Joseph Morecraft, has noted that Calvinists and Charismatics are uniting around the issue of DT. Morecraft said,

God is mixing the light of the Reformed Faith with the heat of the Charismatic Movement. A person can be in the light, & freeze to death. He can also be warm but be in total darkness. It is the mixture of light and heat that bring forth life and growth. ("The Christian Reconstruction Dialogue," p. 7)

The Dominionist heat being generated by Charismatics is often called "Kingdom Now" (KN), because they believe that we are now in the Kingdom. The language of KN often begins with a complaint about how damaging belief in the Rapture is. KN often charges Christians who believe in the Rapture with just sitting around, doing nothing, waiting for the escape of the Rapture. Instead, the Church should be involved in expanding God's Kingdom now, they claim. Now we will look at some of the specific KN teachings which many Charismatics are adopting in part and in whole.

### **KINGDOM NOW BELIEFS**

Basic to KN teaching is the understanding that Christians are now gaining back lost territory forfeited to Satan when Adam fell. In order to be victorious in this spiritual warfare, the Church needs unity and great spiritual power. Those who submit to the special teachings (often received by direct revelation from God) of their leaders (Apostles) will be some of the special Christians called "overcomers." More extreme elements teach that these overcomers will actually be gods or the "Manifest Sons of God" before the resurrection. The following are some of the key teachings of the KN movement.

#### ***Anti-Rapture***

KN often explain the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:17) not as a physical catching up to be with the Lord, but rather a feeling of excitement or rapture when the Lord returns to an earth which has been conquered by Christians. (I have greatly relied upon Albert James Dager, "Kingdom Theology," Part I, Media Spotlight (Vol. 7, No. 2; April-June, 1986) for much of my understanding and many of my explanations of KN.) KN teaches that the Church is spiritual Israel, and therefore God is finished with Israel as a covenant nation. The prophecies in both the OT and NT regarding Israel now apply to the Church. This "Replacement" approach applies the restoration passages, which the Bible intends to refer to Israel, as being fulfilled by the Church.

#### ***The Church has Failed***

There is much talk about how the Church has failed to really be the Church. Therefore, if Christians would adopt the KN agenda it would revitalize Christianity and bring a great revival which would sweep the world. This would mean that as true

overcomers are faithful in their witness, the sooner the blessings of the Kingdom will flow. "To be a witness means to demonstrate the Kingdom on earth: to take dominion, bringing all things into obedience to Christ" (Dager, p. 15). As the Church increasingly turns failure into success it will see more people walking in divine health and prosperity. Some believe that even death will be eliminated. A dangerous sign is that some within KN believe the Church will have to be purged of those who do not follow their leadership.

### ***Restoration***

Since the Church has failed, the true Church is being restored in these last days. Restoration occurs in two ways: personal and cooperate. Personal restoration occurs when one receives the fullness and cleansing of God by being open to "all that the Lord has for His children." Cooperate restoration refers to the time when the Church demonstrates the power and unity which God has planned for her.

Restorationists make at least two major errors in their mishandling of the Bible. First, they make positional terms experiential. Christ's sanctification of the Church (Eph. 5:25-27) is accomplished by His righteousness being credited to Believers. This act gives the Believer a right standing or position because of Christ's substitutionary work. Believers are then to live in terms of their standing, but will never experientially achieve full holiness until the resurrection. KN teaches that the Church will experientially achieve this status of holiness. They wrongly believe that a righteousness of our own is spoken of, rather than Christ's righteousness given to His own.

Second, the KN movement has a habit of taking Scriptures relating to Israel and misapplying them to the Church. The Bible does teach that Israel will be restored one day in the future. This promise is seen in Acts 3:19-21 where Peter is telling Israel that if they will believe in Jesus as the Messiah, then the "times of refreshing" and "the period of restoration of all things" will arrive. This is a reference to a blessing for Israel, not the Church. In a similar way, KN often wants to apply aspects from different time periods to the present. They will take the past, like the blessing and cursing section of Deuteronomy 28, and make it a standard for today. Or, they will reach ahead to the Millennium & say that health and prosperity is a right of a faithful Believer today. While the Bible does speak of restoration, it does not teach about it in the way that KN advocates say.

### ***Five-Fold Ministry***

KN teaches that the maturity of the Church will be accomplished through the restoration of the gifted men mentioned in Ephesians 4:11. This viewpoint, received as a new revelation, believes that the 1950's saw the restoration of evangelists; the 1960's the pastor; the 1970's the teacher; the 1980's the prophet; and the 1990's will see a revived office of apostles. The result of this supposed return to first century Christianity will reap the following result:

The restoration of the apostle to full recognition & authority will bring the Church to maturity, unity, & proper Church structure. Signs & wonders will be wrought which will cause the world to look to the Church for answers & miracles needed. Whole nations will turn to God. The Church will become glorious & victorious & cause the glory of the Lord to fill the earth as the waters cover the sea. When all five-fold ministries are fully restored, all the saints are moving in their membership ministry, & the Church is unified & perfected, when Jesus can return & set up His Kingdom & establish His eternal reign with His Bride/Church. Planet Earth will be purified to

become the headquarters for Jesus & His Church to rule & reign over His vast domain forever & ever & ever forevermore. Amen! (Bill Hamon, "God's Wave of Restoration for the 1980's," Thy Kingdom Come, (Vol. 9, No. 8; Aug., 1987), p. 11.)

The problem with this application of Ephesians 4:11 is that it is based upon a supposed "new" revelation from God, rather than a proper interpretation of the passage. So many of the important points of KN are based not upon interpreting passages from the Bible which we know are God's Word, instead they require us to trust that these self-proclaimed prophets and apostles speak for God. I am not going to be moved from the stability of God's clear word, to the shaky ground of a human offering by following after these "new revelations." In addition, this view would require those ministries to have been absent from the Church during the past, so that they can now be restored. This is a slap in the face of God who has promised that He will be with us always, even to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20).

### ***Latter Rain***

Still another KN teaching proclaims that there will be a great spiritual awakening at the end of the Church Age, right before Christ's return. This revival is often called the "Latter Rain." Once again KN teachers misused Scripture (Joel 2:23 & Jam. 5:7) which applies to Israel and will occur at a future time with this doctrine. The current Church Age is a period described in Scripture as having general characteristics concerning its development and progress (Matt. 13; 24:4-8; Rev. 2-3). It does not have specific prophecy being fulfilled, like a time of great spiritual revival at the end of the Age. On the other hand, Israel does have a great deal of specific prophecy outlining God's program for her. Therefore, it is wrong to misapply Israel's blessing to the Church, as the KN advocates have done with the latter rain teaching.

### ***Some Other Issues***

There are many other doctrines related to KN. Many of them are designated by Biblical terms. The context and way in which these terms are used will help Christians discern if they are used with a KN intent. James Dager lists some of the other phrases used to convey KN. They include:

- Word-Faith
- Spoken Word
- Tabernacle of David
- Feast of Tabernacles
- Many-membered man child
- Manifestation of the Kingdom
- Ongoing Incarnation
- Birthing in the Spirit
- Get this into your spirit
- Serpent's Seed or Seed of the Serpent
- God's faith
- Faith in faith
- Kingdom principles
- Elijah Company
- Bride Company
- Perfection of the Body (p. 16)



### **KINGDOM NOW LEADERS**

It would be impossible to name most of the leaders of KN, but some of the more visible ones seem to be: Earl and Don Paulk, Robert Tilton, Larry Lea, James Robison, Rick Godwin, Clark Whitten, Bob Weiner, Dennis Peacocke, Bob Mumford, Richard Hogue, John Mears, John and Anne Gimenez, Bill Hamon, Tommy Reid, Marilyn Hickey, and others.

### **WHOSE KINGDOM NOW?**

Since the Bible does not teach KN, then we need to question whose Kingdom are they really trying to establish? I believe that the KN agenda has more in common with the enemies of Christ, than with Jesus Christ's Kingdom. The power of their Kingdom is not from the Holy Spirit, but very likely from the occult. The coming together in unity is a unity in apostasy, rather than the true unity of Christ. Their doctrine is false, rather than that which reflects the faith once for all delivered to the saints. We are seeing another attempt in history to establish a man-made Kingdom, all in the name of God.

### **THE INSUFFICIENCY OF GOD'S PROVISION**

The KN doctrine denies the sufficiency of God's provision for mankind in two ways. First, the insufficiency of the work of Christ. KN teachers view some believers as "overcomers" while others are not. This denies that salvation, from start to finish is a work of God. It is true that Christians are to respond to God's work, but it is His work. KN teaches that a believer needs a second work of grace in their life to really live the Christian life. Christ's work on the cross was not sufficient, believers need a "power boost" along the way to really handle the problems of life as overcomers.

Unfortunately, the "power boost" is often the false doctrine of KN. The Biblical view of the Christian life is that Christ gave us all at the moment of salvation. Sanctification is the outworking of justification. When one is born physically, they are fully human, so are believers who are born again in Christ. We have to grow and develop by learning the Word (eating) and obeying the Word (exercise), and as we mature we are better able to handle life and serve God. However, KN tells believers that they cannot handle life not because they need to mature or have disobeyed God, but rather they are not a full Christian and need to get all that God has for them. So in this way they teach that Christ's work is lacking.

Second, they imply that the Word of God is insufficient as given in the Bible and needs their new revelations to either understand it correctly or to receive new information. Somehow these modern times need the new revelation of the apostles and prophets within the KN movement. These leaders ignore the clear Biblical teaching that the Scriptures are sufficient for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Jude tells us that we have in the Bible a faith which was once and for all delivered to the saints--a fixed faith--for which we are to contend (3). Paul calls this "fixed faith" a deposit which is to be passed down through succeeding generations of believers through faithful men (2 Tim. 1:13; 2:2). Paul gives us a double warning: (1) do not follow after men who base their teaching on extra-biblical revelation like visions (Col. 2:18), and (2) that believers learn to not exceed what is written (1 Cor. 4:6). Instead, the true Apostle, Paul, instructed Christians to bring our thoughts under the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:3-4), rather than call our speculations about God's Word "revelation knowledge" which overcomers are to follow. God's Word is sufficient for the believer. Those who trust in and delight

in Christ and His Word have found that He meets all of our needs as well as many of our wants.

### CONCLUSION

Dominion Theology, with its two elements, the Christian Reconstruction Calvinists and the Kingdom Now Charismatics, are coming together to create what Christian authors Hal Lindsey and Dave Hunt are calling the most dangerous trend within Evangelical Christianity. This appears to be true since the call for Believers to exercise a premature dominion is at the heart of Satan's promise to Eve in the Garden. Since Dominionists are wrong about the timing of the Kingdom (Kingdom NOW), and about the means of establishing the Kingdom (DT believes the Kingdom is established by means of the work of the Church, rather than Christ's through Christ personal return.), therefore they cannot help but be involved, either knowingly or unknowingly, in furthering Satan's Kingdom, to the extent that they apply their deviant theology. Christians are instructed to seek after the things above, to set our minds on the things above (Col. 3:1-2), while we eagerly wait for our Savior's return (Phil. 3:20). Our calling in the present is not to take dominion, but rather to preach the Gospel to the world and to wait for God's Son--Christ--from heaven who will deliver us from the wrath to come (1 Thess. 1:10). Then, and only after our Lord's return to earth, will we reign and rule (have dominion) with Christ as overcomers (Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21). Maranatha!

## WHAT IS REPLACEMENT THEOLOGY?

Tom's Perspectives  
by Thomas Ice

Replacement theology “is the view that the church is the new or true Israel that has permanently replaced or superseded Israel as the people of God.”<sup>1</sup> Another term, often found in academic circles, for replacement theology is supersessionism. Replacement theology has been the fuel that has energized Medieval anti-Semitism, Eastern European pogroms, the Holocaust and contemporary disdain for the modern state of Israel. Mike Vlach notes: “The acceptance or rejection of supersessionism may also influence how one views the modern state of Israel and events in the Middle East.”<sup>2</sup> Wherever replacement theology has flourished, the Jews have had to run for cover.

### DEFINITION AND DESCRIPTION

Preterist and covenant theologian, Kenneth Gentry defines replacement theology—to which he holds—as follows: “We believe that the international Church has superseded for all times **national** Israel as the **institution** for the administration of divine blessing to the world.”<sup>3</sup> We dispensationalists believe that the church is the current instrument through which God is working in this age, but God has a future time in which He will restore national Israel “as the institution for the administration of divine blessing to the world.” Gentry adds to his initial statement the following embellishment:

That is, we believe that in the unfolding of the plan of God in history, *the Christian Church is the very fruition of the redemptive purpose of God.* As such, the multi-racial, international Church of Jesus Christ *supersedes* racial, national Israel as the focus of the kingdom of God. Indeed, we believe that the Church becomes “the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16), the “seed of Abraham” (Gal. 3:29), “the circumcision” (Phil. 3:3), the “temple of God” (Eph. 2:19-22), and so forth. We believe that Jew and Gentile are eternally merged into a “new man” in the Church of Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:12-18). What God hath joined together let no man put asunder!<sup>4</sup>

Walt Kaiser tells us that replacement theology, “declared that the Church, Abraham’s spiritual seed, had replaced national Israel in that it had transcended and fulfilled the terms of the covenant given to Israel, which covenant Israel had lost because of disobedience.”<sup>5</sup> European scholar, Ronald Diprose, defines replacement theology as follows: “the Church completely and permanently replaced ethnic Israel in the working out of God’s plan and as recipient of Old Testament promises addressed to Israel.” It appears that supersessionists believe that Israel is a “has been” and has no future in the plan of God. The Church inherits all the blessings, while Israel is meant to endure only curses.

### THE RISE OF REPLACEMENT THEOLOGY

Replacement theology has been “the consensus of the church from the middle of the second century A.D. to the present day, with few exceptions.”<sup>6</sup> Even though the ante-Nicene fathers were predominately premillennial in their understanding of future things, they laid a groundwork that would lead to the rise and development of

replacement theology. Premillennialist Justin Martyr was the first to view “the Christian church as ‘the true spiritual Israel’ (*Dial. 11*)”<sup>7</sup> around A.D. 160. Justin’s views laid the groundwork for the growing belief that the church had superseded or replaced Israel. “Misunderstanding of it colours the Church’s attitude to Judaism and contributes to anti-Semitism,” notes Peter Richardson.<sup>8</sup> He adds, “In spite of the many attributes, characteristics, prerogatives of the latter which are applied to the former, the Church is not called Israel in the NT. The continuity between Israel and the Church is partial; and the discontinuity between Israel B.C. and its continuation A.D. is partial.”<sup>9</sup>

Further, by the time of Irenaeus, it becomes entrenched in Christian theology that “the bulk of Israel’s Scriptures [are] indecisive for the formation of Christian doctrine.”<sup>10</sup> Soulen continues: “In addition to narrowing the thematic focus of the Hebrew Scriptures to the problem of sin and redemption, the standard model also foreshortens the Hebrew Scriptures into a temporal sense. As perceived through the lens of the standard model, the Hebrew Scriptures do not relate a story that extends indefinitely into the future.”<sup>11</sup> Kaiser paints the following developmental picture in the early church:

Replacement theology is not a new arrival in the theological arena, for it probably has its origins in an early political-ecclesiastical alliance forged between Eusebius Pamphilius and the Emperor Constantine. Constantine, regarding himself as God’s representative in his role as emperor, gathered all the bishops together on the day of his tricennalia (30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his reign), an event, incidentally, which he saw as the foreshadowing of the eschatological Messianic banquet. The results of that meeting, in Eusebius’ mind, made it unnecessary to distinguish any longer between the Church and the Empire, for they appeared to merge into one fulfilled kingdom of God on earth in the present time. Such a maneuver, of course, nicely evacuated the role and the significance of the Jewish people in any kingdom considerations. Here began the long trail of replacement theology.<sup>12</sup>

The details about Israel’s future, especially in the Old Testament, are simply missing as a part of the development of Christian theology. Jeffrey Siker cites this issue as the primary reason for the disinheriting of the Jews within the early Christian church. “The first factor is the diminishing emphasis upon the eschatological dimensions of the Christian faith.”<sup>13</sup>

### THE IMPACT OF REPLACEMENT THEOLOGY

“The doctrine of replacement theology reflects a wide range of Christian thinking,” notes Menachem Benhayim. “From utterly malignant anti-Jewish hatred to simple misunderstanding and misapplication of biblical texts.”<sup>14</sup> Since Israel is a subject found on just about every page of the Old and New Testaments, to get that subject wrong can only lead to a mega-distortion of Scripture. This has indeed been the case throughout the history of the church.

Paul says in Romans 11:7–8, “But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you.” Yet, this history of most during the church age has been an attitude of arrogance toward God’s wayward, chosen people—Israel.

Such an attitude of arrogance has led to a distortion of so many biblical teachings. The church often allegorizes many portions of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, in order to teach that since the time of Christ Israel has no claim to the land of Israel. Replacement theologian Colin Chapman obfuscates the issue as follows: “the coming of the kingdom of God through Jesus the Messiah has transformed and reinterpreted all the promises and prophecies in the Old Testament. . . . Jesus the Messiah, who lived, died and was raised from death *in the land*, has opened the kingdom of God to people of all races, making all who follow him into ‘one new humanity’ (Ephesians 2:15, NRSV).”<sup>15</sup> As Hebrew Christian Arnold Fruchtenbaum is fond of saying, “While the church is said to be a partaker in Israel’s promises in the New Testament, nowhere is she said to be a taker over of Israel’s promises.”

### CONCLUSION

“Replacement theology is just plain bad news for both the Church and Israel,”<sup>16</sup> declares Kaiser. Not only does the Bible distinguish between God’s plan for Israel and His plan for the church, but it also teaches a distinction between saved and lost Jewish individuals. This is one of the things denied by replacement theology. British commentator C. E. B. Canfield, who is by no means a Bible thumping fundamentalist (a rare moment in academia), provides the following appropriate apology:

It is only where the Church persists in refusing to learn this message, where it secretly—perhaps quite unconsciously!—believes that its own existence is based on human achievement, and so fails to understand God’s mercy to itself, that it is unable to believe in God’s mercy for still unbelieving Israel, and so entertains the ugly and unscriptural notion that God has cast off His people Israel and simply replaced it by the Christian Church. These three chapters [Romans 9—11] emphatically forbid us to speak of the Church as having once and for all taken the place of the Jewish people. . . . But the assumption that the Church has simply replaced Israel as the people of God is extremely common. . . . And I confess with shame to having also myself used in print on more than one occasion this language of the replacement of Israel by the Church.<sup>17</sup>

Yet, today, even some evangelicals, are attempting to develop new reasons to replace Israel with the church. May God help us all to understand His Scripture more clearly! Maranatha!

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Michael J. Vlach, “The Church as a Replacement of Israel: An Analysis of Supersessionism,” (PhD dissertation at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, NC, 2004), p. xv.

<sup>2</sup> Vlach, “Replacement of Israel,” p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., “Supersessional Orthodoxy; Zionist Sadism,” *Dispensationalism in Transition*, Vol. VI, No. 2; Feb. 1993, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., “The Iceman Cometh! Moronism Reigneth!,” *Dispensationalism in Transition*, Vol. VI, No. 1; Jan. 1993, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “An Assessment of ‘Replacement Theology,’” *Mishkan* (No. 21; 1994), p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> H. Wayne House, “The Church’s Appropriation of Israel’s Blessings” in H. Wayne House, editor, *Israel: The Land and the People* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998), p. 77.

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<sup>7</sup> R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), p. 35.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Richardson, *Israel In The Apostolic Church* (Cambridge: At The University Press, 1969), p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Richardson, *Israel*, p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> Soulen, *God of Israel*, p. 50

<sup>11</sup> Soulen, *God of Israel*, p. 53

<sup>12</sup> Kaiser, "Replacement Theology," p. 9.

<sup>13</sup> Jeffrey S. Siker, *Disinheriting The Jews: Abraham in Early Christian Controversy* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), p. 194.

<sup>14</sup> Menachem Benhayim, "The Church Has Replaced the Jewish People—A Response," *Mishkan* (No. 21; 1994), p. 31.

<sup>15</sup> Colin Chapman, *Whose Promised Land? The Continuing Crisis Over Israel and Palestine* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), p. 285.

<sup>16</sup> Kaiser, "Replacement Theology," p. 20.

<sup>17</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle to The Romans*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979), vol. 2, p. 448.

## NEO-REPLACEMENT THEOLOGY

*Tom's Perspectives*  
by Thomas Ice

"Supersessionism is the view that the New Testament Church supersedes, replaces, or fulfills the nation Israel's place and role in the plan of God,"<sup>i</sup> notes Mike Vlach, who has written a PhD dissertation on the topic.<sup>ii</sup> Supersessionism is another term, often found in academic circles, for replacement theology. Today there is a growing trend for some who teach replacement theology to deny that their views should legitimately be classified as supersessionism.

### WALKS LIKE, TALKS LIKE

We have a number of expressions within Americana that illustrate one who is not willing to exercise truth in labeling. For example we may say, "If it walks like a duck, quacks like a duck, and smells like a duck, then it must be a duck." Or, Shakespeare said it more eloquently: "A rose by any other name is still a rose." That dictum is true when it comes to some evangelicals who teach replacement theology but then will not own up to what they actually advocate.

Amillennial and covenant theologian Samuel Waldron wrote a response to a lecture by John MacArthur in which he made a case for premillennialism. Waldron vigorously denied that he was a replacement theologian, even though he holds the classic beliefs of replacement theology. He says, "the Church *is* Israel in a newly reformed and expanded phase of existence. . . . the Church is really the *continuation* of Israel."<sup>iii</sup> How can someone with a PhD in theology, as Waldron has, not realize that the statement noted above and the rest of his book demonstrates that he advocates a form of replacement theology? The fact is he states that the Church represents a new "phase of existence" and then defines the New Testament "phase" of Israel as including Gentiles.<sup>iv</sup> This is classic replacement theology since the outcome and logic of his position is that ethnic and national Israel have been replaced by the Church. Such a view teaches that Israel has been disinherited and does not have a future that includes a national future for a redeemed Israel. Waldron displays a blindness that does not allow him to see that two plus two equals four.

