

# **Directed Study on Eschatology:**

## **The Science of Last Things**

A Comparative and Persuasive Paper

Submitted to:

Professor Craig Hazen  
CSAP 695

Fulfilling One Unit of Essential Christian Doctrine II

Submitted by:

Paul Viggiano

Completed 3/17/00

*Directed Study on Eschatology: The Science of  
Last Things*

Original Essay Submission, March 2000  
First Printed Edition, April 2020

© Paul Viggiano (Lulu Press, Inc.)  
All rights reserved.

The following paper was submitted by Pastor Paul Viggiano in March 2000 in order to fulfill a requirement for a Master's-level course at Biola University in California.

*Soli Deo Gloria*



# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<i>Page 9</i>
<b>I. Is Eschatology Important</b>	<i>Page 11</i>
<b>II. Approach the Scriptures</b>	<i>Page 13</i>
A. The Analogy of Faith and Literalism	
B. Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology	
<b>III. Four Dominant Methods of Approaching Prophecy</b>	<i>Page 21</i>
A. The Historicist	
B. The Idealist	
C. The Futurist	
D. The Preterist	
<b>IV. The Millennium</b>	<i>Page 27</i>
A. Historic Premillennialism	
B. Dispensational Premillennialism	
C. Amillennialism	
D. Postmillennialism	
<b>V. But What About...?</b>	<i>Page 37</i>
A. What About the Temple?	
B. What About the Olive Tree?	
C. What About the Olivet Discourse?	
D. What About Daniel's Image and the Roman Empire?	
E. What About the Land?	
F. What About Daniel's Seventy Weeks?	
G. When Does, or Did, the Kingdom of God Begin?	
H. Are Things Supposed to Get Worse?	
I. What About the Man of Sin?	
J. The Thessalonian Problem	

<b>VI. The Revelation</b>	<i>Page 51</i>
<b>Glossary</b>	<i>Page 65</i>
<b>Bibliography and Recommended Reading</b>	<i>Page 67</i>







# *Introduction*

November 1, 1999, the cover of *Newsweek* donned a copy of the painting ‘*The Vision of Ezekiel*’ by Raphael. It is a painting, which shows the ominous coming of angels and God’s judgment. In letters bigger than the title of its own magazine is the word ‘PROPHECY’ with a sub-heading, “What the Bible says about the end of the world.”

There may not be a section in any Christian bookstore that attracts more browsers than the shelves dedicated to eschatology (the study or science of last things). The best-selling Christian book in the entire decade of the seventies was *The Late Great Planet Earth*. This was a book bought by Christians and non-Christians alike which popularized the study of last things.

Although the views proposed in that book will not be found in any confession or creed (or anywhere else) prior to 1800, the influence of the book, and other books with the same theological flavor, was phenomenal. So much so, that those views have become somewhat of an untested modern orthodoxy. To hold views inconsistent with the brand of eschatology found in *LGPE* will cause not a few eyebrows to be raised. For this reason a study of the ancient confessions on this subject should be of value to Christians.

At arguably richer theological times, none of the great masters of the faith held to the views that dominate today’s airwaves and bookstores. This is not to suggest that there were no disagreements among early brilliant theologians. But it should get our attention that in all the disagreements, no one held the view that is most popular today. It should be an assumption among Christians that the Church is a spiritually richer place when it holds more closely to Biblical Christianity. We should also note that today’s dominant view is prevailing during a period of apostasy in western evangelicalism. We, therefore, should not be sheepish about questioning what the majority of a lukewarm church believes about the Christian faith. None of this makes any position right or wrong. But it should make us a little more comfortable when giving modern notions of Christian thinking a

healthy critique—especially as we examine alternatives that have a richer theological history.

We must keep in mind that our purpose here is not merely to lay siege to one view. I mention the most popular view simply because it has been my experience that many people who hold this view think it is a test of orthodoxy. Our purposes here will be to examine the value of eschatology and the differing positions of eschatology. I will also give my slant, that is, the position that I hold to be most Biblical. So you must keep in mind that this isn't merely an academic pursuit but a persuasive pursuit on my part.

Finally, I will seek to answer in advance the onslaught of questions I anticipate will come forward. I recently taught a twelve-week class on the Westminster Confession, which ended with the study of eschatology. Consistent with most historical confessions, it taught—something to this effect—that Jesus will return and that will be the end of history. Not surprisingly all the hands flew up. The questions “Who is the anti-Christ?”, “What about the mark of the beast?”, “Who are the 144,000?”, “What about the millennium?” and so on, all came to people's minds. I will try to answer these questions in advance, from all perspectives, and then from what I believe to be the most biblical perspective.