Hank Hanegraaff is another neo-supersessionist who said, "I have never argued for Replacement Theology."<sup>v</sup> This is a surprising statement since his book *The Apocalypse Code* is filled with replacement theological statements and arguments.<sup>vi</sup> He gives the following reason for denying that he holds supersessionist views:

God has only ever had one chosen people who form one covenant community, beautifully symbolized in Scripture by one cultivated olive tree. Indeed, the precise terminology used to describe the children of Israel in the Old Testament is ascribed to the church in the New Testament. . . . As such, the true church is true Israel, and true Israel is truly the church—one cannot replace what it already is. Rather than reason together in collegial debate, dispensationalists have coined the phrase "Replacement theologian" as the ultimate silencer.<sup>vii</sup>

For some reason, the new trend by some today is to reject the label but teach the historic viewpoint of replacement theology.

### REPLACEMENT REASONS

Hanegraaff errs in thinking that replacement theology is something invented by dispensationalists by which they might name-call those who disagree with them. “While it is true that Israel occupies an important place in dispensational theology, it is also true that reflection concerning the place of Israel in God’s plan predates this school of thought by many centuries,”<sup>viii</sup> notes Ronald Diprose. While noting that an early form of replacement theology began in the second century with Justin Martyr, Diprose describes it as consisting of the belief that “Israel has been repudiated by God and has been replaced by the Church in the working out of his plan. A variation of this idea is that true Israel always has been the Church,”<sup>ix</sup> which is the view expressed by Waldron and Hanegraaff throughout *The Apocalypse Code (AC)*.<sup>x</sup>

Mike Vlach, in his Ph.D. dissertation on the subject, describes both the method of replacement theology and the theology or outcome it produces. “In the realm of hermeneutics, supersessionists argue that: (1) the New Testament has interpretive priority over the Old Testament; (2) national Israel functioned as a type of the New Testament church; and (3) the New Testament indicates that Old Testament prophecies regarding national Israel are being fulfilled with the church.”<sup>xi</sup>

It is obvious that Hanegraaff has adopted the hermeneutics or method, and then the conclusions of replacement theology.

That the New Testament has interpretive priority over the Old is seen throughout AC as Hanegraaff dismisses Old Testament prophecy that has never been fulfilled for Israel by subsuming it into a supposed New Testament fulfillment. For example, by characterizing Israel in the Old Testament as “the prostituted bride” who is replaced in the New Testament by “the purified bride,” which is the church, Hanegraaff reinterprets the Old in light of the New.<sup>xii</sup> After comparing a number of Old Testament characters with Jesus of the New Testament (for example, Joshua and Jesus), Hanegraaff says, “In each case, the lesser is fulfilled and rendered obsolete by the greater.”<sup>xiii</sup> I agree that the New Testament often notes God’s progress in revelation by noting Christ’s fulfillment of the Old, but nowhere does the New indicate that Old Testament promises to ethnic Israel are superseded by Christ’s work. Instead, Christ is the basis for the fulfillment of Old Testament promises. Hanegraaff says, the “old covenant shadows find their final consummation in the person and work of Jesus Christ.”<sup>xiv</sup> It is not an either/or situation; it is best to see the relationship between the testaments as a both/and.

Vlach’s second methodological point is that advocates of replacement theology see national Israel as a type of the New Testament church. “Jerusalem symbolized all that Israel was to be. . . . Jerusalem is typological of the greater purposes of God,”<sup>xv</sup> declares Hanegraaff. He speaks of Paul illustrating a “typologically heightened fulfillment . . . that all who fixate on an earthly Jerusalem with a rebuilt temple and reinstituted temple sacrifices are in slavery to types and shadows.”<sup>xvi</sup> Hanegraaff speaks of “the typological fulfillment of the temple and the rest of the old covenant.”<sup>xvii</sup> His views are summarized as follows: “The New Testament’s typological interpretation of the Old Testament thus stands as the ultimate corrective to Zionist zeal.”<sup>xviii</sup>

The third point, that the Old Testament promises to Israel are fulfilled with the church is also evident in Hanegraaff. He says, “the land promises are fully and finally fulfilled in the final future through Jesus. . . . the promise is typologically fulfilled in the in the Lord.”<sup>xix</sup> Again he says, “Peter uses the very language once reserved for national Israel and applies it to spiritual Israel.”<sup>xx</sup> “Furthermore, the land promises are fulfilled



in the far future through Jesus who provides true Israel with permanent rest from their wanderings in sin."<sup>xxi</sup> Hanegraaff uses the term "true Israel" as a reference to the church.

Vlach also describes the theological arguments that supersessionists construct as follows: "(1) the New Testament teaches the permanent rejection of national Israel as the people of God; (2) application of 'Israel' language to the church shows that the church is now the true Israel; (3) salvific unity between Jews and Gentiles rules out a restoration of national Israel; and (4) fulfillment of the new covenant with the church shows that the church is now the true Israel."<sup>xxii</sup> Clearly Hanegraaff and Waldron hold to these theological beliefs.

## CONCLUSION

Hanegraaff even uses the term "superseded" in the following statement: "History, like the New Testament, reveals that the Holy City—turned harlot city—is superseded by the holy Christ. Jesus is the antitype who fulfills all of the typology vested in Jerusalem."<sup>xxiii</sup> Hanegraaff says that Genesis 12:3, which I take to include ethnic Israel, refers instead "to true Israel, which consists of every person who through faith has been adopted into the family of God."<sup>xxiv</sup> When speaking of the land promises which have never yet been completely fulfilled, he insists that they are "fulfilled and rendered obsolete by the greater."<sup>xxv</sup> Such are classic replacement theology statements.

It is safe to conclude that in spite of their denials, Hanegraaff and Waldron are clearly advocates of replacement theology. Norm Geisler also understands that Hanegraaff's AC teaches replacement theology when he notes the following: "In general *The Code* repeatedly takes the Old Testament promises to Jews out of their original context by replacing Israel with the New Testament church. The 'Replacement Theology' is a classic example of taking texts out of their context."<sup>xxvi</sup> Even though they vigorously reject the label, both Hanegraaff, Waldron and others today have some form of replacement theology, whether they will admit it or not. Maranatha!

## ENDNOTES

<sup>i</sup> Michael J. Vlach, "12 Reasons Why Supersessionism/Replacement Theology Is Not a Biblical Doctrine," [www.theologicalstudies.org/page/page/4425336.htm](http://www.theologicalstudies.org/page/page/4425336.htm).

<sup>ii</sup> Michael J. Vlach, "The Church as a Replacement of Israel: An Analysis of Supersessionism," PhD Dissertation, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, May 2004.

<sup>iii</sup> Samuel E. Waldron, *MacArthur's Millennial Manifesto: A Friendly Response* (Owensboro, KY: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2008), p. 7. [emphasis original]

<sup>iv</sup> Waldron, *Manifesto*, pp. 35–55.

<sup>v</sup> Hank Hanegraaff, "Response to *National Liberty Journal* article on *The Apocalypse Code*, [www.equip.org/site/apps/nl/content2.asp?c=mu11LaMNjRE&b=2616123&ct=3839317](http://www.equip.org/site/apps/nl/content2.asp?c=mu11LaMNjRE&b=2616123&ct=3839317).

<sup>vi</sup> Hank Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code: Find Out What the Bible Really Says About The End Times and Why It Matters Today* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007). For a book-length rebuttal of Hanegraaff's book see Mark Hitchcock and Thomas Ice, *Breaking The Apocalypse Code: Setting The Record Straight About The End Times* (Costa Mesa, CA: The Word For Today).

<sup>vii</sup> Hanegraaff, "Response."

<sup>viii</sup> Ronald E. Diprose, *Israel In The Development of Christian Thought* (Rome: Instituto Biblico Evangelico Italiano, 2000), p. 3.

<sup>ix</sup> Diprose, *Israel*, p. 31. [emphasis original]

<sup>x</sup> Hanegraaff calls the church the "true Israel" (p. 116, 124, 127, 180, 199, 200) or "spiritual Israel" (p. 221) a number of times in AC.

<sup>xi</sup> Vlach, "Replacement of Israel," p. xvii.

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- <sup>xii</sup> Hanegraaff, *Code*, p. 124.  
<sup>xiii</sup> Hanegraaff, *Code*, p. 201.  
<sup>xiv</sup> Hanegraaff, *Code*, p. 174.  
<sup>xv</sup> Hanegraaff, *Code*, p. 190.  
<sup>xvi</sup> Hanegraaff, *Code*, pp. 202–03.  
<sup>xvii</sup> Hanegraaff, *Code*, p. 223.  
<sup>xviii</sup> Hanegraaff, *Code*, p. 223.  
<sup>xix</sup> Hanegraaff, *Code*, p. 182.  
<sup>xx</sup> Hanegraaff, *Code*, p. 221.  
<sup>xxi</sup> Hanegraaff, *Code*, p. 180.  
<sup>xxii</sup> Vlach, “Replacement of Israel,” p. xvii.  
<sup>xxiii</sup> Hanegraaff, *Code*, p. 197.  
<sup>xxiv</sup> Hanegraaff, *Code*, p. 200.  
<sup>xxv</sup> Hanegraaff, *Code*, p. 201.  
<sup>xxvi</sup> Norman L. Geisler, “Review of Hank Hanegraaff’s *The Apocalypse Code*,”  
[www.ses.edu/NormGeisler/ReviewApocalypseCode.html](http://www.ses.edu/NormGeisler/ReviewApocalypseCode.html).

## WHAT ABOUT THE LAND PROMISES TO ISRAEL?

*Tom's Perspectives*

by Thomas Ice

*So the LORD gave Israel all the land which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they possessed it and lived in it. And the LORD gave them rest on every side, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers, and no one of all their enemies stood before them; the LORD gave all their enemies into their hand. Not one of the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass.*

—Joshua 21:43-45

I have on more than one occasion heard Bible teacher Chuck Missler say that there is only one piece of real estate on planet earth where God has specifically said that it belongs to a specific people and that is Israel. Yet, that specified land is the most contested on the entire planet. This is true because God has spoken specifically on the matter. The fact that God's clear Word is contested by so many means that Satan is behind such a consensus.

The arrival of the modern state of Israel on the world scene in 1948 was a big boon to the premillennial understanding of the Bible. This vindicates—in history—our biblical belief that God has a future plan for the land of Israel and the Jewish people. In spite of these developments, there are a group of evangelicals who think that the current state of Israel has nothing to do with God's biblical promises. How could anyone who claims to believe the Bible hold to such error?

### **SOME BELIEVE THAT ISRAEL IS FINISHED**

An increasing number of anti-Zionists, usually advocates of some kind of replacement theology, have been using a misinterpretation of Joshua 21:43–45 as a proof-text, which they believe nullifies God's land promises to Israel. They present God as Someone who is looking to discharge promises, in a legalistic way, by, in essence saying, "I have fulfilled the letter of the law on that one, now I can mark it off of my list of obligations." They claim that God has discharged all His promises to Israel regarding the land because of the statement in Joshua 21.

In the process of making this claim, they either ignore or claim that God's eternal and perpetual promises to Israel about her land are no longer in force today. They want to do away with Israel and they think they have found a biblical passage that supports their un-biblical notion. At least, that's what they think.

It is not surprising that Gary DeMar is one who believes as such. He says concerning Israel's future: "the text says nothing about the restoration of Israel to her land as a fulfillment of some covenantal obligation. All the land promises that God made to Israel were fulfilled (Joshua 21:43-45)."<sup>1</sup> DeMar's perspective should not surprise us since he believes that virtually all prophecy has already been fulfilled. He believes on that basis that the modern state of Israel has no legitimate biblical basis.

Anti-Zionist, Stephen Sizer, also believes that the Joshua 21 passage ends any future claims by the Jews to the Land of Israel. Sizer says, “To the claim that certain promises have yet to be fulfilled, Joshua is emphatic, *‘Not one of all the Lord’s good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled.’*”<sup>2</sup> Replacement theologian, Keith Mathison, declares, “Joshua 21:43–45 explicitly declares that *all* the land that God promised Israel was given to them.”<sup>3</sup> So have the land promises to Israel been totally fulfilled so that there is no hope at all for national Israel? The answer is NO!

### SO WHAT DOES IT REALLY MEAN?

A survey of commentaries reveal, that virtually no one takes such an understanding of this passage in the way outlined by the above anti-Zionists.<sup>4</sup> That all of Israel’s land promises have forever been fulfilled in Joshua make not sense. Instead, most commentators see the opposite problem, as noted by John Calvin who says, “How then can these two things be reconciled, that God, as he had promised, gave possession of the land to the people, and yet they were excluded from some portion by the power or obstinate resistance of the enemy?”<sup>5</sup> Calvin does not see this fulfilling God’s land obligations to Israel instead he sees the opposite problem. Calvin offers the following solution:

In order to remove this appearance of contradiction, it is necessary to distinguish between the certain, clear, and steadfast faithfulness of God in keeping his promises, and between the effeminacy and sluggishness of the people, in consequence of which the benefit of the divine goodness in a manner slipped through their hands. . . . The whole comes to this, that it was owing entirely to their own cowardice that they did not enjoy the divine goodness in all its fullness and integrity.<sup>6</sup>

Such a view is even supported by outspoken, anti-Zionist, Colin Chapman, who says, “There are many indications in the, however, that the conquest of the land was never complete (e.g. Joshua 13:1–32; Judges 1:1–36), and that many of the original inhabitants continued to live alongside the Israelites (e.g. Joshua 9:1–27).”<sup>7</sup>

The emphasis of this summary statement in the book of Joshua (21:43–45) must be seen against the backdrop of the Lord’s overall charge and promise to give them the land in 1:2–11. Joshua is recording the historical facts that God was faithful, even when the tribes of Israel were only partially true to their word. Keil and Delitzsch explain this aspect to us as follows:

Notwithstanding the fact that many a tract of country still remained in the hands of the Canaanites, the promise that the land of Canaan should be given to the house of Israel for a possession had been fulfilled; for God had not promised the immediate and total destruction of the Canaanites, but only their gradual extermination (Ex. xxiii. 29, 30; Deut. vii. 22). And even though the Israelites never came into undisputed possession of the whole of the promised land, to the full extent of the boundaries laid down in Num. xxxiv.

1–12, never conquering Tyre and Sidon for example, the promises of God were no more broken on that account than they were through the circumstance, that after the death of Joshua and the elder his contemporaries, Israel was sometimes hard pressed by the Canaanites; since the complete fulfilment of this promise was inseparably connected with the fidelity of Israel to the Lord.<sup>8</sup>

Joshua 21:43–45 must be understood within the overall context of the entire book, not simply trotted out as proof-text, which if not examined within the broader context of Joshua, appear to the ignorant as an argument of disinheritance of the land from Israel. Adrian Jeffers set the broader context of Joshua:

The Book of Joshua clearly shows that Israel conquered the land in Canaan in two major campaigns (Joshua 10, 11). At the end of these campaigns a summary is given (“So Joshua took all that land, the hill-country . . .” 11:16–20) which indicates that his work was done, the Conquest was completed. That this also is somewhat ideal is seen in that chapter 13:1–6 says “there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed . . .” and describes the various areas remaining with a list of unconquered cities (cf. Judges 1:27ff.). A similar example is given near the end of the book (Joshua 21:43–35—Israel possessed all the land, all their enemies were delivered, and all that Jehovah promised came to pass). Yet the Book of Judges makes it plain that this was not the case. Again the command to dispossess all the enemies in the land and to occupy their territory (Genesis 15:18; Exodus 23:23–31, Numbers 34:2, Deuteronomy 1:7, 8, etc.) has a similar implication. Ideally Israel was to dispossess all their enemies, but in actual fact many were left behind, and these became a snare to them. In fact it is indicated that this was part of the will of God—in order to, discipline them (Joshua 23:12, 13, Judges 3:1,2).<sup>9</sup>

### **GOD IS FAITHFUL EVEN WHEN MEN FAIL**

“The theme here is the faithfulness of God in fulfilling his promises. God did his part,” explains Trent Butler. “No matter what the political situation of Israel in a later generation, be it the division of the kingdom, the fall of the northern kingdom, or the destruction of Jerusalem and the Exile, Israel could not blame God. God had faithfully done for Israel what he promised. Blame belonged on Israel’s shoulders, not God.”<sup>10</sup> John Walvoord echoes this understanding and says, “The Lord had not failed to keep His promise even though Israel had failed by faith to conquer all the land.”<sup>11</sup> Donald Campbell speaks clearly to the issue in the following:

Some theologians have insisted that the statement in Joshua 21:43 means that the land promise of the Abrahamic Covenant was fulfilled then. But this cannot be true because later the Bible gives additional predictions about Israel possessing the land after the time of Joshua (e.g., Amos 9:14–15). Joshua 21:43, therefore, refers to the extent of the land as outlined

in Numbers 34 and not to the ultimate extent as it will be in the messianic kingdom (Gen. 15:18–21). Also though Israel possessed the land at this time it was later dispossessed, whereas the Abrahamic Covenant promised Israel that she would possess the land forever (Gen. 17:8).<sup>12</sup>

In fact there are a number of passages written after the time of Joshua that promises a future for Israel (Isa. 60:18, 21; Jer. 23:6–6; 24:5–6; 30:18; 31:31–34; 32:37–40; 33:6–9; Ezek. 28:25–26; 34:11–12; 36:24–26; 37:1–14, 21–25; 39:28; Hosea 3:4–5; Joel 2:18–29; Micah 2:12; 4:6–7; Zeph. 3:19–20; Zech. 8:7–8; 13:8–9). In addition, Deuteronomy 30:3–6 speaks of a still future restoration in belief. I believe that this will take place just before the second coming of Christ. Look at Amos 9:14–15, it is one of the clearest, future restoration passages.

“Also I will restore the captivity of My people Israel, and they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them, they will also plant vineyards and drink their wine, and make gardens and eat their fruit. I will also plant them on their land, and they will not again be rooted out from their land which I have given them,” says the LORD your God.

### CONCLUSION

The Bible is clear that Israel has a national future in which she will dwell in blessing in her land. This will be after she has been converted to Jesus as her Messiah. However, in the mean time, the current regathering of Israel in unbelief is for the purpose of putting God’s covenant people through the fire of tribulation, which will result in the salvation of the remnant. If one misses the clear message of this biblical teaching it is only because they have a bias against this view. This explains why anti-Zionists evangelicals have abandoned the normal, literal interpretative approach of Scripture and are guilty of reading back into the text their *a priori* replacement theology. They have exchanged proper exegesis of Holy Writ for a false theologizing. In the process of developing their anti-Zionist doctrines, their rhetoric is increasingly sounding like Muslim Arabs who call themselves Palestinians. I would like to ask them, “What biblical texts speak specifically of this people?” Maranatha!

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 1999), p. 332.

<sup>2</sup> (Italics original) Stephen R. Sizer, “Whose Promised Land: Israel and Biblical Prophecy Debate between Neil Cornell (CMJ & ITAC) and Stephen Sizer,” Guildford Diocesan Evangelical Fellowship St John’s, Working. Surrey, 18<sup>th</sup> March 1997. Taken from the internet at [www.christchurch-virginiawater.co.uk/articles/debate.html](http://www.christchurch-virginiawater.co.uk/articles/debate.html), n. p.

<sup>3</sup> Keith A. Mathison, *Dispensationalism: Rightly Dividing the People of God?* (Phillipsburg, PA: P & R Publishing, 1995), p. 27.

<sup>4</sup> See for example Reformed commentator M. H. Woudstra who would be expected to raise such an issue, but does not in *The Book of Joshua* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), pp. 314–15.

<sup>5</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on The Book of Joshua* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), p. 248.

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<sup>6</sup> Calvin, *Joshua*, p. 248.

<sup>7</sup> Colin Chapman, *Whose Promised Land? The Continuing Crisis Over Israel and Palestine* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), p. 119.

<sup>8</sup> C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I & II Samuel*, 10 vols., (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), Vol. II, p. 216.

<sup>9</sup> Adrian Jeffers, "Ideal Versus Real History in the Book of Joshua," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Summer 1969), p. 183.

<sup>10</sup> Trent C. Butler, *Word Biblical Commentary: Joshua*, Vol. 7 (Waco: Word Books, 1983), p. 235.

<sup>11</sup> John F. Walvoord, *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook: All the prophecies of Scripture explained in one volume* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1990), p. 44.

<sup>12</sup> Donald K. Campbell, "Joshua," in John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1985), pp. 364-65.

# Student Study and Evaluation Questions

## Article one: What is Dispensationalism?

Dispensationalist believe.....

**(Write true or false in 1 - 8)**

1. The Bible is inspired and inerrant \_\_\_\_\_
2. The Bible should be interpreted literally and historically \_\_\_\_\_
3. That there is no plan of God for history as everything is random \_\_\_\_\_
4. Every person must believe in Jesus for eternal life \_\_\_\_\_
5. All humanity is naturally good \_\_\_\_\_
6. God's plan for Israel has already been completely fulfilled \_\_\_\_\_
7. The Church Age will end with the rapture \_\_\_\_\_
8. The main purpose in history is the salvation of man \_\_\_\_\_
9. If one is a dispensationalist it is the same thing as saying that I believe what the Bible \_\_\_\_\_ teaches
10. What does the Greek word *oikonomos* mean?
11. What is the definition of the word dispensation given by Charles Ryrie (under *definitions* heading p.6)?
12. What is the definition given by Renald Showers?



13. List below the three main essentials of Dispensationalism:

A. \_\_\_\_\_

B. \_\_\_\_\_

C. \_\_\_\_\_

14. Explain below, in your own words, what is *literal interpretation*?

15. Why is the distinction between Israel and the Church so important?

16. True or false: the Church is the new spiritual Israel \_\_\_\_\_

17. Fill in the blanks (p.11) "We are making the point that the dispensationalist understands the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ means that He is \_\_\_\_\_ in history by more means or facets than those who see mankind's \_\_\_\_\_ (probably the most important aspect of God's plan) as the single area displaying \_\_\_\_\_."

## Article Two: What is Amillennialism?

1. What are the three main historical positions when it comes to the issues of the millennium and what do the terms mean?

A. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

B. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

C. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. What does the word "millennium" mean? \_\_\_\_\_

3. What does traditional amillennialism believe about the first resurrection of Revelation 20:5-6?

4. When did amillennialism as a system of theology begin and who developed it? Around the year

\_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_

5. Who were the main two persons who developed the allegorical approach to Scripture?

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_

6. True or false: It was considered orthodox to be premillennial in the early years of the Church

\_\_\_\_\_

7. True or false: Augustine was premillennial in his beliefs \_\_\_\_\_

8. Why is amillennialism wrong?
9. Amillennialism is the official eschatology of the \_\_\_\_\_ Catholic Church and the \_\_\_\_\_ Church.
10. True or false: the early Protestant Reformers were also Amillennial \_\_\_\_\_
11. Fill in the blanks “Yet, salvation includes both the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ realms of humanity. Redemption will be completed here on \_\_\_\_\_ when Christ redeems us not only \_\_\_\_\_ but physically and rules on earth for a \_\_\_\_\_

### **Article three: What is Postmillennialism?**

1. Define postmillennialism
2. True or false: all postmillennialists believe that the current age is the kingdom \_\_\_\_\_
3. Postmillennialists believe that the \_\_\_\_\_ is the agent which this return to Eden will be mediated by Christ the King from heaven.
4. Postmillennial Reconstructionist add \_\_\_\_\_ and faithfulness to biblical \_\_\_\_\_ to evangelism as the means for victory

Answer the following questions 5 – 12 true or false. Postmillennialism believes:

5. The Messianic Kingdom has already been established on earth \_\_\_\_\_
6. The church is the transformed Israel \_\_\_\_\_
7. Christ rules His Kingdom from a secret place on earth \_\_\_\_\_

8. As more and more people are converted to Christ it will transform the culture \_\_\_\_\_
9. The expansion of the kingdom is gradual \_\_\_\_\_
10. The fulfillment of the Great Commission will never solve the problems on earth \_\_\_\_\_
11. Theonomic Postmillennialism says the culture must be transformed by biblical law \_\_\_\_\_
12. The return of Jesus Christ to the earth can happen at any moment \_\_\_\_\_
13. It is general thought that \_\_\_\_\_ developed systematic postmillennialism as a clearly distinct form of millenarianism.
14. What was Augustine's interadvent theory?
15. Why did Constantine's declaration help in the development of postmillennialism?
16. Why is Joachim of Floris important to this discussion?
17. "Postmillennialism came into flower in the \_\_\_\_\_"
18. What historical events brought about the decline of postmillennialism?

19. True or false: The greatest problem with postmillennialism is people rejecting the truth of the Bible \_\_\_\_\_
20. Postmillennialism must abandon, at some point, a \_\_\_\_\_ hermeneutic
21. What does the Bible say about the kingdom of God in reference to the first coming of Jesus Christ?
22. True or false: postmillennialism confuses Israel and the Church \_\_\_\_\_
23. What is the outcome of this confusion?
24. True or false: Postmillennial ideas line up with the facts of history \_\_\_\_\_

### **Article three: New, Improved Postmillennialism**

1. Moorhead sees postmillennialism as a blend of what he calls the \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_ view of time.
2. In Matthew 13:31-32 the term leaven in the Bible normally refers to \_\_\_\_\_, not good
3. The modern Reconstructionalists interpretation of the Olivet discourse and the book of Revelation. What does this mean?
4. There is no evidence of anyone following preterism until a Catholic Jesuit named \_\_\_\_\_ started it in the year \_\_\_\_\_
5. True or false: Reconstructionalists listen carefully to church history \_\_\_\_\_
6. True or false: the early church taught preterism \_\_\_\_\_
7. The preterist hermeneutic can in no way follow from comparing \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

8. Compare and contrast 2 Peter 3:1 – 18 with the preterist teachings as the author points out.
9. How would you respond to someone who says, “Heavenly-minded Christians do not have present motivation in the “nasty now-and-now”?”
10. True or false: Reconstructionists distortion of prophetic Scriptures results in misdirected action in the present \_\_\_\_\_
11. An attempt to set up an earthly kingdom without the presence of Jesus Christ is the goal of whom? \_\_\_\_\_
12. True or false: there have been many attempts in history to bring on an ideal age of man on the earth and they have all failed \_\_\_\_\_

## Article four: The Unscriptural Theologies of Amillennialism and Postmillennialism

1. Fill in the blanks: "One's view of the \_\_\_\_\_ has tremendous impact upon what one believes an individual should do in the \_\_\_\_\_"

2. Pagans and the Bible view the past and the future differently. Explain.
3. How does the author use the book of Job in this article?
4. Since postmillennial understanding cannot come up with even one Scripture that clearly supports their belief system, what does this tell you?
5. Why is Premillennialism quite removed from either Amillennialism or Postmillennialism?
6. According to both groups, when is the millennium? \_\_\_\_\_
7. "Chiliasm" is the same as \_\_\_\_\_
8. Yes or no: was this the view of the early church? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Amillennialism and Postmillennialism are what people come up with when they do not take into account God's future for what group? \_\_\_\_\_
10. According to Kelly, premillennialism was dominate in the church until when? \_\_\_\_\_
11. Who is the first one in recorded history who interpreted the thousand year symbolically?  
\_\_\_\_\_.
12. What does the author mean by anti-millennialism?
13. Yes or no: Did this viewpoint arise from the study of the Scriptures? \_\_\_\_\_. From what source did it arise?

14. True or false: one early way to attack premillennialism was to claim the book of Revelation was not inspired and did not belong in the Bible \_\_\_\_\_
15. Explain what Eusebius of Caesarea, Constantine, and the adoption of Christianity as the Empire's official religion, has got to do with millenarianism
16. Historically, how have allegorical interpreters looked at literalists?
17. What did Jerome say about the millennium?
18. True or false: Literal interpretation, especially in the books of Daniel and Revelation, faded quickly in the A. D. 300s to 400s \_\_\_\_\_
19. True or false: Augustine's book, *The City of God*, was a strongly premillennial book \_\_\_\_\_
20. The influence of what pagan philosophy influenced Christian thinking? \_\_\_\_\_
21. Why has postmillennialism had a resurgence in recent times?
22. What happens if the church does not have a consistent literal hermeneutic?
23. Fill in the blanks: "A positive presentation for \_\_\_\_\_ can be made from the \_\_\_\_\_, while \_\_\_\_\_ and postmillennialism cannot."
24. If one simply presents a literal and consistent exposition of Scripture will led a person naturally to which view of the three views discussed in this paper? \_\_\_\_\_



### Article five: What is Progressive Dispensationalism?

1. What are the two names of men from Dallas Seminary who are associated with developing this new system? \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_
2. True or false: the author believes that these men and this system is in the process of destroying Dispensationalism \_\_\_\_\_
3. Bock tells us that Christ is currently spiritually reigning where? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What has traditional Dispensationalism said about Jesus, the Father's throne, and the throne of David?
5. In what way do these teachers use the word "progressive"?
6. True or false: Progressive Dispensationalism tries to combine both the spiritual (allegorical) interpretation with literal interpretation \_\_\_\_\_
7. They use an "already/not yet" approach to which Covenant? \_\_\_\_\_
8. True or false: They try to say that the Kingdom is both present now and future at the same time \_\_\_\_\_
9. True or false: Dr. Ice states that they have created this idea from a careful analysis of Scripture and he agrees with it \_\_\_\_\_
10. Summarize below the main points of the problems of this view:
  - A. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - B. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - C. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

D. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

E. Israel and the church \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

11. True or false: Progressive dispensationalist do not see any specific interpretive essentials in dispensationalism and thus see their approach as still being dispensationalism \_\_\_\_\_

12. What were the “Niagara Bible Conferences”?

13. What does Dr. Ryrie point out about these conferences in reference to the reason they were held and its impact on dispensationalism?

14. Fill in the blanks (p. 47): “Niagara’s unity was the product of those from within \_\_\_\_\_ denominations who meet together for \_\_\_\_\_ to counter the lack of biblical input they were not receiving from their \_\_\_\_\_ churches. The result was that they saw in \_\_\_\_\_ an answer to \_\_\_\_\_ approach to tearing down \_\_\_\_\_ faith.”

15. True or false: Today progressive dispensationalists are arriving at a synthesis between premillennialists and nonpremillennialists because they place great weight upon dialogue rather than inductive Bible study \_\_\_\_\_

David Pearson's definition: Ecumenicalism is the attempt to bring different churches and denominations together for a working relationship while downplaying, ignoring, blending, or denying serious doctrinal differences and errors. The "big idea" is that there can be a "community of believers" based on something other than clear and correct Bible Doctrine (essentialism).

16. True or false: Blaising and other progressive dispensationalists have a strong ecumenical impulse

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17. After reading this, should Progressive Dispensationalism be accepted or rejected? Defend your answer:

### **Article Six: What is Dominion Theology?**

1. This theology comes out of two different streams of theological thought. These are the \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_
2. What do all these advocates believe about the first coming of Christ in relation to the dominion of man? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Yes or no: Do they believe we are now in the Kingdom? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What do they believe the present task of the church to be?
5. True or false: They both believe that dominion can only be achieved with the physical return of Jesus Christ \_\_\_\_\_
6. When does the Bible teach man will rule with Christ? \_\_\_\_\_
7. True or false: The Bible teaches that this current age is not Christ's Kingdom \_\_\_\_\_
8. The current Church Age is a time of \_\_\_\_\_ for believers as we call people to \_\_\_\_\_.
9. In what way is this current destiny for the Church like the career of Christ?
10. What does the misguided effort of the Dominionists lead to?

11. Reconstructionism comes out of the Reformed / Calvinist camp. How do they define theonomy?
12. Discuss below the reasons that the ideas of theonomy do not agree with Scripture in the area of the Law (Mosaic Law)
13. Discuss below why their ideas related the Adamic and Noahic Covenants are incorrect
14. True or false: The word “fulfill” in Matthew 5:17 means “confirm” \_\_\_\_\_
15. True or false: Covenant Theology teaches that the Church has replaced Israel in the plan of God  
\_\_\_\_\_
16. What does this replacement theology teach?

17. How does Paul, in Romans 11, demonstrate that God has not rejected Israel and replaced it with the Church?

18. In what way does Replacement Theology misuse Deuteronomy 28?

19. What is preterism?

20. True or false: The Christian Reconstructionist Movement rejects preterism \_\_\_\_\_

21. True or false: These people believe the Great Tribulation took place with the fall of Israel in A. D.

70 \_\_\_\_\_

22. What do they believe about the Rapture and the Second Coming? \_\_\_\_\_

23. What do they believe about the thousand years of Revelation 20? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

24. They believe that the New Jerusalem is the \_\_\_\_\_

25. Fill in the blanks: "It should be clear that this approach produces \_\_\_\_\_ that don't count, \_\_\_\_\_ who will not exist, \_\_\_\_\_ that do not exist, and events that \_\_\_\_\_"

26. Under "The Charismatic Connection," we discover the name often used by them to refer to their form of Dominionism. What is it? \_\_\_\_\_

27. True or false: These people believe that the Church should be involved in expanding God's Kingdom here and now \_\_\_\_\_

28. Ice tells us that there is a basic thing that is needed to understand Kingdom Now teaching. What is it? \_\_\_\_\_

29. What do they teach about the rapture?

30. Yes or no: Do they believe the Church is spiritual Israel? \_\_\_\_\_

31. Yes or no: Do they believe God is finished with Israel as a covenant nation? \_\_\_\_\_

32. What are some of the things they say will happen if the church "takes dominion"?

33. They believe this restoration has two parts, personal and corporate. What do they mean?

Personal \_\_\_\_\_

Corporate \_\_\_\_\_

34. What are their two major errors in handling the Bible?

A.

B.

35. What do they mean about the restoration of the “five-fold” ministry of the Church?

36. On what is this idea supposedly based? New \_\_\_\_\_ rather than proper \_\_\_\_\_ of the passage in Ephesians 4:11.

37. Yes or no: Should believers follow anyone claiming such new revelations from God? \_\_\_\_\_

38. What is the “Latter Rain” movement and why is it in error?



39. True or false: The Bible teaches Kingdom Now principles \_\_\_\_\_
40. True or false: The power of their “Kingdom” is very likely from the occult \_\_\_\_\_
41. True or false: Their unity is based on true Bible-believing unity \_\_\_\_\_

**From Pastor David Pearson, In reference to “overcomers”:**

To derive from the Bible that there are *individual* overcomers and non-overcomers in the spiritual life of believers does not make such teaching a part of this so-called “Kingdom Now” movement. You can refer to other lessons in the Free Grace Bible Institute for a clearer understanding of the doctrine of rewards and how some believers will end life victoriously and others will not. But the point in this article that Tommy Ice points out is that these false teachers say one has to have a “second work of grace” to make it possible for a believer to be an overcomer. *That* is totally false – learn more in the two spiritual gifts studies from the Bible Institute.

In another short article I found on-line, Dr. Ice makes this clarifying statement: “Now, the Bible does speak of individuals who are overcomers, but that proves the point since they are contrasted with apostates. In addition, the victory language in the New Testament applies to individual believers, not the Church as a whole.” Accessed at [www.deceptioninthechurch.com](http://www.deceptioninthechurch.com), in an article entitled “Coming in out of the Latter Rain: A Biblical Critique.”

In the Revelation study I wrote this: “There will be winners and losers at the evaluation to come before Him. This is seen also because each letter (referring to the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2 -3) issue the challenge to be an “overcomer” – one who overcomes the dangerous and destructive influence of the satanic cosmic system in which they live and, as a result, becomes one of the companions (*metachoi*, see Hebrews 1:9) of Christ who will rule with Him.

42. Complete this sentence: “Sanctification is the  
\_\_\_\_\_
43. Why should believers today reject the idea of “new revelation from God”?

## Article Seven: What is Replacement Theology?

1. Define Replacement theology
  
2. What other name does this go under? \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. What do Dispensationalists believe (correctly, I might add!) about the nation of Israel?
  
4. True or false: The ante-Nicene fathers were predominately premillennial but they laid the groundwork for the development of replacement theology \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. What premillennial writer in about the year A. D. 160 was the first to view the church as “the new spiritual Israel”? \_\_\_\_\_
  
6. True or false: The church is clearly called “Israel” in the New Testament \_\_\_\_\_
  
7. What does Walter Kaiser say about the development of replacement theology (summarize in your own words, not just one long quote!)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. Fill in the blanks: “Since \_\_\_\_\_ is the subject found on just about every page of the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ Testaments, to get that subject wrong can only lead to a \_\_\_\_\_ of Scripture.”

9. Write Romans 11:7 -8: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

10. To say the church has replaced Israel is an attitude of \_\_\_\_\_ (pride)

11. True or false: The church often allegorizes Scripture to try and prove national Israel has no claim of the land of Israel \_\_\_\_\_

12. Write out the quote from Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

13. Check all that are correct:

\_\_\_\_ Many people in the church today believe in replacement theology

\_\_\_\_ God has a plan for Israel and a plan for the church but there is a distinction between them

\_\_\_\_ The Bible says that God is finished with national Israel

\_\_\_\_ The Church has once and for all replaced Israel

\_\_\_\_ Replacement thinking causes people to think wrongly about national Israel

\_\_\_\_ It makes sense that replacement theology would encourage antisemitism

\_\_\_\_ Replacement theology is a new arrival on the church doctrinal scene

For an excellent discussion on this issue see Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum's Messianic Bible Study 007 "Jews, Gentiles, Christians."

### Article eight: Neo-Replacement Theology

1. True or false: the idea that the church is a *continuation* of Israel really is replacement theology  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. True or false: The Church is found in the Old Testament because true Israel has always been the Church \_\_\_\_\_
3. Fill in the blanks: "Nowhere does the New (Testament) indicate the Old Testament \_\_\_\_\_ to ethnic \_\_\_\_\_ are superseded by Christ's work"
4. How do advocates of replacement theology see national Israel?
5. Yes or no: Are the Old Testament promises to Israel fulfilled with the church? \_\_\_\_\_
6. What term does Hank Hanegraaff use to refer to the church? \_\_\_\_\_
7. True or false: Hank Hanegraaff is a holds to replacement theology \_\_\_\_\_
8. After reading the previous articles on replacement theology give your reasons for either accepting rejecting it as a proper theology. I \_\_\_\_\_ this theology and here is why:

## Article Eight: What About the Land Promises to Israel?

For information on Zionism see the “Ariel Thought Tract” *Zionism: What It Is and What It Is Not* available without cost from [www.ariel.org](http://www.ariel.org) or from FGBI

1. Anti-Zionists are usually advocates of some kind of \_\_\_\_\_ theology
2. In what way do anti-Zionists use Joshua 21:43 – 45?
3. True or false: virtually everybody takes this view of the Joshua 21:43 - 45 passage \_\_\_\_\_
4. True or false: the conquest of the land under Joshua was never complete \_\_\_\_\_
5. This passage must be seen in the light of what other passage in Joshua? \_\_\_\_\_
6. What is the proper way to understand the Lord’s promise of the Land even though the tribes never took complete possession?
7. God is \_\_\_\_\_ even when men fail

8. Fill in the blanks: "The Lord had not failed to \_\_\_\_\_ His \_\_\_\_\_ even though \_\_\_\_\_ had failed by \_\_\_\_\_ to conquer all the land."
9. Explain how Joshua 21:43 does not mean that the Abrahamic Covenant was fulfilled then.
10. True or false: There are no passages in the Old Testament that promise a future for Israel \_\_\_\_\_
11. Give the reference to one of the clearest Old Testament passages of a future restoration of Israel \_\_\_\_\_
12. What is required for Israel to in the future dwell in blessing in the Land?  
\_\_\_\_\_
13. Today Israel is being regathered in unbelief. Why?
14. True or false: Anti-Zionists have abandoned the normal, literal approach to Scripture \_\_\_\_\_
15. These people have exchanged proper exegesis for a \_\_\_\_\_

Consider all you have learned in this set of eight articles by Tommy Ice then write out at least six important things you have learned.

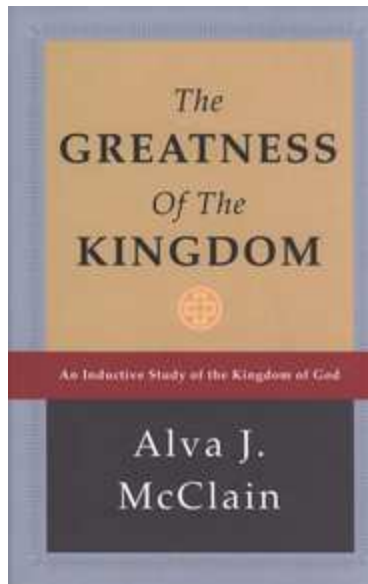


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# THE GREATNESS OF THE KINGDOM

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By Dr. Alva J. McClain



FOR KINGDOM STUDIES COURSE

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# The Greatness of the Kingdom

Alva J. McClain

## Part One: THE UNIVERSAL AND MEDIATORIAL KINGDOMS OF GOD

This article begins the series by Dr. McClain, Former President of Grace Theological Seminary, which constituted the W. H. Griffith Thomas Memorial Lectureship at Dallas Theological Seminary, November 9–12, 1954

The title chosen for these lectures, a phrase found in the seventh chapter of the book of Daniel, will indicate the general thesis which I hope to establish, namely, “The Greatness of the Kingdom.” For a long time I have had a growing conviction that much of the disagreement over the subject of the kingdom of God has arisen out of narrow views as to its character. This situation obtains, of course, in more than one department of Biblical theology. Men have gone wrong, not so much in what they affirmed, but rather in what they denied or neglected.

This tendency has been given impetus by that natural bent of the human mind, best represented by the philosophers, which impels men to search for one principle or idea that will explain everything else. While this motive, held under legitimate restraints, has often led to fruitful results; it nevertheless is always attended with certain hazards. In the first place, there is the danger of omitting matters of importance which may stand outside our neat little formulas. In the second place, thinking now of the field of Christian theology, this passion for oversimplification may cause men to miss the richness and infinite variety of Christian truth in the interest of a barren unity. It was William James who once suggested that, considered from a certain abstract viewpoint, even a masterpiece of violin music might be described as “the scraping of horses’ tails over cats’ bowels!” Such a definition of course has the merit of simplicity; it gets rid of all the mystery of personality and genius, but the residue is not very interesting.

Now I feel strongly that the Biblical doctrine of the kingdom of God has suffered considerably from this tendency toward oversimplification. Men have forgotten the *greatness* of the kingdom, its richness and complexity, in the interest of their own partial and inadequate explanations. What I am saying is underscored by the very small place given to the subject of the kingdom in some well-known and honored works by conservative theologians. For example, in the books on Systematic Theology by A. H. Strong, Wm. G. T. Shedd and A. A. Hodge one looks in vain for even any mention of the term kingdom in their indexes. It is to the everlasting credit and honor of my dear friend, the late President of Dallas Theological Seminary [Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer] that in his own excellent *Systematic Theology* he was able to make such a large and important contribution to this particularly needy field of theological science.

It should be axiomatic that any conception of the kingdom of God which rests in large part upon a certain interpretation of a single text or passage of the Bible is to be regarded with deep suspicion. In this category are the systems built around such passages as “*the kingdom of God is within you*” (Luke 17:21), or “*I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven*” (Matt 16:19), or the parable of the leaven (Matt 13:33), or the ethical precepts of the sermon on the mount (Matt 5—7), or even Revelation 20. The doctrine of the kingdom should be determined by an inductive examination of all the Biblical material on the subject, and it should not have to stand or fall by the inclusion or exclusion of isolated passages where interpretations may be in serious dispute. To me there is no question as to the general

meaning of Revelation 20, but I maintain that the essential outline of the Biblical doctrine of the kingdom can be established without it. And this doctrine, once established, should be our surest guide in our approach to the passage under controversy.