The following will be, more or less, a laymen's guide to eschatology. The serious student can use this information as a springboard into deeper study. At the end of this class you should be able to understand and articulate the major eschatological positions. You should have gained an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the positions. And as you read the Scriptures you should be able to begin to determine which position is most consistent with the general tenor of the Old and New Testaments. Again, I will reveal what I believe to be the most solid position. I will also reveal what I believe to be the weaknesses of other positions.

# *I. Is Eschatology Important?*

**“Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near” (Revelation 1:3).**

Some might question if studying eschatology has any value at all. Many pastors I know have ducked the issue altogether. They make jokes about being pan-millennialists. They say it will all pan out in the end. Or they suggest that it is simply an unknowable aspect of the Christian faith. Some wonder what difference it makes. They assert that there doesn't seem to be any direct application in terms of personal behavior. There are a number of reasons, however, why eschatology is important.

The most obvious reason eschatology is important is because it is part of God's word. We certainly don't think the Holy Spirit added a branch of theology to the Bible that was unnecessary. Eschatology is part of God's word, so to propose that it is useless to the Christian is an insult to God. It is part of God's word and it deserves our study. It may be a difficult subject, but the entire Bible is difficult. That certainly is no excuse for never opening it. On the other hand it may not be as difficult as one might think. I once thought Calvinism was difficult but now see it in the Scriptures quite easily. Eschatology might be quite easy if approached properly.

However one views it, the Scriptures are to be studied because they have inherent value as the word of God. Even beyond this, the third verse of the opening chapter of Revelation promises blessings to those who read and keep the words of this prophecy. Prophecy is a worthy and necessary aspect of the devotions of a Christian. It is unfortunate that prophecy, in some circles, has become little more than Christian psychic hot-line sensationalism. Even still, the subject must not be ignored simply because it has reached levels of absurdity among certain sects.

The argument that it is all going to pan out is a short-sighted notion. This attitude reveals a lack of interest in participating in what God is doing in history. Eschatology tells us what God's plan is in history. We are to work and pray toward that plan. As James Henley Thornwell (1812-62) stated,

**If the Church could be aroused to a deeper sense of the glory that awaits her, she would enter with a warmer spirit into the struggles that are before her.<sup>1</sup>**

---

<sup>1</sup> Keith A. Mathison, *Postmillennialism, An Eschatology of Hope*, (P & R Publishing, 1999), p. 47.

## *II. Approaching the Scriptures*

### **A. The Analogy of Faith and Literalism**

Before seeking to determine what the Bible teaches regarding prophecy, we must determine how we are to approach prophetic passages (or any passages of Scripture for that matter). Many modern Bible teachers use literalism as their primary hermeneutic (principle of interpretation). We can speculate as to why this might be the case,<sup>2</sup> but it should be put forth at the beginning of this study that literalism has not always been the driving hermeneutic of Protestant Christianity. The Westminster Confession of Faith, 1:9 teaches,

**The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.**

This method of interpretation is known as the analogy of faith. It is the idea of laying Scripture next to Scripture and letting the clear help us understand the unclear. When an inspired writer of Scripture interprets another passage, concept or word of Scripture a certain way, we are free (if not required) to interpret it the same way.

#### **1. The Temple**

For example, there is much talk today about the rebuilding of a physical temple in Jerusalem. Those who use the literal approach as their primary hermeneutic promote this. Those who view the temple as the body of Christ (somewhat of a spiritual application—or perhaps

---

<sup>2</sup> Perhaps it is a response to the neo-orthodox tendency to spiritualize huge portions of Scripture.

metaphorically) are regarded as doing injustice to the text. But consider the words recorded by the Apostle John,

**“Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” Then the Jews said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?” But He was speaking of the temple of His body. Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said” (John 2:19-22).**

Certainly Jesus wasn't a theological liberal. Jesus explains the temple a certain way. We are free (again, if not required) to understand it the same way. This is the analogy of faith.

## **2. Israel**

Another example has to do with the nation of Israel. Some understand the promises given to Israel to apply across the board to the physical nation of Israel. Once again we see the literal hermeneutic as the primary interpretive agent. But consider the words of the Apostle Paul:

**“And if you *are* Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:29).**

Christians should not take the liberty to “spiritualize” passages or words in Scripture as it suits them. But when the Apostle Paul, speaking by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, tells Christians they are Abraham's seed, we must exercise the analogy of faith and allow the Scriptures to tell us what the Scriptures mean. This does not necessarily mean that every time Israel or Abraham's seed is mentioned it is referring to New Testament Christians. But we must certainly allow this to be a driving influence in our interpretation of Scripture.