### **Definition of the Kingdom of God**

Let me begin the discussion with a tentative definition. A kingdom involves at least three things: *first, a king who rules; second, subjects who are ruled; and third, the actual exercise of the function of rulership.* I do not think that much attention need be paid to the effort to show that the term kingdom refers to a bare divine sovereignty. The great ideas of the Bible are concrete rather than abstract, and such terms as the *kingdom of God* are intended to convey meanings which are pertinent to actual situations in the world of reality with which men are somewhat familiar. On the basis of the above analysis, the kingdom of God may be defined broadly as *the rule of God over his creation.*

Now it should be clear that this phrase the *kingdom of God* has no precise meaning or authority apart from the content assigned to it in the Holy Scriptures. Therefore, passing over for the moment the various theories (and they are many), let us attempt to establish its content on the basis of an inductive study on the Biblical material out of which the original idea arose. In examining the very extensive array of references, especially in the Old Testament, we are immediately impressed by a series of differences which at first seem almost contradictory.

In the first place, it appears that the kingdom is something which has *always existed*; yet it also seems to have a definite *historical beginning* among men.

Second, the kingdom appears as something *universal* outside of which there lies no created thing; yet again the kingdom is revealed as a *local affair* beginning on earth.

Third, the Kingdom appears in Scripture as the rule of God *directly*; yet it is often pictured as the rule of God through a *mediator* who serves as a channel between God and man.

Fourth, the divine kingdom is set forth as an *unconditioned* rule arising out of the sovereign nature of Deity itself; yet on the other hand it often appears as a kingdom based on a *covenant* made by God with man.

Some of these distinctions, if not all, have been noticed by various Biblical scholars, and attempts have been made to explain them; either by asserting the existence of one kingdom with two aspects or phases, or by the assumption of two separate kingdoms. For example, Hengstenberg distinguishes between a "kingdom of power" and a "kingdom of grace." And Peters speaks of the one as "God's universal, general sovereignty exercised by virtue of his being the creator," while the other is the "Theocracy" or "Theocratic Kingdom." Recently we have seen the rise of a school of opinion, somewhat anti-intellectual in character, which, rejoicing apparently in the existence of religious paradox and tension for their own sake, is content to leave all such antinomies permanently unresolved.

For myself, while recognizing the reality of these Biblical distinctions, I am also convinced that the Scriptures offer a reasonable explanation. In one sense it would not be wholly wrong to speak of *two* kingdoms revealed in Scripture. But we must at the same time guard carefully against the notion that these two kingdoms are absolutely distinct one from the other. There is value and instruction in thinking of them as two aspects or phases of the one rule of our sovereign God. In seeking for terms which might best designate these two things, I have found nothing better than the adjectives *universal* and *mediatorial*. They are not commensurate terms, of course, but describe different qualities, the first referring to *extent*, the latter to *method*. Nevertheless, in each case the designated quality seems to be the most important one from a descriptive standpoint. As we proceed with the discussion, therefore, the terms used will be the *universal kingdom* and the *mediatorial kingdom*.

### **The Universal Kingdom of God**

My treatment of the universal kingdom must be very brief, not much more than a summary of its chief characteristics. In any conventional system of theology this universal rule or control of God would be

dealt with in part under the head of his work in providence. But it should not be ignored here. I shall ask you to note at least six things about it:

*This universal kingdom is something which has always existed.* Thus we read that Jehovah is **“King forever and ever”** (Ps 10:16). Again, describing the progress of a storm sweeping in from the sea across the land, breaking down the cedars of Lebanon, the Psalmist declares that God is in this violence of nature sitting as **“King forever”** (Ps 29:10). As a precious comfort in the midst of desolations brought by judgment, the Old Testament saint could say, **“God is my King of old”** (Ps 74:12). And the prophet Jeremiah bears a like testimony to the everlasting character of the divine rule, affirming that **“The Lord is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king”** (Jer 10:10). And in the midst of his lamentations the same prophet finds a kingdom of God grounded in the eternal nature of God himself, saying, **“Thou, O Lord, remainest forever; thy throne from generation to generation”** (Lam 5:19). *This kingdom is universal in the most complete sense of that term.* Nothing lies outside its reach and scope. It includes all things in space and time, in earth, in heaven and in hell. Jehovah is the **“King of the nations”** (Jer 10:7). Witnessing to the present reality of that universal kingdom in his own day, the Psalmist writes, **“The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all”** (Ps 103:19). Nebuchadnezzar, golden head of an ancient world empire, is cut down from his throne by divine judgment in order that **“the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men”** (Dan 4:17, 25, 32). David the king, although reigning over a small nation in a small land, sees and speaks of a greater kingdom, **“Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted above all. Thou reignest over all”** (1 Chron 29:11–12).

*The rule of this kingdom operates generally through second causes;* that is, what theologians have sometimes called *the rule of ordinary providence*. Thus the Assyrian monarch is a **“rod”** in the hand of Jehovah to accomplish his divine purpose in judgment against Jerusalem, though the king knows it not and has no intention to serve God (Isa 10:5–15). Likewise, the King of Babylon is God’s **“servant”** for the accomplishment of his will (Jer 25:9). In the sequence of the rise and fall of world empires, it is Jehovah who raises up and prepares the **“Kings of the Medes”** for the destruction of Babylon (Jer 51:11, 28–37). Long before his birth, the great Cyrus is named prophetically and then **“anointed”** to fulfill the purpose of Jehovah in rebuilding, his holy temple (Isa 44:28–45:4). At exactly the crucial moment a fit of insomnia disturbs the rest of the Persian Xerxes, causes him to call for the chronicles of his kingdom (something like our own Congressional Record), and the outcome of this seemingly insignificant incident is the rescue of Israel from national extermination, together with all the irreparable losses such a disaster would have entailed (Esth 6:1–8:17).

*Upon special occasions and under certain circumstances the rule of God in this universal kingdom may operate directly through divine miracles.* Without attempting just now to draw the precise line between what is called the natural and the supernatural, I mean that God may break into the so-called closed system of nature (which of course He upholds and controls) with great exhibitions of his unveiled power. The Bible writers are never conscious of any necessary conflict between the divine rule through the system of *nature* and that through the *miraculous*. In both they recognize the hand of the same sovereign God who is transcendent as well as immanent. Thus we read that **“Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places. He causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; he maketh lightnings for the rain; he bringeth the wind out of his treasures. Who smote the firstborn of Egypt, both of man and beast. Who sent tokens and wonders into the midst of thee, O Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his servants”** (Ps 135:6–9). Here we have both nature and miracle. But in general, especially with reference to the earth, the method of divine control in this universal kingdom is through second causes—**“Fire and hail; snow and vapour; stormy wind fulfilling his word”** (Ps 148:8).

*The kingdom of God in this universal sense exists regardless of the attitude of those under its rule.* Some personal beings, the elect angels and the true people of God, have bowed in submission. Others, as in the case of the Egyptian king, are actively opposed to the revealed will of God. Still others, as the Assyrian of Biblical history, know nothing about the divine rule of such a kingdom. Nevertheless, we are told in Scripture, the Lord worketh all things after the counsel of his own will. Even if there were in all the universe not one solitary personal being not in rebellion against God, (whether angel or demon or man); even if there were no heaven of the redeemed but only a hell of the lost—it would still be true of this universal kingdom that “The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all.” This kingdom is an ever-present reality from which there can be no escape.

In the light of these facts, it becomes clear that *this universal kingdom could not have been precisely that kingdom of God for which our Lord taught his disciples to pray, “Thy kingdom come.”* For in the universal and providential sense, the kingdom of God *has already come* and the will of God *is being done* on earth. This rule of God, in fact, has always existed and has never been abrogated or interrupted. The key to the real meaning of the so-called Lord’s Prayer must be found in the clause, **“as it is in heaven.”** Although the kingdom of God ruleth over all, there is a profound difference between the exercise of its rule **“in heaven”** and **“in earth.”** This difference arises out of the fact that rebellion and sin exist upon the earth, sin which is to be dealt with in a way not known in any other spot in the universe, not even among the angels that fell. And it is precisely at this point that the great purpose of the mediatorial kingdom appears: On the basis of blood redemption it will put down at last all rebellion with all its evil results, thus finally bringing the kingdom and will of God **on earth as it is in heaven.** When this purpose has been accomplished, the mediatorial phase of the kingdom will finally disappear as a separate entity, being merged with the universal kingdom of God.

With this rather brief survey, of the universal kingdom, I shall now turn to a consideration of the mediatorial phase to which the Biblical writings give the vast, preponderance of attention. You should understand that during the remainder of our study, to save repetition, the term *kingdom* will invariably refer to its mediatorial phase, unless otherwise stated.

### **The Mediatorial Kingdom of God**

The mediatorial kingdom may be defined tentatively as the rule of God through a divinely chosen representative who not only speaks and acts for God but also represents the people before God; a rule which has especial reference to the human race (although it finally embraces the universe); and its mediatorial ruler is always a member of the human race.

I shall trace the development of this kingdom as it appears imperfectly realized in Old Testament history; present its future form as forecast in Old Testament prophecy; its character as announced by our Lord in the period of the Gospel records; its place in the history of the apostolic period covered by the book of Acts; the peculiar form in which it exists during the present Christian church era; its visible and established form in the millennial age; and finally its mergence in and complete identification with the eternal and universal kingdom of God.

### **The Mediatorial Kingdom in Old Testament History**

Attempts have been made to erect an absolute separation between the historical kingdom and the future kingdom of prophecy; but that there is a vital connection between the two should be clear from many passages with which we shall deal in later lectures. Certainly, the future kingdom is to be a revival and continuation of the **“throne of David.”** In a very real sense there is but one mediatorial kingdom of God. But where historically did this idea of mediatorial rule originate?

*Let us review briefly its background.* In Eden the newly created man cast off the rule of his Creator, arrogating to himself the perilous right to decide for himself what was good for him and his posterity. This attitude seems to characterize the early pages of human history, brief as the record is, so that Cain the fratricidal killer is not brought to the bar of human government to answer for his terrible deed. And Genesis 6:5 records the only possible end to such an era—universal, wilful and unrestrained wickedness.

Following the divine judgment of the flood we have something new: the institution of human government by divine decree. Here again the record is brief, but its basic principle lays the foundation for all human law and government—***“Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man, shall his blood be shed, for in the image of God made he man”*** (Gen 9:6). This is not a law of personal vengeance, as some have claimed. The punishment of the murderer is to be inflicted ***“by man”*** in the collective sense. The moral justification for capital punishment is found in the very argument sometimes used to oppose it, namely, the preciousness of human life in God’s sight. Human government exists for only one reason—the protection, conservation and fostering of human life. But the establishment of human government by divine decree with its salutary principle for the conservation of life did not succeed. Things did not grow better but worse in certain respects, resulting finally in the judgment at Babel.

*The mediatorial idea appears incipiently among the patriarchs.* Following the confusion of tongues and the scattering of mankind throughout the earth, God turns away from “man” in the collective sense and calls out one man through whom he will accomplish his will on earth (Gen 12:1–4). In Abraham and Isaac and Jacob the mediatorial idea begins to take form historically in miniature. God speaks to these men and they in turn mediate the divine will, although often very imperfectly. The Genesis record indicates that within the scope of their own families the patriarchs were genuine mediators through whom God ruled in the chosen line of humanity. These men were almost absolute monarchs in their own households which included not only their own progeny but also servants, retainers, and fighting men (Gen 14:14).

In their hands rested the power of life and death, as may be seen in the offering of Isaac (Gen 22).

*The mediatorial kingdom began in historical form with Moses and continued under the early great leaders who followed.* This period is marked by the mediation of God’s rule through Moses, Joshua, the judges, and Samuel. At first thought it may seem strange to have a kingdom without a king. But we must remember that in this kingdom it is *God*, not man, who rules. Crude as were some of his ideas, Gideon was right about one thing: ***“I will not rule over you,” he said to the men of Israel, “the Lord shall rule over you”*** (Judg 8:23). And speaking of that long and remarkable period extending from Moses to Saul, Samuel characterizes it to Israel as an era ***“when the Lord your God was your king”*** (1 Sam 12:12). During this period the great leaders of Israel were in all cases chosen by divine appointment and invested with authority to speak and act for God within the scope of their prescribed responsibilities. Moses was to be to Aaron and the people ***“as God”*** (Exod 4:16, A.S.V.), a divinely appointed authority which was underscored in terrible fashion by the judgment upon Korah and the rebels who questioned it (Num 16). Joshua was invested with the same mediatorial authority by the word of Jehovah: ***“As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee”*** (Josh 1:5). Of the great leaders who followed, it was said, ***“The Lord raised up judges,” and judgment fell upon Israel because “they would not hearken unto their judges”*** (Judg 2:16–17). Of Samuel it was written, ***“The Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground,” and his word “came to all Israel”*** (1 Sam 3:10–4:1). In Samuel we have the connecting link between the period of Israel’s great leaders and the period of her kings. But through it all there is a kingdom, and this kingdom is God’s.

*The constitution and laws of the kingdom were given at Sinai.* Altogether too little attention has been given to the many faceted nature of the mediatorial kingdom in history as revealed by the Mosaic code. The limits of these lectures do not permit an adequate discussion of its bearing on matters which are ethical, social, ecclesiastical, political and physical; save to remark that these provisions could still be studied with great profit by modern political and social scientists. This will not surprise the informed premillennialist, of course, since he knows that we have here the foundations of a future millennial kingdom. But there is one thing which is often overlooked, namely, the *spiritual* aspect. For it is not wrong to say that the historical kingdom was also a spiritual kingdom. This can be shown by a study of the Pentateuchal material in the light of the Biblical meaning of the term *spiritual*. It is high time that this perfectly good term should be rescued from the abuse it has suffered at the hands of theologians

who, either consciously or otherwise, are under the spell of Platonic philosophy. This point will be discussed in a later lecture.

*The mediatorial kingdom in history reached the pinnacle of its glory under the first three kings.* Each, one of these men held his throne by the decree and appointment of Jehovah. The entire monarchical career of *Saul* is summarized by the prophet Samuel in two brief statements, both addressed to the king: first, ***“The Lord anointed thee king over Israel,”*** and second, ***“The Lord hath rejected thee from being king over Israel”*** (1 Sam 15:17, 26). In the stead of Saul, it is Jehovah again who exercises his right of sovereign choice in the case of *David* (1 Sam 16:1, 13). And David, speaking as a prophet to whom the word of the Lord had come, thus indicates the divinely chosen line of succession, ***“Of all my sons (for the Lord hath given me many sons) he hath chosen Solomon my son to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel”*** (1 Chron 28:5). It is significant that Solomon, the last of the kings directly chosen by Jehovah, is also the last king of the united kingdom of Israel.

Now it has been suggested that the setting up of kings over Israel meant not only a popular rejection of theocratic rule but also its end in history. Such a view cannot be sustained by any careful study of the Biblical record. As a matter of fact, the monarchical form of the mediatorial kingdom had been clearly delineated in prophecy. To Abraham, and also later to Jacob, it was said, ***“Kings shall come out of thee”*** (Gen 17:6; 35:11). Not only so, but in Deuteronomy some important rules were laid down for the selection of the kings as well as for their conduct politically, morally, socially, and spiritually (17:14–20). Still further, in giving prophetic directions for the succession of Solomon on the throne of Israel, David carefully guards against any misunderstanding. Solomon may indeed sit upon the throne, but the kingdom is still ***“the kingdom of the Lord over Israel”*** (1 Chron 27:5).

Let us now review quickly the events leading to the monarchical form. Following the death of Joshua and the elders that outlived him, there was a swift moral and spiritual deterioration in Israel. But after the manner of sinful men in all ages, instead of seeing the source of the trouble within themselves, they made the mistake of supposing that a change of governmental form would solve their problems. First, they tried to set up Gideon as a king, but their proposal was rejected by Gideon who insisted that ***“The Lord shall rule over you”*** (Judg 8:22–23). Their folly persisted, however, and finally they demanded a king (1 Sam 8:5); to which demand the God of Samuel assented (8:19–22), only reserving to himself the right to choose the king (10:17–24).

Now the key to the understanding of this rather curious situation is found in the words, ***“Make us a king to judge us like all the nations.”*** Viewed from the divine standpoint, the setting up of kings ***“like the other nations”*** was wholly unnecessary. The theocratic kingdom could have continued to be mediated through prophets and leaders like Moses and Joshua. Even David might have mediated the rule of God in Israel without all the trappings and splendors of a court like the other nations. Such an arrangement was not only unnecessary but could only add to the burdens of the people. Therefore, although God assented to their demand, he rebuked them for making it, and at the same time solemnly warned them of what they were getting into (1 Sam 8:4–18). This eighth chapter of First Samuel is so important that it deserves fuller attention than can be given in these lectures. In this brief record we are told how God gave the people their own desire for a government like the nations, and at the same time outlined prophetically the inevitable trend of all such government. The real point does not so much concern the mere political form of government, but rather the desire of the people to exchange a simple theocratic government, based on moral principles and dedicated to the general welfare, for what would become a great top-heavy governmental machine dedicated chiefly to its own perpetuation.

Consider a brief summary of the things, which, according to 1 Sam 8, would rise to plague the nation of Israel:

*First*, in wanting a government like the other nations, they took the first step toward the wrong kind of internationalism.

*Second*, a permanent government service would begin, both civil and military in character.

*Third*, this would lead to a bureaucracy swollen by job-making.

*Fourth*, the unnecessary expansion of government service would produce labor shortages in productive pursuits.

*Fifth*, after this they would get government for its own sake.

*Sixth*, such government would demand heavy taxation to support it.

*Seventh*, increasing taxation would lead to the confiscation of private property.

*Eighth*, much of this wealth would go to the partisans of the government.

*Ninth*, at last all the people would become servants of the state.

*Tenth*, the end result would be intolerable oppression and deep distress.

Can any thoughtful student of government in our times fail to see these very trends in the world of nations—yes, even in our own land of the free?

*The decline of the mediatorial kingdom in Old Testament history.* With the death of Solomon catastrophe struck the chosen nation. Israel was ruptured by a secession of the northern tribes which established their own government. But this did not mean the end of the kingdom in history. As H. C. von Orelli rightfully observes, “The smaller and often overpowered kingdom of Judah, which faithfully adhered to the royal line of David, passed through many crises and had many unworthy rulers. But the legitimate royal house, which had been selected by Jehovah, constituted spiritually a firm bond which kept the people united, as is seen, e.g., by a glance at the addresses of Isaiah, who is thoroughly filled with the conviction of the importance of the House of David, no matter how unworthy the king who happened to rule appeared to him.” As the dying Jacob had said, **“The sceptre shall not depart from Judah”** (Gen 49:10).

But the period of decline had begun, a period characterized by a more indirect mediation of the rule of God. There had been prophets before, but now they appear with greater frequency. Whereas Jehovah had often spoken directly to the great leaders and kings of Israel down to Solomon, now prophets become the immediate spokesmen of Deity, communicating his will to the kings, who sometimes obey. In the divided nation the kings take the throne either by inheritance or by force, and there is swift degeneration with notable exceptions. At the same time the prophets predict disaster and a future kingdom where God will mediate his rule through a righteous king who, like Moses, will be invested with the functions of both prophet and ruler.

*The close of the mediatorial kingdom in history is dramatically recorded in the book of Ezekiel.* The *Glory of Jehovah*, often referred to in the Old Testament, and called *the Shekinah* in non-Biblical Jewish writings, was more than a mere symbol of God’s presence. It was indeed a **“sign and manifestation of his presence”** but it also described **“the form”** in which God revealed himself. Doubtless we are justified in seeing manifestations of this glory in such phenomena as the burning bush and the pillar of cloud and fire, but there can be no question as to its appearance on the Mount of Sinai where, we are told, **“The Lord descended upon it in fire”** (Exod 19:18). And when Moses went up by divine command, the inspired record declares that **“the glory of the Lord abode upon Mount Sinai”** (Exod 24:15–16). It was here that the historical kingdom received its divine constitution and laws, and when the tabernacle had been completed according to directions, we read that **“the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle”** (Exod 40:34). Thus the glory became the visible evidence of God’s presence and rule in the kingdom of Israel. The departure of this same glory is described by Ezekiel under the most dramatic of circumstances, and indicates, I think, the definite close of God’s mediatorial kingdom in history (cf. 8, 9, 10 and 11). The prophet is sitting among his people captive in Babylon on the banks of the Chebar, when he is lifted up by the Spirit and brought in his visions to Jerusalem. There, in spite of the dreadful apostasy unfolded before his eyes, he sees **“the glory of God”** still in the city of David in its proper place (8:4). A little later in the vision, the prophet sees that **“the glory of the God of Israel was gone up...to the threshold of the house”** (9:3). There, he writes, **“the glory of the Lord...stood over the threshold”** for a moment, illuminating even the court with the ineffable **“brightness”** of Deity (10:4). **“Then the glory of the Lord**

***departed from off the threshold of the house*** and stood above the cherubim ***“at the door of the east gate”*** (10:18–20). Finally the cherubim lifted up their wings and the prophet records the tragic end: ***“The glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city”*** (11:23). Later on the city of Jerusalem was rebuilt, and within its walls successively two temples were built, but you will read of no glory therein. The immediate presence of Jehovah was departed.

But there was something wonderfully gracious in the circumstances of God’s withdrawal. Not suddenly, but slowly, with tender reluctance, as if God were actually yearning to remain. But there was no entreaty or repentance on the part of the people as a nation. The elders of Israel go on bowing down to their idols, the women weep for Tammuz, the priests stand with their backs toward the temple of God and worship the rising sun (8:4–16). God is forgotten. And when God is forgotten, the glory is departed. Yet even in the midst of this melancholy vision, we may read the inspired promise that God will be a refuge to Israel during her scattered and dispersed condition (Ezek 11:16). This promise, however, is not something wholly apart from moral and spiritual attitudes. If God will continue to be a ***“sanctuary”*** to Israel, it is also true that to many in the nation He will also be a ***“stone of stumbling”*** and a ***“rock of offence”*** (Isa 8:14).

Furthermore, to the same prophet who saw the departure of the glory and the end of the kingdom in history, the Lord graciously gave a vision of the future return of the glory (Ezek 43:1–7). Just as the Lord’s glory departed by way of ***“the door of the east gate,”*** even so the glory will again return: ***“Behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east,”*** and ***“the glory of the Lord came into the house by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east”*** (43:2, 4). As to the general meaning of all this there can be no misunderstanding—the glory will return, the kingdom will again be established on earth, in the city of Jerusalem. Here, the voice of Jehovah declares, is ***“the place of my throne...where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel forever”*** (43:7). And if historically the final appearance of the glory was ***“upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city”*** (Ezek 11:23), even so the glory will return in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. ***“His feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east...and the Lord shall be king over all the earth”*** (Zech 14:4, 9).

*Why did the historical kingdom decline and apparently fail?* In reply to this question, at least two things should be mentioned:

*First*, there was a lack of spiritual preparation on the part of the people. No government can wholly succeed among men unless there exists a sufficient body of its citizens who are in inward harmony with its laws. We are constantly in danger of forgetting the importance of this principle. To cite a rather recent instance—many of the people who helped to pass the 18th Amendment, because they thought it would be good for the nation, were personally not in harmony with the law for themselves. And so the end was dismal failure and repeal. I am not suggesting the possibility of any ultimate failure of the divine government. But even in the kingdom of God, its citizens are not all robots to be controlled mechanically by irresistible power.

A *second* defect of the historical kingdom was the imperfection of those through whom the rule of God was mediated. It is an axiom of political science that no government can be more perfect than its rulers. It will not be necessary to review the lamentable record of even the best of Israel’s leaders and kings: David with his double crime against society and against God; Solomon with his final violation of the most important regulations of the mediatorial economy. The important fact is that in the midst of the darkness of failure on the part of both people and rulers in the historical kingdom, the prophets bid us look forward to a better age when these two defects shall be remedied; an age when the laws of the kingdom will be written in the hearts of its citizens (Jer 31:33), and its mediatorial Ruler will be perfect in his character, wisdom and ways (Isa 11:1–4).



It should be observed that the independence and success of the Jewish state is inseparably bound up with the *divine* re-establishment of the mediatorial kingdom. The Maccabees made one of the most desperate and heroic attempts recorded in all human history to re-establish the Jewish state, and failed. All other attempts, through political and military means alone, will also fail. It must wait for a supernatural intervention on the part of God, just as it began in history with such an intervention at Sinai. ***“The children of Israel shall abide many days without a king”*** (Hos 3:4).

## **PART 2: THE MEDIATORIAL KINGDOM IN OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY**

Since this area which we are about to enter is in certain respects the most important one of the entire investigation, something by the way of introduction should be said regarding the nature, interpretation and extent of kingdom prophecy.

### **The Nature of Kingdom Prophecy**

a. Viewed from one standpoint, kingdom prophecy arises out of definite historical situation existing immediately before the eyes of the prophet. There is probably no exception to this rule. Even in purely predictive prophecy, or what some have called apocalyptic prediction, although the prophet may say nothing about the immediate historical situation, it nevertheless provides the background of what he has to say about the future. There is no such thing as predictive prophecy totally unrelated to history.

b. Sometimes prophecies of the kingdom have what has been called a “double reference,” or which might be more accurately called an “apotelesmatic” character. As Delitzsch has written, “All prophecy is complex, i.e., it sees together what history outrolls as separate: and all prophecy is apotelesmatic, i.e., it sees close behind the nearest-coming, epoch-making turn in history, the summit of the end.” That is, somewhat as a picture lacks the dimension of depth, the prophecy often lacks the dimension of time: events appear on the screen of prophecy which in their fulfillment may be widely separated in time. Thus the student may find a prophecy referring to some event in the near future connected with the historical phase of the kingdom, and also to some far off event connected with the Messiah and his millennial kingdom. When the first event arrives it becomes the earnest and divine forecast of the more distant and final event. An excellent example may be found in Isaiah 13:17—14:4, a prediction which begins with the defeat of Babylon by the Medes, and moves from that point immediately to a Babylon of the end-time. The same phenomenon may be observed in prophecies of the coming of the Messianic King, which New Testament history “outrolls” into two advents greatly separated in time. Such a view of prophecy does not mean an abandonment of its literality, as some have argued. The double prediction is literal, and is to be literally fulfilled: The Medes have destroyed historic Babylon, and God will also literally destroy a future Babylon. Christ has come once literally; and He will again break into the stream of history with no less literality.

### **Interpretation of Kingdom Prophecy**

Without paying too much attention to individual variations, I have reduced the important methods now current to three, which I have named the literal, the eclectic, and the critical; being deeply conscious of the inadequacy of mere names. As I am in the habit of saying to my classes, you should feel at liberty to improve upon my suggestions—but be sure that yours are better than mine.

*The literal method.* Probably this method has never been stated better than by Ellicott: “The true and honest method of interpreting the Word of God [is] the literal, historical, and grammatical.” This method, as its adherents have explained times without number, leaves room for all the devices and nuances of language, including the use of figure, metaphor, simile, symbol and allegory. In their criticism of this literal method, most of its critics have been guilty of a “crasser literalism” than ever used by any reputable adherent of the method in its application to the Word of God. Certainly the literal method is not without its problems, but these problems are only such as naturally arise out of the nature of human language. Basically the method is extremely simple. For example, Psalm 72:6 speaks of the

Messianic King as follows: ***“He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass.”*** Here we have a literal coming—the Lord ***“shall come down.”*** Also the effect of his coming is literal, although in this case it is described by a simile—***“like rain upon the mown grass.”*** If you have ever seen the glorious effect of a summer shower coming down on a field of grass which, has been cut, then you will have some idea of what the literal effect of our Lord’s coming will be upon a troubled world. Of course, if you wish to depart from simple common sense, you can say that in this text ***“grass”*** stands for the church at Pentecost; ***“mown”*** stands for the unsanctified state of the disciples upon that occasion; and, the ***“rain”*** stands for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Once launched on the sea of conjecture, it is not surprising that interpreters finally arrive at strange ports, as far removed from reality as the “beautiful isle of somewhere.”

In a comparatively recent book written by Oswald T. Allis under the title *Prophecy and the Church*, the author in the course of his anti-millennial argument makes a curious attack upon the literal method of prophetic interpretation. First he criticizes severely some premillennial writers for being more concerned about “typical interpretation” than about the Old Testament history from which the alleged types are gathered. This criticism might well be taken to heart. But then Allis goes on to complain that, “If Ruth can give ‘a foreview of the Church,’ if ‘the larger interpretation’ of the Songs of Solomon concerns the Church, why must the Church be absent from the glorious visions of Isaiah?” Now it is hard for me to believe that the very able and intelligent writer of these words does not know exactly what he is doing, even though a careless reader might miss the point. Reduced to a simple statement, his argument is that if we premillennialists are willing to take Old Testament *history* typically, we should not object to the taking of Old Testament *prophecy* typically. “In dealing with prophecy,” Allis writes, our premillennial “treatment is marked by a literalism which refuses to recognize types.” This seems to Allis “strikingly inconsistent” on our part.

As a matter of fact, the inconsistency is in Allis and in his fallacious argument. Our answer is as follows: First, premillennialists take both history and prophecy literally. We may indeed, within proper limits, find in history certain types and shadows of things to come, but no one among us in his right senses ever questioned the literality of the history. But what about the author of *Prophecy and the Church*? Well, Allis accepts the history as literal, but denies the literality of the *prophecy*, at least in certain areas of the Old Testament, and insists that a typical interpretation is the only one! If Allis were as willing to accept the literality of Old Testament prophecy as he is of its history, I for one would raise no serious objection if he should find some legitimate “types” in both. I would insist, however, that just as in any proper interpretation of Old Testament history Joseph is always Joseph and not Christ, even so in prophecy Israel is always Israel and never the church. This does not mean that the preacher must never take a *prophecy* concerning Israel and *apply* it to the church. But he should always know what he is talking about, and make certain that his hearers know.

There is, after all, a fundamental difference between Biblical history and prophecy which must not be overlooked. *History* deals with a literal event, which may or may not be a type pointing to some future event. Thus a type seems to be always prophetic in nature. As the late William G. Moorehead once wrote, “A type always prefigures something future. A Scriptural type and predictive prophecy are in substance the same, differing only in form.” On the other hand, *prophecy* (predictive) deals directly with the future reality. To talk about a “typical interpretation” of prophecy, therefore, is something like saying that prophecy should be interpreted prophetically! Perhaps it would help to clear the air if we could get rid of all the adjectives, and simply use the term interpretation alone in its first and original sense, “to give the meaning of.” We could then go on from there and talk about other things, such as types and applications. This is what we mean by literal interpretation.

*The eclectic method.* This is sometimes called the “spiritual” method, for the reason that “spiritualizing” is its most distinctive feature. The great church father Origen is generally regarded as the originator of this method, although in his better moments he insisted on...an exact grammatical interpretation of the

text as the basis of all exegesis.” Origen was a Platonist in philosophy, which explains much in his theology. In his hands the spiritualizing method of Biblical interpretation became a useful tool in opposing the doctrine of a literal millennial rule of Christ on earth, something which no consistent Platonist could possibly accept.

The term spiritual should be rejected, I feel strongly, as a proper name for the anti-literal method of interpretation, for at least two reasons: First, the word spiritual is much too fine to be surrendered without protest for wrong uses; and second, no one of any consequence was ever known to employ the “spiritualizing” scheme consistently and exclusively. For example, Dr. Shedd speaks disparagingly of what he calls “the blooming age of Millenarianism,” and finds that this age was mainly caused by the adoption of “the literal interpretation of the Old Testament prophecies” as opposed to the spiritual method. But it must be said to the credit of this able scholar that he himself did not use the “spiritualizing” method exclusively, not even in his approach to Old Testament prophecy. He only resorted to it under the spell of his very narrow and inadequate notions about the kingdom. At other times in his Biblical interpretations Dr. Shedd became just as literal as the “literalists” whom he criticizes. Doubtless we should thank God that not all men are logically consistent in holding their erroneous opinions. What can happen when men cut loose from literality may be seen in Gregory the Great’s exposition of the book of Job, where we learn that the patriarch’s three friends denote the heretics; his seven sons are the twelve apostles; his seven thousand sheep are God’s faithful people; and his three thousand humpbacked camels are the depraved Gentiles!

Actually therefore the anti-millenarian scheme of prophetic interpretation is eclectic, employing both the spiritualizing and literal methods.

*The critical method.* Adherents of this method regard the Bible for the most part as a collection of human writings setting forth the religious experiences of men in their search for God. Since it was written by men, they argue, the Bible should be treated like other books written by men. Feeling no compulsion to defend any doctrine of Biblical inspiration or infallibility, they move through the Biblical literature dropping burning matches anywhere and everywhere, regardless of what may be burned up. The one good thing in this attitude is that the Bible is permitted to speak for itself literally. If the Bible says something which to these men seems to contradict history or science, so much the worse for the Bible. They simply reject what it says. Among the more moderate members of this school of interpretation is the late A. B. Davidson, who leaves no question whatever about his attitude toward the Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel and the coming kingdom. The question of interpretation here, he argues, is a “double one.” The first question is, what did the prophets mean? “And to this question there can be one answer,” writes Davidson, “*Their meaning is the literal sense of their words*” (Italics are mine). The second question has to do with the fulfilment of the prophecies. Again let Davidson answer his own question in his own words: “There is no question as to the meaning of the Old Testament prophecies; *the question is how far this meaning is now valid*” (Italics mine – “Eschatology,” *Hasting’s Bible Dictionary*, I, 73). Although we may regret his conclusion, at least Davidson’s candor is refreshing.

### **The Extent of Kingdom Prophecy**

In a very real sense, all Messianic prophecy in the Old Testament is kingdom prophecy. Even those predictions which deal with Messiah’s humiliation and sufferings cannot be separated from the context of regal glory. As Archibald M’Caig has rightfully observed concerning the great prophetic period in Old Testament history, “The prophecies all more or less have a regal tint, and the coming one is preeminently the coming king” (M’Caig, “King, Christ as,” *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, III, 1802).

Generally we may say that Old Testament prophecy of the future mediatorial kingdom of God begins with a few scattered references in the Pentateuch; opens up clearly in the records of the historical

kingdom; grows in volume and brilliance as the historical kingdom declines; and comes to its close in Malachi.

This material is so extensive that no attempt can be made in these lectures to present an exhaustive list of references; nor shall I try to deal with the ideas in the order of their historical utterance. I can only set forth in very much condensed form a series of generalizations, supported by selected but representative material from the inspired text as time permits. The question before us is, therefore, What do the Old Testament prophets say about the future kingdom? Whether their conception is identical or not with the kingdom announced in the gospel records is a question to be dealt with in a later lecture.

### **The Literality of the Coming Kingdom**

This kingdom of Old Testament prophecy is not merely an ideal kingdom like the Kantian “kingdom of ends,” something toward which man must ever strive but never attain. On the contrary, it will be as real and literal in the realm of sense experience as the historical kingdom of Israel or the kingdom of Great Britain today. All prophecy from first to last asserts and implies this literality: in such details as its ruler (Isa 33:17), its geographical location (Isa 14:1–2), its citizens (Jer 23:3–6), its capital city (Isa 2:5), the nations involved (Isa 11:11), and numerous other details which will appear in the progress of this study. Worthy of special notice here is the fact that the prophets picture the coming kingdom as one which will destroy and supplant other kingdoms which are literal (Dan 2, 7). The divine kingdom does indeed come down from heaven, but the arena of action is on earth where the heavenly kingdom supplants literal kingdoms and functions in their stead. There is no place left for an unfilled vacuum in human history. Furthermore, the prophets insist that the coming kingdom will actually be a revival and restoration of the Old Testament kingdom of history: **“the former dominion”** shall be returned to the nation of Israel in the city of Jerusalem (Mic 4:1, 7, 8); the tabernacle of David, which is fallen, shall again be raised up by divine power, **“as in the days of old”** (Amos 9:11). In all these and a thousand other details there is the unmistakable flavor of literality.

And lest there be some misunderstanding on this point, let me say that I am not using the term *literal* as absolutely opposed to the term *spiritual*. Even spiritual things are literal; in fact, they are the most literal of all in the whole realm of reality. By literality here I mean that the prophetic details of the coming kingdom will be tangible in the world of sense experience: **“Thine eyes shall see the King...they shall behold the land”** (Isa 33:17); and **“All flesh shall see it together”** (Isa 40:5). With such words before us, therefore, we should not be too quick to criticize the literal-mindedness of the early apostles when they asked of the risen Christ, **“Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?”** (Acts 1:6).

### **The Future Establishment of the Kingdom**

The time of its establishment, to the prophets, sometimes seems to be very near at hand: Haggai says it will come in it **“a little while”** (2:6–9); Isaiah says, **“a very little while”** (29:17). Yet other predictions indicate that the kingdom is far in the future, after the lapse of **“many days”** (Hos 3:4, 5), or in the “latter days” (Isa 2:2). Doubtless the reconciliation of these forecasts may be found in the divine mind to which our many days are only a very little while.

The establishment of the kingdom is always preceded by divine judgments. There will be world-wide military preparation and devastating wars among the nations (Joel 3:9–16; Isa 3:25—4:1); great cosmic disturbances affecting the heavenly bodies (Joel 2:30–31); a special judgment upon the nation of Israel which will attend their regathering back into the land of the promised kingdom (Ezek 20:35, 33, ASV); and also a special judgment upon the living Gentile nations, based primarily upon their treatment of Israel whom they have scattered among the nations and robbed of their silver and gold (Joel 3:1–8). Some of these divine judgments will fall upon the earth itself, causing it to **“reel to and fro like a drunkard”**—all this to precede that glorious day **“When the Lord of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem”** (Isa 24:17–23).

Thus the coming of the kingdom in established form will be a world-shaking event. Although the divine work of preparation may seem at times almost interminable, its actual establishment will not be a long

and gradual process, so imperceptible at times that sceptics will be able to dispute whether there even be such a thing as a kingdom of God. On the contrary, the coming of the kingdom will be *sudden*, comparable only to the falling of a great stone from heaven; *supernatural* in its descent as a stone **“cut out without hands”**; and *catastrophic* in its immediate effects, destroying the governments of earth so completely that no trace of them can be found (see Dan 2, 7).

### The Ruler of This Future Kingdom

The names and titles applied to the coming King indicate that ‘he will be both human and divine in nature. He is called **“a man”** (Isa 32:1, 2), one like unto a **“son of man”** (Dan 7:13, 14), the **“son”** of God (Ps 2:7), a **“rod of the stem of Jesse”** (Isa 11:1), a **“righteous branch of David”** (Jer 23:5), **“God”** and **“the Lord Jehovah”** (Isa 40:9, 10, ASV), **“Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace”** (Isa 9:6, 7).

He will be perfect in character, wisdom and ability. The Spirit of God rests upon him in wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, and fear of the Lord; righteousness is the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins (Isa 11:1–5). He does not win his way to power by the ordinary means of demagoguery or military force; his voice is not heard in the street and a bruised reed shall he not break; yet unlike other rulers and statesmen he **“shall not fail or be discouraged till he have set judgment in the earth”** (Isa 42:1–4).

But over against this clearly revealed glory, there is a deep note of mystery in the career of the coming King. He is presented in Old Testament prophecy as a man of sorrow, despised and rejected of men; wounded, bruised, afflicted and dying for the iniquities of men (Isa 53). He is the great shepherd of Israel, yet he is smitten by the sword of God, and the sheep are scattered (Zech 13:7; cf. Isa 40:9–11). He is **“Messiah the Prince”** of Israel, ruler of the nations, yet he is **“cut off”** and has nothing which belongs to his regal glory (Dan 9:25, 26).

This mysterious problem did not go altogether unnoticed by the Jewish rabbins; some thought there might be two Messiahs, one the **“son of Joseph”** who would die, the other the **“son of David”** who would reign in glory. Other Jewish scholars applied the prophecies of the suffering to the nation of Israel personified, a view favored by modern Jewish interpretation. These proposed solutions, however, seem to be definitely post-Christian in origin, and were motivated probably by Jewish antagonism toward the Christian interpretation of Old Testament prophecy. It is highly doubtful whether anyone, having the Old Testament Scriptures alone and with no knowledge of Christian history, could or ever did arrive at a correct solution of the problem: that is, not two Messiahs, but one Messiah with two comings separated by a vast gulf in time.

We do know, however, that the problem was given serious consideration in pre-Christian times by the Old Testament prophets themselves. These men saw clearly the sufferings and glory of Messiah; they also understood the sequence of events—the sufferings would be first, and the glory would **“follow.”** But the time relation between the two was an unsolved problem to the Old Testament prophets, although they searched their own inspired writings to discover **“what time or what manner of time”** was signified (1 Pet 1:9–11, ASV). If this time relationship was ever revealed exactly to the prophets, Scripture is wholly silent as to any such revelation. And this silence will become a fact of high importance when we come later to the gospel records and ask, Was the kingdom in any sense postponed?

### The Nature of Government in the Kingdom

The Mediatorial Kingdom as set forth in Old Testament prophecy is monarchical in form. The ruler will sit upon a **“throne,”** and the government will be **“upon his shoulder”** (Isa 9:6, 7). He receives his authority and holds it by divine grant: he is God’s king, established upon his throne by God himself (Ps 2:6; Dan 7:14). His rule will be characterized by severity, but a severity based upon absolute justice and righteousness (Ps 2:7–9; Isa 11:4a). And although he will rule the nations with a rod of iron, yet with

infinite tenderness he will deal with the meek and the needy, gathering the lambs in his arms and carrying them in his bosom (Isa 40:10, 11).

In its external organization, the prophets picture the kingdom with the mediatorial king at its head; associated with him are those who are called **“princes”** (Isa 32:1); the **“saints”** possess the kingdom, doubtless the saved of Old Testament days (Dan 7:18, 22, 27); the living nation of Israel is given first place of favor and authority on earth, and the nation which rebels against it will perish (Isa 60:3, 10, 12). The subjects of this kingdom will include **“all people, nations, and languages”** (Dan 7:14), though certain passages suggest an unwilling subjection on the part of some, a point I shall discuss later. All the functions of government are centered in the person of the mediatorial king. The prophet Isaiah sees him and names him as **“judge,” “lawgiver,”** and **“King”**—remarkable forecast of the conventional divisions of modern government: judicial, legislative, and executive (Isa 33:22). The founding fathers of our own American government, approaching their task with a deep suspicion of human nature, designed a system of checks and balances to separate these three departments and keep any one of them from getting too much power. Although it seems clumsy, wasteful and inefficient at times, our government has provided a welcome refuge for personal liberty in such a world as this, and will continue to do so—if we can keep it. But this is not the most ideal form of government. When God’s own glorious King takes over the kingdoms of the earth, it will be safe at last to concentrate all the functions of government in one Person. This does not mean that he will do everything, but rather that he will be the directing head and final authority; thus providing a unifying center, both infinitely wise and good, for all the activities of government, something which no government on earth has ever had.

#### **The Extent and Duration of the Kingdom**

**“In that day,”** the prophet Zechariah declares, **“The Lord shall be king over all the earth”** (14:9). And the Psalmist describes the scope of his government with still greater detail, **“He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the River unto the ends of the earth. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him; and his enemies shall lick the dust.... Yea, all kings shall fall down before him; all nations shall serve him”** (72:8–11). Instead of regarding government as a necessary evil—the less of it, the better—the beneficent rule of the mediatorial kingdom will permeate and affect every department of human life: **“In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD.... Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the Lord of hosts”** (Zech 14:20–21). That artificial and popular distinction between the secular and the sacred will disappear in the immediate presence of the King who is the giver and sustainer of all that exists.

The rule and power of this kingdom will never suffer any diminution or reverses, such as are common with ordinary governments: **“Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever.”** This is because its foundation is not in man but in God: **“The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this”** (Isa 9:7). And joining together in a single passage the two ideas of universality and eternity, Daniel describes the rule of the mediatorial King as a dominion extending over all, and also **“an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away,”** and **“which shall not be destroyed”** (7:14). The throne of this kingdom endures forever because, as the Psalmist declares, it is **“Thy throne, O God”** (45:6).