## B. Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology

Two other major distinctions must be addressed regarding the way the Scriptures are approached. The methods in question are called dispensationalism versus covenant theology. Dispensationalism will generally have literalism as a driving hermeneutic. Covenant theology will generally have the analogy of faith as a driving hermeneutic.

The system known as dispensationalism has its roots in the Plymouth Brethren, more specifically John Nelson Darby,<sup>3</sup> and started in 1830. It gained popularity through the 1800s but became extremely popular around the turn of the century with the widespread publication of the Scofield Reference Bible. Proponents of dispensationalism include Clarence Larkin, Charles Ryrie, Lewis Sperry Chafer, John Walvoord, Hal Lindsey, Chuck Smith, Chuck Swindoll, Jack Van Impe and Chuck Missler.

In short, dispensationalism divides the bible into distinct dispensations or eras in history. Different dispensationalists divide things up differently, but in general they see six or seven dispensations:

1. Innocence (before the fall)
2. Conscience (up to the flood)
3. Government (up to the tower of Babel)
4. Patriarchs (the period of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob)
5. Law (the period of Moses)
6. Grace (the church age)
7. Millennium (a future thousand year period of bliss)

Others might include the age of perfection in eternity or the age of the church during the writing of the New Testament, etc.

We will find that covenant theology does a similar thing in understanding eras in history (certainly we are not in an era where we sacrifice animals any longer), but there is a difference between the way the two understand the dispensations or eras.

Dispensationalism sees the dispensations as self-contained. The promises, the requirements and, for some, even the means by

---

<sup>3</sup> Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Baker Book House, 1984), pp. 292,293.

which men are saved differ and start afresh from dispensation to dispensation.

## 1. Under The Law

For example, many dispensationalists will assert that if a certain law is not repeated in the age of grace, a New Testament Christian is under no obligation to seek to obey it.<sup>4</sup> It is simply a law for a different dispensation. They view the comment of the Apostle Paul in Romans 7:14 as a proof text for this idea.

**“For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace” (Romans 6:14).**

Paul anticipates this error and rapidly addresses it in the next verse.

**“What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!” (Romans 6:15).**

And how does the Christian know what sin is? John tells us in 1 John,

**“Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4).**

New Testament writers did not view the dispensations as self-contained. John here clearly assumes his readers knew, and would seek to obey, the law. Dispensationalists view the dispensations as periods where God tests men and men ultimately fail. They view the present dispensation (the age of grace) as a period in history where failure occurs as well.

---

<sup>4</sup> Bob George, a radio talk-show host on a nationally syndicated program called *People to People* makes this assertion practically on a daily basis.



## 2. The Failure of Christianity

The failure of Christianity is perhaps a shocking concept, but it is the title of a chart on page 771/2 of Clarence Larkin's book on dispensationalism. Larkin writes,

**“It is evident that there are more than a 100 times as many persons born into the world each year, as there are persons ‘New Born’, and that thus far Christianity, as a world converting power, is a failure, all of which proves that, if after 1900 years of gospel preaching the world is not converted, it is not God’s purpose to convert the world by the preaching of the gospel in this age, but simply to gather out an ‘elect body’—the church.**

**The ‘Millennial Age’ will be the ‘Dispensation of the Spirit,’ then righteousness shall cover the earth as the waters cover the deep.”<sup>5</sup>**

Larkin finishes by quoting the eleventh chapter of Isaiah and assigning it to a future millennium. Charles Ryrie, in his study bible, has the same interpretation. It must be noted at this point that this is on page 1030 of Ryrie's study bible. There is no mention, however, of a future millennium (which is a debated subject itself) until page 1919. So even if the millennium were a yet future event (a subject we will address later) it is not spoken of within 889 pages of the promise recorded in Isaiah. This hardly seems to be a natural reading of the text. Especially when just two chapters earlier these promises are associated with the birth of a child (9:6,7). Isaiah writes of no intervening dispensation between the birth of the child and that which is accomplished by the child.

Larkin's failure of Christianity is a hard concept for most dispensationalists to accept. Indeed many of them deny this to be the teaching at all.<sup>6</sup> But consider the words of the founder of Dallas

---

<sup>5</sup> Clarence Larkin *The Greatest Book on dispensational Truth in the World* (Rev. Clarence Larkin Est. 2802 N. Park Ave., Philadelphia 32, Pa. U. S. A., 1918), p. 77 1/2

<sup>6</sup> Revised dispensationalism and progressive dispensationalism are moving in a good direction from the classic position. I am not sure where they will end up so I cannot address it here.