#### **The Extensive Nature of the Kingdom**

An examination of how and where the kingdom functions in human life will shed light upon its vast extension. Its establishment will bring about sweeping changes in every department of man’s activity, so far-reaching that Isaiah speaks of its arena as **“a new earth”** (65:17). Every need of humanity will be anticipated and provided for: **“Before they call,”** God says, **“I will answer”** (Isa 65:24). For the most part, the various current views of the kingdom are too narrow; in concentrating upon some one aspect, men have missed the richness and greatness of the kingdom. Nowhere in all Scripture is its great variety

revealed so clearly as in the Old Testament prophets, who saw the coming kingdom functioning in at least six important realms:

*The kingdom will be spiritual in nature.* It will bring personal salvation from the hand of God (Isa 12:1–6), divine forgiveness for sin (Jer 31:34), provision of God’s own righteousness for men (Jer 23:3–6), moral and spiritual cleansing, a new heart and a new spirit (Ezek 36:24–28), inward harmony with the laws of the kingdom (Jer 31:33), recognition by men of all nations that Jehovah is the true God, the God who is able to answer prayer (Zech 8:20–23), the restoration of genuine joy and gladness to human life (Isa 35:10), and the pouring out of God’s Spirit **“upon all flesh”** (Joel 2:28).

The spiritual blessings enumerated above are only a few out of the many which the kingdom brings to a sinful and needy world. I have no quarrel with the dictum of writers who insist that the kingdom is “spiritual,” unless they insist upon a definition of the term which is exclusively Platonic, or unless they should be so foolish as to deny that a spiritual kingdom can function in a world of sense experience. As a matter of fact, it would not be wrong to say that the kingdom of Old Testament prophecy is *basically* “spiritual,” yet a kingdom producing tangible effects in every department of human life.

*The kingdom will be ethical in its effects.* At last there will be a proper estimate of moral values in human life; the fool will no longer be called noble (Isa 32:5); darkness will not be called light. An adjustment of moral inequalities will sweep through every department of human relationships (Isa 40:3–5). Moral retribution at last will become an individual matter: men shall no longer say, **“The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children’s teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his own iniquity”** (Jer 31:29–30): thus removing one of the greatest present stumbling blocks to rational belief in a moral universe.

*The kingdom will bring great social and economic changes.* All wars will be eliminated (Zech 9:10). But instead of abolishing the arts and sciences which today are contributing to the horrors and destruction of warfare, these things will be turned to economic uses: the sword becomes a plowshare and the spear a pruninghook; and, I suppose, the stuff of the atomic bomb will generate power and light up the darkness (Isa 2:4). An era of worldwide peace will be ushered in by divine sanctions, never to end again (Isa 9:7). Social justice at last will become a reality, not merely something to be talked about by self-seeking politicians: Men will actually get and enjoy what they produce; one shall not build a house and another live in it (Isa 65:21–22). No longer will the weak, the poor, and the ignorant, be subject to economic exploitation; but they shall be redeemed from **“deceit and violence”** because they are **“precious”** in the sight of the great King (Ps 72:1–4, 12–14). With complete social and economic justice for all, everything in human life will be tenderly fostered. The hopeless invalid will not be consigned to the tragic comfort of euthanasia; neither will the backward child be finally and rigidly classified at a fixed capacity-level; **“a bruised reed will he not break, and a dimly burning wick will he not quench”** (Isa 42:3, ASV). Even that stubborn obstacle to human understanding and international accord, the barrier of languages, will apparently be broken down. **“The discord of Babel shall, as it were, give place to unity of language.”** Philosophy, science and religion will dwell together in harmony, abundantly available to all (Isa 33:6, ASV).

*The kingdom will have political effects.* With its establishment on earth, a central authority will be set up for the adjudication and settlement of international disputes; and this authority will have not only the requisite wisdom to make just and impartial decisions but also the power to enforce them: **“Out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem; and he shall judge among the nations”** (Isa 2:3–4). Thus resort to war will become both unnecessary and useless. National security, that political mirage of uneasy statesmen, will be guaranteed to all. Military science will become obsolete—**“Neither shall they learn war any more”** (Isa 2:4). The international problem of the Jew, which is certainly political in part, will be solved permanently by the divine restoration of this people to their own land (Amos 9:14–15), and by the reestablishment and unification of the Jewish state: **“One nation in the land...and one king shall be king of them all; and they shall be no more two nations, neither**

***shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all***" (Ezek 37:22–24). The present Jewish State in Palestine indicates a trend toward the fulfilment of prophecy, but no permanent solution can ever be reached apart from divine intervention on the part of the mediatorial King (Zech 12:3–9).

*The kingdom will have ecclesiastical effects.* Its ruler will combine in his own person the offices of both King and Priest (Ps 110; cf. Zech 6:13). Thus both church and state become one in purpose and action; which is certainly the ideal combination if, as the Word of God teaches, there is but one true religion. The American policy of complete separation of church and state, which I fully approve under the present conditions, is not however the ideal policy, but rather a policy of *safety* in a sinful world where political and ecclesiastical power too often get into the wrong hands. In the days of the coming kingdom a central sanctuary will be established on earth, to which men from all nations will come to worship the one true God whose glory will be visibly revealed in the mediatorial King (Ezek 37:26–28; 43:1–7). With this revelation, what we call ***"religious freedom"*** will come to an end, and man's dream of religious unity will become a reality, secured by divinely imposed sanctions wherever actively opposed (Zech 14:16–19).

It has been objected (carelessly, I think) that a central sanctuary at Jerusalem for worship would be a backward step, reversing the spiritual and universal principle laid down by our Lord when he said to the Samaritan woman, ***"The hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father.... They that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth"*** (John 4:21–24). The objection misses the point of the passage entirely. Our Lord was not abolishing worship in the city of Jerusalem (There are churches there today), but he was adding the idea of universality to the historical idea of localized worship. The reestablishment of a central sanctuary in Jerusalem for international worship will no more detract from the principle of universality than the going of Bishop Oxnam up to the First Methodist Church of his city next Sunday morning. The assumption that universality and locality in worship are mutually exclusive ideas is certainly unwarranted either in reason or revelation. Objections like this arise out of prejudice not logic.

*The kingdom will be physical in its effects.* Bodily infirmities will be healed, and disease controlled by divine prevention (Isa 35:5–6; 33:24). Longevity of life will be restored: in fact, it is suggested that the crisis of physical death will be experienced only by those incorrigible individualists who rebel against the laws of the kingdom (Isa 65:20, 22). The ordinary hazards of physical life, so tragic and heartbreaking today, will then be under supernatural control (Isa 65:23; Ezek 34:23–31). In that day some modern books on ethics will be largely obsolete: as for example, Durant Drake has written, "When we have done our best we are still at the mercy of fortune.... If all men were perfectly virtuous, we should still be at the mercy of flood and lightning, poisonous snakes, icebergs and fog at sea, a thousand forms of accident and disease, old age and death. The millennium will not bring pure happiness to man; he is too feeble a creature in the presence of forces with which he cannot cope" (*Problems of Conduct*, Revised Edition, 1920, p. 168).

The answer of the prophets to all this is that in the coming kingdom men ***"shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth for calamity"*** (Isa 65:23, ASV). For the earth in that day will be under the direct control of One whose voice even the ***"winds and the waves obey."***

The inauguration of the kingdom will, furthermore, be signalized by tremendous geological changes (Zech 14:3–4; Ezek 38:19–20); and these changes could very naturally bring about corresponding climatic alterations, causing the waste regions of the earth to become fruitful and ***"blossom as the rose"*** (Isa 35:1, 6, 7). At the same time there will come a great increase in the fertility and productiveness of the soil, so that ***"the plowman shall overtake the reaper"*** (Amos 9:13). Even in the animal world some remarkable changes will come to pass: ***"The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb...and a little child shall lead them.... They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the Lord"*** (Isa 11:6, 9).

Such is the extensive nature of the mediatorial kingdom as presented by the Old Testament prophets. And in closing, I would like to suggest that it satisfies and reconciles all legitimate viewpoints. The



kingdom is spiritual; with effects which are ethical, social, economic, political, ecclesiastical, and physical. To single out any one of these important aspects, and deny validity to the others, is to narrow unwisely the breadth of the prophetic vision and to set limits upon the possibilities of human life on earth under God.

### PART 3: THE MEDIATORIAL KINGDOM IN THE TEACHING OF CHRIST

I have in mind here, of course, the teaching of our Lord during the historical period covered by the gospel records. In approaching this important body of material, it is possible for men to forget that the stream of history never stands still, not even in the brief time-span of our Lord's public ministry. His teaching about the kingdom, therefore, cannot be read accurately apart from the background of the constantly changing historical situation. This principle has been rightly stressed in connection with the great expanse of Old Testament history. It is no less important in dealing with the gospel records when the very narrowness of the time increased the swiftness of the current. Hence, we shall do well, not only to heed exactly *what* the King has said about his kingdom, but also to give careful attention to the time *when* he said what he did. To neglect this principle will plunge the interpreter into misunderstanding and confusion.

It is hardly necessary to remind you that the Gospels open with the announcement of a kingdom. It is announced by angels (Luke 1:11, 26), anticipated by the Magi (Matt 2:1–6), preached by John the Baptist (Matt 3:1–3), by our Lord himself (Matt 4:17, 23) then by the twelve apostles (Matt 10:1–7), after that by the seventy (Luke 10:1–9). Several strong expressions are used to indicate the proximity of this kingdom. As to its supernatural powers, it had **"come upon"** men (Luke 11:20). As to its King, it was actually **"in the midst of"** men (Luke 17:21). As to its complete establishment on earth, the kingdom was **"at hand,"** that is, impending or imminent (Mark 1:15).

It has been well said that "The Gospels present Christ as king. Matthew, tracing his genealogy, gives special prominence to his royal lineage as son of David. He tells of the visit of the Magi who inquire for the newborn king of the Jews, and the scribes answer Herod's question by showing from Micah's prophecy that the Christ to be born in Bethlehem would be a **'governor,'** and would rule, **'be shepherd of my people Israel'** (2:5–6). Luke's account of the nativity contains the declaration that the child to be born and named Jesus would occupy the throne of David and reign over the house of Jacob forever (1:32–33). In John's account of the beginning of Christ's ministry, one of his early disciples, Nathanael, hails him as **'King of Israel'** (1:49). And Jesus does not repudiate the title" (Archibald M'Caig, "King, Christ as," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, III, 1802).

#### Relationship to Old Testament Teaching

Now the question naturally arises: What is the relation of the kingdom announced by our Lord and his disciples to that kingdom set forth by the prophets of the Old Testament? Perhaps the many answers to this question can be summarized under about four heads:

First, the *Liberal* view—that Christ took from the Old Testament prophets chiefly the moral and social elements, and made these the program of a kingdom which it is the responsibility of his followers to establish on earth today.

Second, the *Critical* view—that Jesus at first embraced fully the ideas of Old Testament prophecy, some of which were current among the Jews of his day; but later in the face of opposition he grew discouraged and changed his message. As to the nature and extent of this change the critics are not agreed.

Third, the *"Spiritual"* view that Christ took up certain spiritual elements from the Old Testament prophetic picture, either dropped or spiritualized the political and physical aspects, and then added some original ideas of his own.

Fourth, the *Biblical* view—that the kingdom proclaimed by our Lord was identical with that of the Old Testament prophets. I have named this fourth view the “Biblical” one because it is supported by the New Testament literature taken at its face value; which, by the way, is the only material anyone has on the subject. Without intending to imply that the late James Orr would have endorsed in every detail the view set forth in these lectures, it is fair to say that his words do support my central thesis: “In announcing the approaching advent of ‘the kingdom of heaven,’ Jesus had in view the very kingdom which the prophets had foretold” (James Orr, “Kingdom of God,” *Hasting’s Dictionary of the Bible*, II, 849).

That the kingdom announced by our Lord as **“at hand”** was identical with the kingdom of Old Testament prophecy is very evident. The name **“kingdom of heaven,”** so often upon the lips of Christ, seems to have been derived from Daniel 2:44 and 7:13-14. In support of his proclamation of the kingdom, our Lord constantly appealed to the Old Testament prophets; and he characterizes two hesitant disciples as **“fools”** because they have failed to believe **“all that the prophets have spoken”** (Luke 24:25; cf. 4:18–19; 7:27; 20:41–44). The closest search of the gospel records will discover no passage in which Christ ever intimated that his conception of the kingdom was different from that of the prophets. If the prophets were wrong in any respect, how simple to say so. But there is nothing. On the contrary, from the beginning of his ministry on earth to the end of it, his evaluation of the prophetic Scriptures remains the same: **“All things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning me”** (Luke 24:44; cf. Matt 5:17–18). Furthermore, the very events attending the appearance of the Messianic King demonstrate the identity of the two kingdoms. Consider only two examples: Micah had predicated that the One who was to be God’s **“ruler in Israel”** would be born in Bethlehem (5:2); and Zechariah saw this king riding up to the city of Jerusalem **“upon an ass, even upon a colt the foal of an ass”** (9:9, ASV). Do I need to remind this audience that these very things came to pass exactly as predicted, that the gospel writers were fully aware of the connection between the prophecy and the history, and that no legitimate Biblical criticism has been able to remove the passages from the literary and historical records?

Still further, in the works and teachings of Christ may be found every aspect and element of the Old Testament prophetic kingdom, although we should not expect here the fullness of detail so apparent in the prophets.

First, the kingdom announced by our Lord is basically *spiritual* in nature, so much so that except men repent and **“be born again”** they cannot enter into it (Matt 3:2; John 3:3–5).

Second, its *ethical* aspect is set forth especially in the Sermon on the Mount, a body of material which contains little that is absolutely new, the main ideas being found in the Old Testament at least in germ. Some of the Beatitudes are transported almost verbally (Cf. Matt 5:5 with Ps 37:11).

Third, the correction of *social* evils appears often in our Lord’s teaching; and in his forecast of the complete establishment of his kingdom all such evils will be sternly gathered out by supernatural agency (Matt 13:41–43).

Fourth, the *ecclesiastical* aspect of his kingdom is recognized when he whips the money changers out of the temple. Why not simply ignore the temple if, as some argue, God is done with the nation of Israel and the Old Testament theocratic idea? On the contrary, as the mediatorial Priest-King, Christ lays claim to the Jewish temple, citing an Old Testament prophecy of the kingdom in defense of his action, **“My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations”** (Mark 11:15–17, ASV; cf. Isa 56:7–8).

Fifth, even the *political* aspect of the kingdom is assigned an important place in such passages as Matthew 19:28, where our Lord promises the Twelve that they **“shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel,”** and Matthew 25 where we have his own description of himself sitting upon a throne of glory judging living nations on the earth, in accordance with the vision of Isaiah.

Sixth, as to the *physical* aspects of the kingdom, read the New Testament record of blind men that saw, lame that walked, deaf that heard, the lepers that were cleansed; consider also the multitudes fed by

supernatural power, and the deliverances from hazards of wind and storm and violence. That not one of these elements can be omitted without distorting our Lord's picture of the kingdom, is being admitted even by critical scholars.

If the kingdom announced as *"at hand"* by our Lord was merely a *"spiritual kingdom,"* or as some have defined it, *"the rule of God in the hearts of men,"* such an announcement would have had no special significance whatever, because such a kingdom of God had always been recognized among the people of God. Compare the Psalmist's confession, *"God is my king of old"* (74:12). Any denial of this would certainly be a new kind of dispensationalism.

And this brings me to a passage so important that it must be quoted in full. John the Baptist is in prison liable to lose his head for rebuking the immorality of an earthly ruler; strange situation for the herald of the great King who, according to the prophets, would correct all such injustices. Did John's faith waver? It may be so, for he sent messengers to Jesus, asking wistfully, *"Art thou he that should come (hercomenos—The Coming One), or do we look for another?"* Now the answer of Jesus to John furnishes an infallible key to the interpretation of the Old Testament prophets and also the relation of his own message to their vision of the kingdom: *"Go and tell John the things which ye hear and see; the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good tidings preached to them"* (Matt 11:2–6, ASV). Such an answer was worth a thousand merely verbal affirmations. To John it proved that he had not been mistaken about the identity of the promised King of Old Testament prophecy. And to us it should prove what to John required no proof, namely, that when the kingdom comes it will be a literal kingdom, identical with the kingdom of the prophets.

But to this official answer sent back to John in the Roman prison, our Lord added a very special and personal word, an assurance intended to guard John's mind against all future contingencies and doubts: *"Blessed is he,"* said Jesus, *"Whosoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me."* How tender and gracious! For the rising tide of Jewish opposition had already demonstrated historically that the King would be rejected and the complete establishment of his kingdom long delayed—and John must die. He walked bravely, I am sure, into the valley of the shadow with this last precious assurance from his Lord, the King.

One other point should be noticed in this connection: The fact that John and Christ began their preaching of the good news of the kingdom with no formal explanation of its character indicates an assumption that their audiences would understand what kingdom was being announced. Why this assumption? The answer should be obvious: Israel had the prophets, read and taught in every synagogue. If the conception of our Lord had differed from the prophets, then a formal definition was essential at the very beginning. But there is nothing of this kind. This lack of more definite explanation has caused speculation and disagreement, when it should have sent us to the Old Testament.

Perhaps I should guard what has been said, by explaining that while our Lord follows closely the Old Testament prophetic pattern, there is no mere slavish repetition of words, phrases and texts. Rather he unfolds and interprets the utterances of the prophets, so that meanings become deeper and richer. Furthermore, it is quite evident that he did emphasize the spiritual and ethical aspects of the Old Testament vision, not only because these things were important in themselves, but also because the Jewish teachers had neglected them and were concentrating largely upon the political and national aspects. And like all true preachers of the Word, our Lord fought many of his battles over neglected truth. Today, were he standing in some pulpits, he might stress the other side.

### **Contingent Character of the Kingdom**

In his own teaching, Christ and the kingdom which he proclaimed were inseparably connected. The kingdom was *"at hand"* because the King was present. Without the King there could be no kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. To reject the King would be to reject the kingdom. And this brings us to a most significant fact, namely that the good news of the kingdom was announced *to Israel alone*. Even down to

the work of the Seventy, the disciples were expressly forbidden to enter into any ***“way of the Gentiles”*** or ***“any city of the Samaritans”*** (Matt 10:5). More than one interpreter has had trouble with that dictum of Christ: ***“I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel”*** (Matt 15:24). The most satisfactory explanation of the problem is to see, what our Lord saw clearly, the contingent nature of his announcement of the kingdom as ***“at hand.”*** To put the matter in a sentence: *the immediate establishment of his kingdom was contingent upon the attitude of the nation of Israel*, to whom pertained the divine promises and covenants (Rom 9:4). Not that the favor of God would terminate upon this nation, but rather that through them all the blessings of the mediatorial kingdom would flow to the world of nations.

That our Lord understood the contingent nature of his kingdom proclamation is clear from his evaluation of John the Baptist and his career. Every intelligent Jew knew that the final word of the final Old Testament prophet predicted the appearance of Elijah as the precursor of the established kingdom (Mal 4:5–6). And Christ declared concerning John the Baptist, ***“If ye are willing to receive him, this is Elijah, that is to come”*** (Matt 11:14, ASV margin). Still later, when historical events have demonstrated the certainty of his rejection and death at the hands of the Jewish nation, our Lord again refers to John; but now the historical situation has changed, and the die is cast. ***“Elijah indeed cometh, and shall restore all things,”*** he assures his disciples; but then he quickly adds, ***“I say unto you that Elijah is come already, and they knew him not”*** (Matt 17:11–12 ASV). We have here a key to one of the most puzzling problems of New Testament eschatology in relation to the kingdom: How could the kingdom be ***“at hand,”*** and yet not near at hand? (Mark 1:15 with Luke 19:11). The answer is to be found in the word “contingency.” The very first announcement of the kingdom as ***“at hand”*** also called upon the nation of Israel to make a decision (Mark 1:15), a genuine decision, a moral and spiritual decision, and they made it; tragically the wrong way. The fact that all this was ***“by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God”*** does not in the least detract from its moral reality. Those who fail to see this can make nothing out of certain portions of our Lord’s prophetic teaching.

It should be clearly understood, however, that when I speak of “contingency” I refer to the human aspect of history. Certainly our Lord was not caught by surprise. There are evidences in his earliest teaching (recalled and recorded by the latest gospel writer, as we might expect, knowing the historical sequence) which indicate at least a veiled reference to his rejection and death (John 2:18–22; 3:14). Moreover his ministry met with opposition from the very beginning (Luke 4:28–29); even his popularity with the common people was only sporadic (Cf. John 6). This tide of opposition grew steadily to a definite crisis, and can easily be traced in the record of the gospels. The crisis is reached when his miraculous credentials are not only denied validity, but are actually attributed to the powers of the evil one (Matt 12:24–32). Not long afterward, having gathered his disciples about him, and having heard their adverse reports as to the public reaction toward his claims, there is a sharply defined turning point in his ministry: ***“From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must...suffer...and be killed...and be raised again”*** (Matt 16:21).

#### **Kingdom Teaching in the Light of Rejection**

We come now to a large and important body of material which may be termed his *preparatory teaching in view of the historical certainty of his rejection by the nation of Israel*. He outlines in a remarkable series of parables the future of the kingdom in the peculiar form (hitherto unrevealed) which it will assume during the temporary period of Israel’s rejection. And the parabolic method of teaching at this particular point, according to our Lord, is a divine judgment upon a people who have rejected a simple method of teaching (Matt 13:10–15). (How any expositor could miss this clearly stated fact might also be well called a ***“mystery”***). Furthermore, Christ now for the first time announces the building of a new thing, the church, something wholly unforeseen by the Old Testament prophets (Matt 16:13–18). At the same time, in the clearest terms he assures his followers that the kingdom has not been abandoned, but that its establishment on earth is only deferred; and he carefully prepares them for the delay which will

ensue before its ultimate establishment. While on their way to Jerusalem, because the disciples still ***“thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear,”*** he outlined the course of future events in a parable: A nobleman goes into a far country; there he receives a kingdom; then he returns; reckons with his servants who have been put to work during his absence; and suppresses by judgment all the ***“citizens”*** who had hated him and rebelled against his authority and rule (Luke 19:11–27). This is the divine program, according to the rejected king, who now unfolds it in perfect correlation with the movement of history. The disciples are not to be disturbed about the changing situation; they shall yet have a part in the coming kingdom, sitting on ***“thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel”*** (Matt 19:27–28; Luke 22:28–30).

In the face of the now historically certain rejection, our Lord leaves nothing undone in the prophetic program, but goes up to Jerusalem to offer himself as the Messianic king finally and officially in accordance with Old Testament prophecy (Luke 19:28–44). The triumphal entry, celebrated by Christendom for the most part without understanding, was an event of tremendous import, fulfilling to the very day the greatest time-prediction of the Old Testament (Dan 9:25). Weeping over the city in divine compassion, because its people knew not the ***“time”*** of their ***“visitation,”*** our Lord turns to his disciples and privately unfolds the prophetic program more fully, revealing the parenthesis of time which will intervene before his return to establish the kingdom, but leaving its length undetermined for reasons which will appear later. In the record by Luke (21:10–27) the present era is clearly marked out and isolated from the ***“fearful sights and great signs”*** of the end; its beginning being indicated by the words, ***“But before all these”*** (v. 12), and its scope and close by the words, ***“Until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled”*** (v. 24).

It becomes necessary also for our Lord to forewarn his disciples of changing conditions which they will soon be facing: In his personal presence and under his immediate supervision they had been sent out with neither scrip nor purse and they had lacked nothing, but now when they go some material provision should be made: ***“He that hath a purse, let him take it.”*** (Luke 22:35, 36). The supernatural effects in the physical realm, properly associated with the kingdom, will recede into the background during the era of the church. This will not mean an end of the supernatural, but rather that its operation will be largely behind the veil of divine providential control. Those who in the future kingdom shall be ***“first”*** must now for a time be satisfied to be ***“last”***; and those who by every law of the kingdom should live must understand that now persecution and death by the hands of wicked men will often be their portion (Luke 21:12–19).

The Lord also now reveals more completely the various details related to his second coming and the kingdom (Matt 24:27–25:46). In this part of the gospel records there is a great wealth of material which must be passed over, except to say that believers are to be ***“faithful”*** during the King’s absence, watching for his return, and prepared to render an account of their stewardship at his coming.

One of the most striking facts about the career of our Lord upon earth is that during the death trials he continued calmly to urge, more clearly than ever before, his claim to be the mediatorial King of Old Testament prophecy. Before the Sanhedrin, before Pilate, his testimony is unwavering.

Consider, first, his examination by the Sanhedrin, where the charge was primarily *religious* in nature. Angered by his silence under accusation by false witnesses, the high priest placed him under a solemn oath to answer whether or not he was ***“the Christ, the Son of God.”*** While the law of the formal oath (Lev 5:1) doubtless required our Lord to break his silence, there was something at issue greater than this, which was his identity as the mediatorial King of Old Testament prophecy. And thus his answer to the high priest becomes memorable: ***“Thou hast said”*** (Matt 26:64). This was not an evasion, as the ordinary English reader might suppose, but definitely “a Greek affirmative,” as A. T. Robertson has well said. Mark records it simply, ***“I am”*** (14:62). But the simple affirmation was not enough at a time like this. What is the evidence that his affirmation is true? His answer is: ***“Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of (the) power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.”*** The unmistakable

reference was to a pair of the greatest kingdom prophecies of the Old Testament, Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13, and Christ applied them to himself. Bruce has paraphrased in striking fashion the answer of the Lord to his Sanhedrin judges: "The time is coming when you and I shall change places; I then the Judge; you the prisoners at the bar" (A. B. Bruce, "The Gospel of Matthew," *Expositor's Greek New Testament*, I, 320). The high priest, better schooled than some theologians, understood his claim, rent his clothing judicially, and called upon his fellow judges to pronounce him **"guilty of death"** (Matt 26:65). The action of the great Jewish council, dramatic as it seemed under the circumstances, was only a tardy judicial ratification of a tragic decision which had already become a fact of history.

Let us come now to the examination before Pilate the Roman governor. The charge here was *political*, and was so intended by the Jews who made it: **"We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a king"** (Luke 23:2). Now, however contemptuous Pilate may have been with the technicalities of Jewish religion, he could not ignore the political charge. Knowing this, the Jewish leaders were not slow to press their advantage: **"If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend; whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar"** (John 19:12). There are some interpreters who argue that this charge was a total misrepresentation of the true nature of the Messianic kingdom, and that our Lord's answer to Pilate proves that his kingdom was wholly a "spiritual" matter, having no political or material implications whatsoever. It is passing strange that men have not seen the utter folly of trying to erect an adequate definition of our Lord's kingdom based in large part on a brief conversation between him and a cynical Roman governor who knew nothing about the kingdom of God, and cared less. But what are the facts? In the record of John's Gospel, the examination consists of three questions by Pilate and three responses on the part of Christ (18:33–38).

The first question was, **"Art thou the King of the Jews?"** (v. 33). Our Lord's reply to this is a question of his own: **"Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?"** (v. 34). The purpose of this question was not to gain information—Christ certainly knew the identity of his accusers—but rather by this means to clarify the exact meaning of Pilate's inquiry so that it could be answered intelligibly. If the source of the charge was Pilate, then it would be entirely political and nothing more. In that case the Lord's answer would be, No, I am not a king in that narrow sense of the term. But on the other hand, if Pilate is voicing a charge made by "others," that is, by the Jewish people; then the question is wholly different and must be answered differently. A charge of regal claims on the part of Jesus, if originated by the Jewish leaders, would carry with it all the implications of the Old Testament mediatorial kingdom; and would have to be answered accordingly.

We come now to the second question: **"Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me; what hast thou done?"** (v. 35). Thus Pilate scornfully disclaims any and all responsibility for the charge, and the way is cleared for our Lord's reply to the original question. The first part of his reply is wholly negative: **"My kingdom is not of this world"** (v. 36). The preposition is "*ek*," indicating source or originating cause. His kingdom does not originate in the present kosmos or world system. As concrete evidence of this negative proposition, our Lord refers Pilate to the actual situation before his eyes: **"If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight"** (v. 36). This was something that Pilate could understand: a "*king*" with no military support, and who actually had to be protected from physical violence on the part of his own subjects, could give no possible concern to the politically realistic Pilate.

This brings us to the third question of Pilate. He has satisfied himself that there is no political danger in the strange figure before him—a little later he will actually write over his head, **"This is the King of the Jews"**—but just now he is mildly intrigued by the notion of a kingdom without any armed legions to support it; and so he asks of Jesus, **"Art thou a king then?"** (John 18:37). The answer of our Lord is without equivocation: **"Thou sayest that I am a king,"** or **"Thou sayest it because I am a king."** (So Alford, Ellicott, Robertson, and others).

Marcus Dods thinks we “must” render it, ***“Thou art right, for a king am I.”*** (Marcus Dods, “The Gospel of John,” *Expositor’s Greek New Testament*, I, 852). That this is the proper meaning is made certain by the words which follow: ***“To this end have I been born, and to this end am I come into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth”*** (v. 37, ASV). To this, Pilate has no answer, except to drop his cynical, ***“What is truth?”*** as he left the hall of judgment, tragically unaware that he had been in the presence of the King who is the God of all truth.

Now to deduce from this brief exchange between Pilate and Jesus the sweeping proposition that the Messianic kingdom is exclusively a kingdom of love and truth, which will never employ force in dealing with sinful men upon earth, is certainly theological conjecture at its worst. The Old Testament prophets had agreed that Messiah would rule over the nations “with a rod of iron,” and this was confirmed by the King himself in the days of his flesh (Luke 19:14, 27); but the force used will be that of divine omnipotence, not the force of human armies. In that remarkable vision of the coming of the King from heaven to establish his kingdom on the earth, John says that ***“the armies which are in heaven followed him”*** (Rev 19:11–14). Strange armies they are, bearing no weapons, and striking no blows. For it is the ***“sharp sword”*** of the King himself which strikes the enemy and wins the victory—***“which sword proceeded out of his mouth”*** (Rev 19:21). That there is in the God of heaven a spiritual power which can produce political and physical effects on earth was clearly affirmed by our Lord in his final word to Pilate, ***“Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above”*** (John 19:11). Is it necessary for us to argue as to the nature of this ***“power”*** which our Lord says had been ***“given”*** to Pilate ***“from above”***? Surely, in no sense was it ***“spiritual,”*** but clearly political and nothing else. And the inference is compelling: If this power from above can make itself manifest on earth in the political career of a Pilate, on what ground of either reason or revelation can anyone deny the possibility of its greater exercise through the perfect mediatorial King and his saints when he comes down to earth again?

Our Lord’s consciousness of his own regal person and authority never wavered, but only grew the stronger as he passed through the judgment of Calvary. Even there, suffering the agonies of crucifixion, he exercised the royal prerogatives which he claimed, by throwing open the doors of Paradise to a poor thief who prayed in his extremity, perhaps as only a Jew might have prayed, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy *kingdom*” (Luke 23:39–43).

In closing this part of the discussion, a question might well be raised: Why was the Lord Jesus Christ rejected by the nation of Israel when he offered himself and the kingdom for which they had long waited and prayed? I suggest at least six reasons, without pretending at all that these add up to a total answer:

First, the high spiritual requirements our Lord laid down as essential for entrance into the kingdom (Mark 1:15; John 3:3–5; Luke 18:15–17).

Second, his refusal to establish a kingdom *merely* social and political in character (Luke 12:13–30; John 6:5–15).

Third, his denunciation of the current religion with its traditionalism, legalism, and ritualism (Luke 11:37–54).

Fourth, his scathing arraignment of the ruling classes (Matt 23).

Fifth, his association with ***“sinners”*** (Luke 15:1–2; Matt 9:10–13).

Sixth, his exalted claims for himself (John 5:16–18; 10:24–33; 18:7). This last, however, would have been no stumbling block if Christ had given them their own fleshly desires. The world will deify any leader who will give them enough “bread and circuses.” But they will reject the true God if He asks them to receive what they do not want.

In this connection we should not make the mistake of blaming all this on the ruling classes in Israel. Luke speaks of three classes of men whose voices were united in the demand for the rejection and death of the King; the ***“rulers,”*** the ***“priests,”*** and the ***“people”*** (Luke 23:13–23). It was, shall we say, a

combination of civil, religious and democratic authority. And the **“people”** here could not have been merely a “street mob,” for it was the Passover season, and leading Jews from all over the known world were present in the city. The name of Jesus had been on every lip. These happenings were not done in a corner (Acts 26:26).

One curious twist in the situation was that the **“people”** seemed to be sympathetic almost to the last moment (Luke 19:48—20:8; 20:19—26; 21:37—22:2). But suddenly the temper of the crowd changes. Matthew says that the chief priests and elders **“persuaded the multitude”** to ask Pilate for the release of Barabbas and the execution of Jesus (27:20). What arguments were used by these leaders, we are not told. But doubtless their arguments would have had something to do with the main charge laid before the Roman governor, and that was political, namely, that Jesus had forbidden the paying of tribute to Caesar, **“saying that he himself is Christ a king”** (Luke 23:2). Certainly the Jewish people here could have had no bias in favor of the Caesars; in fact, they would have welcomed with open arms *any* king who could deliver them from the tribute and bondage of Rome. And there had been a time when, impressed by our Lord’s supernatural power, they had been ready to take him by force and make him king. But now they see him, where he had never been before, apparently helpless in the hands of the Roman authorities. Does anyone suppose that the astute and highly intelligent Jewish leaders would fail to exploit the situation to their own advantage with the crowd? How easy now to point out the appalling incongruity before their eyes—the King of the Jews and a Crown of Thorns! Did the applause of the people, disappointed in their “hero,” turn swiftly into vicious anger? If so, nothing could have been more plausible psychologically. History has shown that the disappointment of the **“people”** can become at times a very terrible and violent thing.

#### PART 4: THE MEDIATORIAL KINGDOM FROM THE ACTS PERIOD TO THE ETERNAL STATE

##### The Mediatorial Kingdom in the Period of the Acts

Two mistakes have been made in approaching the Book of Acts. At the one extreme are a few who see nothing there but the Kingdom; while at the other extreme are those who insist that Acts concerns the church alone. Here again I insist that, as in the Gospels, the Book of Acts must be interpreted historically, i.e., in accordance with the movement of events. To do otherwise will result in serious problems, both in Eschatology and Ecclesiology.

In spite of all our Lord’s teaching prior to Calvary, the disciples had failed to harmonize the fact of his death with their hopes concerning the kingdom. **“We hoped,”** they say, **“that it was he who should redeem Israel”** (Luke 24:21, ASV). The solution of their problem was his resurrection, of course, as he reminds them: **“Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and [after that] to enter into his glory?”** This would have been clear to them had they not been **“slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken”** (Luke 24:25–26). That the kingdom has not been abandoned is evidenced by the question of his chosen apostles, asked at the close of 40 days of teaching by the risen King himself on the subject of the “Kingdom of God.” They said, **“Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom of Israel?”** The crucial point of this question is not whether or not there ever would be such a restoration, but rather is the *time* element. Not *will* this be done? but *when*? This is clearly indicated by the order of the words in the original: **“Lord, at this time, wilt thou restore again the kingdom to Israel?”** As Alford observes, any other explanation of the question “would make our Lord’s answer irrelevant” in the next verse: **“It is not for you to know the times or the seasons”** (Acts 1:3–7). However, although the time element is to remain hidden, there is no indication that the kingdom may not be restored within the lifetime of the apostles. We tend to read 19 centuries into these Biblical passages. Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost suggests that the Day of the Lord may be near at hand, and also powerfully argues the right of the risen Jesus to the throne of David. The effect on the audience, composed wholly of Jews from all over the known world, was startling: three thousand were convinced,



and their so-called “communism” suggests that they were looking for the great social changes of the kingdom immediately (Acts 2:5–45).

But perhaps the best key to the historical situation in the Book of Acts is found in the third chapter where Peter, speaking to Israel from the temple porch with all the authority of one to whom Christ had committed the “keys” of the kingdom, makes an official reoffer of that kingdom (Acts 3:12–21). Peter’s words here are unmistakable: even their rejection and crucifixion of the King have not utterly lost for Israel her opportunity. If they will repent and turn again, their sins will be blotted out, and Jesus Christ shall be sent from heaven to restore all the things spoken of by the Old Testament prophets. And in confirmation of the bona fide character of this reoffer of the kingdom, we find early in the Acts period many of the miraculous signs and wonders which were associated with our Lord’s own original offer of the kingdom. This is at least one explanation of why some things are found here which are not being exactly duplicated today.

I do not mean to suggest that there are no miracles in the present age, but rather that they are now of a different character; not great public demonstrations designed to compel recognition (cf. Acts 4:16), as in this early part of the Christian era. The very Greek terms used are indicative of the special nature of these miracles: they were “*signs*” and “*wonders*” to a nation that by divine prophetic sanction had a right to expect such signs in connection with the promised kingdom. Consider, for example, the outpouring of the Spirit tangible to both sight and hearing (2:1–4), special miracles of healing the sick (3:1–10; 19:11–12), great physical wonders (4:31; 8:39; 16:26), immediate physical judgment on sinners (5:1–11; 12:23; 13:11), miraculous visions (7:55; 9:3, 10; 11:5), visible angelic ministry (5:19; 10:3; 12:7), and instant deliverance from physical hazards (28:5).

But once again the authenticating “*signs*” fail to convince the nation of Israel, although now these signs have become even more impressive by reason of the historical fulfillment of the death and resurrection of the King. For the problem was spiritual and moral rather than intellectual, and throughout the book of Acts we can trace the same growth of Jewish opposition to a definite crisis of official rejection, as in the ministry of our Lord. It came this time, not in Jerusalem, but in the great metropolis of Rome where Paul, now a political prisoner, gathered together the influential leaders of Israel into “*his own hired*” dwelling. They came in great numbers, and for an entire day he spoke with them, “*testifying the kingdom of God, and persuading them concerning Jesus, both from the law of Moses and from the prophets*” (Acts 28:23–29). But there was no agreement, and after quoting once more the terrible prophecy of Isaiah which had been quoted by our Lord on a former and similar occasion, the Apostle Paul turns definitely and finally to the Gentiles. Again the nation of Israel had been faced with a decision, a moral and spiritual decision, and once more they made it the wrong way. Thus the historical die was cast, their holy city was shortly destroyed, they were scattered throughout the nations, to abide “*many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice,*” until they are ready to receive their promised King as he comes down from heaven to save them in their last great extremity.

To summarize briefly: the period of the Acts is therefore transitional in character, and its preaching and teaching had a twofold aspect.

First, there is the continued proclamation of the coming kingdom as an immediate possibility, depending on the attitude of the nation of Israel. But at the same time we have a church, begun on Pentecost, as the spiritual nucleus of the coming kingdom.

Second, as the tide of Jewish opposition grows, there seems to be a change of emphasis in the preaching. Whereas the period had opened with the kingdom in first place, the church having almost no distinguishable separate identity; as the history unfolds, the church begins to assume first place, with a glory of its own, while the established kingdom becomes more remote.

### **The Mediatorial Kingdom in the Present Church Age**

Does the mediatorial kingdom exist in any sense during the present era; and if so, what is the relation of the church to this kingdom? I refer, of course, to the spiritual body of Christ, the true church, not that

abnormal thing which is called “Christendom.” The promise of God to all believers of the present era is that we shall **“reign with Him”** in the coming kingdom. This body of true believers constitutes the royal family, the ruling aristocracy of the kingdom. It would not be improper, therefore, to speak of the kingdom as now existing on earth, but only in the restricted sense that today God is engaged in selecting and preparing a people who are to be the spiritual nucleus of the established kingdom. Thus, as Christian believers, we actually enter the kingdom prior to its establishment on earth, something so remarkable that it is spoken of as a translation (Col 1:13).

This peculiar aspect of the kingdom is set forth by our Lord in a series of parables which refers to the “mysteries” of the kingdom. We learn from these that the present era is a time of seed-sowing, of mysterious growth, mixed growth, and abnormal growth; a period of spreading error; a period which will come to the crisis of a harvest; yet out of this period, even apart from the harvest, there will come a pearl of great price (the church), and a treasure (the remnant of Israel purified and regenerated). Thus at the present time while God is forming the spiritual nucleus for the coming kingdom, He is also permitting a parallel development of righteousness and evil in the world; and both shall be brought to a harvest when good and bad will be separated, and the kingdom established on earth in power and righteousness at the second coming of the mediatorial King.

If I understand the words of certain premillenarian writers, they have made two kingdoms out of the one kingdom of Old Testament prophecy; one a purely spiritual kingdom which was established at Christ’s first coming; the second a visible kingdom to be established at his second coming. In the interest of clearer understanding and discussion, it would be much better to say that at his first coming our Lord *laid the spiritual basis* for the kingdom which will be set up at his second coming.

In support of the above mentioned theory, its adherents have pointed to the fact that so late as the history recorded in Acts 28 the Apostle Paul was engaged in **“preaching the kingdom of God”** (v. 31), which seems to be regarded as proof that a kingdom of God of some kind had already been established. This, in the field of argument, is a perfect non sequitur. The Old Testament prophets, twenty-five hundred years ago, preached the kingdom. In these very lectures, I am preaching the kingdom. But there is one thing about the kingdom which seems to be completely absent from all the recorded preaching of our present church era; that is the preaching of the **“gospel”** of the kingdom. If we stick to the Biblical records, the preaching of this **“good news”** was strictly limited to John the Baptist, our Lord, the Twelve, and the Seventy; all specially accredited messengers. What was this gospel of the kingdom? Fortunately, Mark tells us exactly what it was: **“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye and believe the gospel”** (1:15). That there was sometime to be a mediatorial kingdom was no particular news to the Jewish people; they had always firmly believed in that. What they did not know had to do with the **“time”**; and the good news preached by our Lord was that at last the time had come when God was ready to establish the long expected kingdom. The church today may indeed **“preach the kingdom of God,”** and should preach it; but to assume to preach the *gospel* of the kingdom today would involve a knowledge of the **“times and seasons”** certainly not possessed by any of our wisest theologians.

#### **The Mediatorial Kingdom in the Millennial Age**

This **“age to come”** will be ushered in by the exercise of our Lord’s immediate power and authority. He has **“all power”** now; he will take this power and *use* it to the full when he comes down from heaven. The age-long “silence” of God, the perennial taunt of unbelief, will be broken first by the resurrection and translation of the Church; then by the unloosing of divine judgment long withheld; then by the personal and visible appearance of the mediatorial King himself; followed by the complete establishment of his kingdom on the earth for a period specified by Holy Scripture as a **“thousand years”** (Rev 20:1–6). The description of this period, as set forth in Revelation 20, is very brief with few details. If any should ask the reason for this extreme brevity, the answer is at hand: The Old Testament prophets had already revealed these details in rich profusion, and the reader is presumed to know them. There

should be no serious complaint on this point, except by those who do not take the prophets seriously or by those who misinterpret their writings.

Having already dealt with these details at some length, it will be sufficient here for me to say merely that during this glorious period every aspect of the mediatorial kingdom of prophecy will be realized upon earth—truly the “Golden Age” of history. Children are born, life goes on, men work and play; but under ideal conditions, the only limitations being those involved in the sinful nature and mortality which will still obtain among the earthly subjects of the kingdom. The period will close with a brief rebellion of unsaved humanity; and then the final judgment, its subjects being the *“dead,”* not the living. Before that great white throne will appear only those who have chosen death rather than life. Those who have trusted in Christ have already passed out of death into life, and cannot come into judgment for sin.

### **The Mediatorial Kingdom in the Eternal State**

When the last enemy is put down by our Lord as the mediatorial king, when even death itself is abolished and complete harmony is established, then the purpose of his mediatorial kingdom will have been fulfilled. Then the Son will deliver up his kingdom to God the Father, to be merged into the eternal kingdom, thus being perpetuated forever, but no longer as a separate entity (1 Cor 15:24–28). This does not mean the end of the rule of our Lord Jesus Christ. He only ceases to reign as the mediatorial King in history. But as the only begotten Son, very God of very God, He shares with the other Persons of the Triune God the throne of the eternal kingdom. In that final and eternal city of God, center of a redeemed new heaven and earth, there is but *one* throne. It is called **“the throne of God and of the Lamb”** (Rev 22:3–5).

***“And his servants shall serve him:***

***And they shall see his face;***

***And his name shall be in their foreheads.***

***And there shall be no night there;***

***And they need no candle,***

***Neither light of the sun;***

***For the Lord God giveth them light:***

***And they shall reign for ever and ever...***

***These sayings are faithful and true.”***

### **About Alva J. McClain (1888-1968)**



Alva J. McClain, the founder and first president of Grace Theological Seminary and Grace College, was born in Iowa and later grew up in Sunnyside, Washington. Shortly after his marriage to Josephine Gingrich in 1911, he and his wife were saved under the preaching of Dr. L.S. Bauman. He had been attending the University of Washington, but removed to Los Angeles, where he attended the Bible Institute of Los Angeles and sat under the teaching of Dr. R.A. Torrey.

Upon graduating from Biola, he enrolled in Xenia Theological Seminary and completed work for the B.D. and Th.M. degrees—following which he was called to the First Brethren Church of Philadelphia, where he served from 1918 to 1923. During the pastorate he taught at the Philadelphia School of the Bible. Because of ill health, he resigned and removed to California, where he finished his work for the A.B. degree at Occidental College, graduating as valedictorian. Later he was awarded the honorary degree of LL.D. at Bob Jones University, and the D.D. degree at the Bible Institute of Los Angeles.

In 1925 and 1926, he served as professor of Bible at Ashland College. In 1927-1929 he taught Christian theology at the Bible Institute of Los Angeles. In 1930, the first graduate school of theology in the Brethren Church was organized at Ashland College under his leadership, where he served as its first academic dean and professor of Christian theology.

In 1937 Grace Theological Seminary was organized under his direction, and as first president and professor of Christian theology, he served from 1937 to 1962. Dr. McClain authored many short treatises, but will be remembered for his monumental work on Christian theology, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, one of seven volumes he had projected concerning the entire scope of Christian faith. He will long be remembered as scholar, theologian, educator, master teacher, and Christian gentleman.

## **THE HIGH COST OF REWARD**

**BY  
SCOTT CRAWFORD**

### **Introduction**

How many have heard the expression “No Pain, No Gain?” Primarily, that expression is used in a gym where athletes are training and building their strength. I can remember seeing tee-shirts with that slogan when I used to work out in the gym on a regular basis. During my college years and early twenties, I was dedicated to physical training and frequented the gym 5 days per week. Unfortunately, after I married and my job responsibilities increased, I made less time to keep my body in top shape. However, I do remember the dedication I had to seeing my body develop and the great feeling of accomplishment I sensed because of my dedication. I felt great after a workout but the workout was many times painful! I am sure we know the prolific body builder Arnold Schwarzenegger. I remember a word he used one time in relation to being successful in strength training: “focus.” Focus on what you are doing and don’t let anything stand in your way. Again, in strength training the phrase, “No Pain, No Gain,” is paramount. If you want maximum results, you must put forth maximum effort.

With this principle in mind, I want to speak to you as mature believers about continued spiritual development. When I say spiritual development I mean growth or maturity. The end result of that maturity being a person who glorifies God, is rewarded by God for his maturity, and achieves the eternal purpose for which God has created him. The passage we are considering is Matthew chapter 16 verses 24-28. A parallel passage we will also consider is Luke chapter 9 verses 23-27.

In Matthew 16:24-27 we read:

24 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. 25 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. 26 For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? 27 For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. 28 Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.

### **Background of the passage**

The scripture we have just read came at a critical time in Jesus’ ministry. I think it is important that we analyze the context and setting of this passage in order to fully understand Christ’s teaching.

Jesus, according to John 1:11 came to his own, the Jews. Unfortunately, the Jews rejected their Messiah. More specifically, the leaders of the Jews rejected their Messiah with the rest of the nation following suit. Matthew 15:24 gives us interesting insight into Christ's earthly ministry. Notice what he says to a Canaanite woman who is asking him to heal her demon possessed daughter in verse 24:

But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

What is more interesting are the verses that follow:

25 Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. 26 But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. 27 And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. 28 Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour. (Matthew 15:25-28)

This is truly a remarkable exchange! It is important that we understand the vast difference in culture to fully understand the conversation. The Jew's considered gentiles dogs or subservient people. Jesus at first was not willing to heal this woman's daughter because the scope of his ministry was to His own people. However, because of the woman's faith and persistence He graciously agreed to heal her daughter. Many lessons can be drawn from this passage but the main idea I want you to take away is that Jesus earthly ministry primarily centered upon the nation of Israel. As we consider this fact it helps us understand the scope of the gospels. Jesus came on the scene to His people demanding they repent:

From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. (Matthew 4:17)

As a nation they were not walking in the ways of the Lord and He, the Messiah, was there to provide deliverance via the establishment of the promised kingdom. However, the deliverance was conditional upon Israel's repentance.

Continuing on with our contextual analysis lets look closer at the flow of events in Matthew. In chapter 10 we see Jesus sending forth His 12 disciples to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel." Their message is the same as Christ's; "the kingdom of heaven is at hand." That is to say the Messiah is here and the promised kingdom is near. Jesus empowers them to heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, and cast out demons. He bids them to do this feely among the people of Israel. Unfortunately, their message and ministry is not well received.

Chapter 12 records a critical point in Christ's ministry to the nation of Israel. The Pharisee's, leaders of the nation, who according to Matthew 23:2 sat in Moses seat, accuse Jesus of healing a man by the power of Satan. At this point Jesus pronounces judgment upon the nation because of the leader's blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Thus, when we come to chapter 16 we see continued unbelief from the Pharisees. Jesus calls them hypocrites and unable to discern the signs and times. Again, their Messiah is within their midst and they are in unbelief. In chapter 16 great transition takes place. The church is first mentioned. Jesus reveals to His disciples that he will suffer at the hands of the leaders of Israel and be killed and rise again on the third day. Peter, who had just acknowledged Christ as the Messiah, began to rebuke the Lord. He just knew the Messiah would not suffer but would gloriously reign. Jesus rebukes Peter strongly and attributes his words to those of Satan.

With this brief analysis of context and setting we can now analyze the primary scripture of Matthew 16:24-28.

### **Christ's coming glory is His millennial kingdom.**

Let's read verses 27 and 28 again.

27 For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. 28 Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.

To understand this passage it is important that we identify the kingdom of which Jesus speaks. It is none other than His millennial or 1000 year reign upon this earth. This kingdom is a literal kingdom with a literal King, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus had much to say about His coming kingdom. In Matthew alone the word kingdom is used 56 times, most of which are a reference to Christ's coming kingdom. All of prophecy is pointing to that coming kingdom which will be characterized by righteousness and peace. The immediate context, as well as the theological context, supports this interpretation.

Jesus goes on to say that several of those standing there, the disciples, will not die until they have seen Him in His kingdom. This statement seems puzzling until we read further in chapter 17 where Jesus takes His inner circle, Peter, James, and John up on a high mountain and is transfigured before them. He was changed and Moses and Elijah appeared with Him. The word "transfigured" is the Greek word (metemorphothee). The word means a change or alteration of form. Jesus was changed before their eyes into the type of body He will have during His millennial reign. Thus, Peter, James, and John saw Jesus as he would be in His glorious kingdom. This event had a tremendous effect on Peter for he references it in his second epistle wherein he says,

16 For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. (2 Peter 1:16-17)

Thus, we see that the kingdom spoken of in this passage is undoubtedly Christ's coming Messianic Kingdom which will last for 1000 years. We also see that reward will be administered

by Christ with a view to His coming kingdom. This is evidenced by verse 27. With this understanding let's examine more closely Jesus' words to his disciples as it relates to His coming kingdom and reward in that kingdom for believers.

**Jesus makes a proposition for His disciples to follow Him on the road of suffering and shame.**

Verse 24 says:

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

The immediate road Jesus was to walk was not a road of glory and exaltation. That would come later. The phrase "come after me" makes reference to Christ's place of exaltation during his future kingdom. However, the road He was about to travel was a rocky and rough road that led to the cross. His disciples had much to learn and he was preparing them for hard times ahead. His proposition is not one of salvation from sin, but about reward. His disciples were already believers. It is improper for us to attribute this proposition as an invitation to common salvation. Contextually, He is speaking to believers who are being prepared to put their faith into action to a greater degree than they ever imagined. Thus, this proposition is one for discipleship. Discipleship is costly for the believer as opposed to the free gift of salvation. Discipleship is about obedience on a daily basis. Discipleship focuses on our works. Discipleship is about submitting to the Lordship of Christ. Disciples are not born they are made. Let's look at the components of the road that Jesus walked.

**Self denial is typified in Christ's perfect example.**

If ever a man displayed an attitude of complete denial of self it was Christ. He gave to us a perfect example. I am reminded of what He said in Matthew 11:29:

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

He invites believers to "learn" from Him. As we consider His words please remember the phrase "No pain, No gain." Jesus did not promise a life of comfort and material blessing. In fact, he taught a life of struggle and difficulty. If we are to follow in the footsteps of our Savior we must be prepared for a sometimes difficult journey.

So what does it mean to deny oneself? The opposite of deny is to agree. If I deny self I will not agree with what I want to do. I will put others before me. Primarily, I will put the Lord in first place. I will seek to please Him and not myself. I am reminded of Paul's words to the Philippian church in Philippians 2:3-8:

3 Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. 4 Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. 5 Let this mind be in you,



which was also in Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: 7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: 8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Denial of self involves having the same mind as Christ. He totally yielded His will to that of the Father. You may ask, how we can follow Christ in this aspect? Certainly we cannot attain the same level of self denial as Christ! No, we cannot, for He was perfect in every way. However, we are commanded to follow Him and seek to imitate Him as much as possible. Scripture is replete with admonitions to deny self, humble ourselves, and serve others. It is important to realize that as believers we should be in a constant state of change. We should not be spiritually stagnate. Our sanctification is progressive. We will always face a battle but the victories should increase.

**Taking up the cross is a figure of speech which signifies self denial and submission to Christ's authority.**

Cultural differences are important to understand when we explore the truths of scripture. The Roman government used crucifixion as a form of capital punishment for various reasons. One was to show publicly the authority they had over their victims. When Jesus used this phrase He was using language with which the disciples could understand and relate. Up to this point they were not thinking about death, suffering, or humiliation because of their association with Jesus. He is now introducing this difficult fact to them in vivid terms. Let's consider the implications this truth has for us today.

**Cross bearing is a daily battle for the believer.**

It is interesting to note the parallel passage in Luke's gospel. Luke 9:23 says:

And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.

Notice the word "daily." Cross bearing for you and I means to submit our will to the will of God on a **daily** basis. Romans 12:1-2 gives us wonderful instruction as to how we are to live our lives in the will of God.

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

When the Lord saved us from sin He did that without any of our works. Since we are justified in His sight, we now have the choice to serve ourselves or Him on a daily basis. Paul made reference to the idea of daily cross bearing in 1 Corinthians 15:31 where he said, "I die daily."

In 2 Corinthians 4:10 he said:

Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.

In Colossians 3:5 he told us to:

Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

The cross was an instrument of death and the believer is to mortify or put to death the flesh and walk in the spirit daily. Later in Colossians 3:16 Paul tells us how we can accomplish the destruction of the flesh and its desires on a daily basis. Verse 16 says:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

It is the Word of God that accomplishes the destruction of the flesh. As we submit to His will, which is revealed in His Word, we will be victorious over the flesh.

**Follow me speaks of discipleship/fellowship and denotes the pupil/master relationship.**

Jesus has now succinctly laid out a proposition that is very difficult for his disciples to swallow. Following Christ in discipleship is a difficult road. It does not promise immediate material wealth, popularity, prosperity or anything else that normally appeals to our fleshly desires. The disciples up to this point enjoyed popularity and were expecting a position in Christ's coming Kingdom. Now Jesus has outlined a difficult road that must be traveled in its entirety in order for them to have a place of honor in His kingdom.

The cross is now in view, although He has not directly told them he was going to be crucified. Crucifixion was the ultimate in humiliation. The process could last for days where the subject was naked before all those who passed by. The truth being introduced is that the cross would precede the crown. Christ must suffer the cross before He enjoyed the crown in His Kingdom. So also must his followers suffer prior to exaltation. This biblical principle must be fully understood by believers: suffering precedes exaltation.

**Discipline, submission, and passion are all associated with following Christ.**

Again, if ever a man were our example Christ is the man. He was an extremely disciplined man. He was deeply committed to knowing and submitting to His Father's will. He was a man of intense prayer. He made it a habit of rising early for prayer. He allowed the scripture to permeate His thought life. When tempted in the wilderness He turned to scripture to defeat the enemy. When he was tempted by the Pharisees He many times turned to the scriptures to answer and defeat them. If we hope to follow him we must be men and women of like passion. We

must realize the road will be a difficult one. The journey is one that demands self denial and submission to the Lord's will and not our own. In order to accomplish this we must follow Christ's example and be men and women of intense Bible study and prayer. We must want more than anything else in our lives to know the will of God. We must seek to know His character, attributes, likes, and dislikes. We must understand that God speaks to us through His Word! We cannot expect to follow or please Christ if we are not in His Word and on our knees on a daily basis.

All through Jesus teaching was the principle of submission. Let's read a few passages in Matthew to further illustrate this doctrine.

26 But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; 27 And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: 28 Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. (Matthew 20:26-28)

11 But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. 12 And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted. (Matthew 23:11-12)

Jesus is saying in both of these passages that being a servant in this life will lead to being a sovereign in the life to come. Those who humble themselves now will be exalted in His kingdom.

### **Jesus promises reward for following Him in v. 25b**

Verse 25 is an interesting verse that demands our close attention. We must remember the context and determine the meaning of several key words in the passage: namely the words life, save and lose. The word for life in the Greek text is (psuche). It is the same word used in verse 26 for soul. In context, it is used to describe our will and desires. The word save is the word (sozo) in Greek, which means to deliver or protect. The word for lose is (apollumi) in Greek, which means to destroy fully.

### **Losing our life means to follow Christ in the way of self denial and cross bearing.**

Understanding the meaning of these key words helps us more fully understand what Jesus was saying. Looking at the overall context and understanding how the words are placed together, their syntax, we see Jesus is not talking about heaven or hell. We have already established the context of the passage does not concern the gospel of grace as it relates to our eternal destination. Jesus is speaking to His disciples about His proposition for discipleship. Thus, to lose ones life simply means to follow Christ! He has defined what it means to follow him in verse 24. Christ is telling His disciples that reward awaits them in His coming Kingdom if they lose (destroy) their life (desires) on earth. This is seen contextually in verse 27:

For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.

If we walk the path Jesus walked we can expect to receive reward with Him in like fashion. God's Word abounds with promises to the faithful believer and Jesus had a great deal to say about rewarding faithfulness. Let's examine a few passages to expound further upon this doctrine. In Matthew 5:12 Jesus says:

Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Jesus was speaking to his disciples about being persecuted. If they lived the way he prescribed in the prior 9 verses, the beatitudes, they would enjoy great reward. His teaching was that of submission, meekness, mercy, and peacemaking in the believer's life. This teaching is directly in line with the passage in chapter 16 which is summarized in the phrase "follow me." There is great future reward for following Him! There is also great temporal cost.

In Matthew chapter 6 he continues to speak of reward and laying up treasures in heaven. The focus was on trusting God and walking in His ways. Again, this can be summarized in the phrase "follow me."

Matthew chapter 10 verses 41 and 42 speak of a prophet's reward and a righteous man's reward. We could go on and on to reference the teaching of rewards in Scripture. Suffice it to say that the mention of reward in Matthew 16 must apply to those who are believers and the scope of that reward is in direct correlation to Christ's coming Kingdom.

The apostle Paul was very familiar with the doctrine of following Christ for reward. Observe his words in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27:

24 Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. 25 And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. 26 I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: 27 But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

Notice Paul's reference to bringing his body into subjection. He is reiterating Christ's teaching of self denial and cross bearing. In essence, Paul is teaching believers that he and they must follow Christ. Paul made it his burning desire to follow Christ. He knew the prize awaited him if he finished the race.

Notice what he says in Philippians 3:14:

I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

The prize is the ability to rule and reign with Christ. In this passage Paul calls it the “high calling” or it could be translated the “upward call.” At the end of his life the Lord revealed his reward to him. Notice Paul’s dying words in 2 Timothy 4:7-8:

7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: 8 Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

One other passage that is worth our attention is 2 Timothy 2:12:

If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us.

We see from this passage the fact that suffering or enduring for Christ yields reward (reigning). The opposite is also brought out in this passage that leads into our next point.

**The cost for not following Christ is to lose our reward in His coming millennial kingdom v. 25a, 26.**

Jesus spoke plainly and warned His disciples of the disastrous consequences associated with not following Him. To save one’s life now would cause them to lose it during His coming kingdom. The disciples had received a great amount of “light”; they had walked, talked, learned, eaten, and lived with the Son of God! Their responsibility was great as it related to spreading of the gospel and accomplishing God’s will. God had chosen them for the task and with their privilege came great responsibility. To turn their back and not follow Christ would have serious repercussions.

In verse 26 Jesus expounds further upon the idea of losing the life. The word for soul in the Greek text is the same exact word as life in verse 25. Jesus asks what has a man profited or gained if he does not follow Christ in discipleship. The pleasures of sin for a season cannot be compared with the glory that will be afforded the faithful who follow Christ. The picture Christ paints is that of a man who owns the entire world. Even that kind of riches and glory cannot be compared to what Christ will share with those who follow him in discipleship. Notice what Jesus tells Peter in Matthew 19:27-30:

27 Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? 28 And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 29 And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life. 30 But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.

## **Saving our life now is deciding to walk contrary to Christ.**

Ephesians chapter 5 illustrates the decision a believer has as it relates to following or not following Christ. Let's look at this passage closely:

1 Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; 2 And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour. 3 But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; 4 Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. 5 For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. 6 Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. (Ephesians 5:1-6)

Paul strongly admonishes the Ephesian believers to walk in love and follow Christ. He says they should not walk like the world. This along with numerous other admonitions in scripture show us that believers should always be on guard and diligent about their walk with the Lord. It is very possible for us to fall into sin and walk in our old man of flesh and not in our new man of spirit. In the previous chapter of Ephesians Paul told them to put off the former lifestyle and put on a new one fashioned after righteousness and holiness.

## **Losing our life there means to forfeit any reward in the coming kingdom.**

Paul makes a bold statement in verse 5 of Ephesians 5. He tells the believers that those who chose to walk in the old man or the flesh will not have any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ. We don't have time to do an in depth study on inheritance but we will look at it briefly.

Inheritance in scripture is used primarily in two ways. Context always governs the meaning. Most of the time inheritance speaks of reward for faithfulness. This is seen vividly in the Pentateuch where second generation Israel via the leadership of Joshua inherited the land. The opposite can be seen of the first generation of Israelites who forfeited their inheritance because of their unbelief and unfaithfulness. They were prohibited by God from entering the promised land of reward.

In the New Testament, inheritance is viewed basically the same way. Colossians 3:23-25 illustrates the relation between reward and inheritance.

23 And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; 24 Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. 25 But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons.

Thus, we can see that to lose our inheritance as a believer is to lose our reward. The reward is rulership with Christ in His kingdom.

Notice what Jesus says in Revelation 3:21:

To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

If we lose our reward we are prohibited from participating in Christ's coming millennial kingdom. Further, we should understand that rewards are eternal in nature. Hence, after the millennial kingdom we will enjoy rewards with the Lord throughout the ages. Consequently, loss of rewards is also eternal. The scriptures do not indicate that we will be able to earn rewards after the judgment seat of Christ.

Take heed to Hebrews chapters 3 and 4. The writer of Hebrews is addressing the "holy brethren" in verse one of chapter 3. Notice what he says in Hebrews 3:12

Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.

Now look at Hebrews 3:19-4:1

19 So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. 1 Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.

The writer is addressing the brethren and includes himself in the warning. There is a great deal to lose for the unfaithful and unbelieving brethren. It may seem strange to say that the brethren can be referred to as those who don't believe. However, we must realize we are all able to live our lives in doubt, especially when we face difficulty. We must believe what God's Word says, especially as it relates to the reward He wants to give us for being faithful. If we don't believe He is a rewarder of those who seek Him diligently (cf. Heb 11:6) then we will easily lose heart and give up. But if we understand that God is going to recompense His faithful servants and that our labor in the Lord is not in vain (cf. 1 Cor 15:58) we are less apt to grow weary!

One last passage I want to bring to your attention is the parable of the talents in Matthew chapter 25. This parable speaks of the judgment seat of Christ and Christ's faithful assessment of the talents he has given to his servants. Verse 19 says the lord of the servants reckoned with them or judged their performance. Those who used their talents wisely were given praise and allowed to enter into the joy of the lord. However, the servant who did not use his talent was called a wicked and slothful servant. His lord dealt harshly with him because of his unfaithfulness. Notice Matthew 25:28-30:

28 Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents.  
29 For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. 30 And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The disobedient servant is not allowed to enter the joy of the lord. He lost that privilege or reward and was cast outside in the darkness where he is in great anguish. This casting into the darkness is not a picture of a servant being cast into the lake of fire. Rather, the darkness outside refers to a place of dishonor. This servant was not worthy of reward and received for the wrong he had done (cf. Col 3:25). In shame (cf. 1 John 2:28) he does not enjoy the benefits of those servants who were faithful. Some want to debate whether this is a description of a Christian who stands before the judgment seat of Christ. Some say the servant described is a Jew. While I believe it describes a Christian at the judgment seat of Christ, the main point is that God deals justly with His servants – whether Jew or Christian. Servants who are not faithful will receive just recompense – loss of reward, honor, and commendation.

## **Conclusion**

Please listen, and listen closely to what Jesus has to say. If we choose to follow Him on earth and identify with His sufferings, we will enjoy unfathomable reward in His kingdom. However, the cost for the believer is extremely high. It requires that we submit to Christ's will and Lordship in every aspect of our lives. It requires that we live a disciplined submissive life, seeking to serve others and not ourselves. It requires mortification of our fleshly desires. It is likened to a race and a fight that is never ending until the day we die. It is the most difficult road we can choose to travel. But, the return on our investment is out of this world!

If, however, after we have been saved by His marvelous grace and given exceeding and gracious promises, we chose to live for the here and now, we will not share in His coming glory; suffering must precede glory. He is no respecter of persons and will reward us in accordance with our works. We will experience indescribable loss due to our unfaithfulness.

Remember, No Pain, No Gain!!!