Theological Seminary, perhaps the most influential seminary in America today. Lewis Sperry Chafer states,

**“Strictly speaking, the Church has no mission; for God has never commissioned her as a corporate body to undertake any task whatsoever. It is true that by means of the Church, God is making known His wisdom, and will yet make known His grace to the angelic hosts (Eph. 3:10; 2:7); but this calls for no effort or sacrifice on her part. All divine commissions are to the individual believer; and this is reasonable, since Christian service is the exercise of a personal gift in the power of the indwelling Spirit. It is noticeable that no service program for the church succeeds until it becomes a service program for the individual.**

**Another error to be avoided in connection with this subject is the supposition that the divine purpose in this age is the conversion of the world. It is true that the world will be converted and there is yet to be a kingdom of righteousness in the earth; but according to the Bible, that day of a transformed earth, so far from being the result of Christian service, is said to follow rather than precede the return of Christ, and is said to be made possible only by His personal presence and immediate power.”<sup>7</sup>**

This is a hard pill for most Christians to swallow, but this is classic dispensationalism.

### **3. Classifications of People**

Dispensationalists also see three classifications of persons: Jew, Gentile and Christian. The covenant theologian sees two classifications: those in the covenant and those outside the covenant. Whether Jew or gentile makes no difference. When the

---

<sup>7</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Major Bible Themes*, (Dunham Publishing Company, 1926), p. 212.

dispensationalist approaches the Scriptures he must figure out which person is being addressed in which dispensation. It can be a very difficult task to keep all this straight, especially when we consider the make-up of the future millennium. It is taught by dispensationalists to be a time of law with the presence of the glorified Christ, glorified saints and unbelievers.

#### **4. Covenant Theology—A Progressive Plan**

The covenant theologian looks at the dispensations quite differently. They are progressive. God's plan, purposes and requirements do not change from era to era. His plan is unfolding throughout history. God made a covenant that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent in Genesis 3:15 and the remainder of the Scriptures gives the details of how that works itself out. Other covenants<sup>8</sup> we read of in Scripture relate to God's overall covenant of grace. They are not self-contained dispensations but all relate to Christ. We see this in the covenants:

- In the Noachic Covenant, God promises not to destroy the world, that the work of redemption might proceed.
- In the Abrahamic Covenant we see through whom the Savior would come.
- In the Mosaic Covenant we see a full expression of the Law, which contains the righteous requirements for salvation.
- In the Davidic Covenant we see the Savior as King of kings.
- In the new covenant we see all the covenants come together and fulfilled in Christ.

The dispensations and covenants are not designed so much to be a time of testing and failure as they are designed to foreshadow their fulfillment in Christ. And the new covenant will not fail to accomplish all the promises prophesied and foreshadowed in the previous covenants.

---

<sup>8</sup> Excluding the covenant of works given to Adam.

## **5. Implied Continuity or Discontinuity**

Dispensationalism is compartmental. There is an implied discontinuity between covenants. In other words, if the laws and promises aren't repeated in the new covenant, it is to be assumed that they are no longer in force. Covenant theology (although it does recognize some discontinuities, e.g., animal sacrifices) is a progressive understanding of the unfolding plan of God in history. There is an implied continuity. In other words if God makes a law or promise it is to be assumed that that law or promise is still in effect unless He, and He alone, abrogates (repeals) it. It is critical to come to terms with these concepts in order to approach prophetic passages.

### *III. Four Dominant Methods of Approaching Prophecy*

Having discussed literalism, the analogy of faith, dispensationalism and covenant theology in general, let us now approach the subject of eschatological and prophetic hermeneutics specifically, especially the way Revelation is approached. Men's attempts to interpret prophetic scripture have led them down many paths. The four most dominant methods (or views) employed in interpreting prophecy are: the historicist, the idealist (symbolic or spiritual), the futurist, and the preterist.

#### **A. The Historicist**

The historicist views Revelation as a survey of the whole history of the Church. Through the symbols of Revelation we can discern what has and will continue to happen throughout church history. Some historicists would assert, for example, that the breaking of the seven seals in Revelation 6 and 7 are the barbarian invasions that sacked the western Roman Empire. The scorpion/locusts that come out of the bottomless pit in chapter 9 are the Arab hordes attacking the eastern Roman Empire followed by the Turks represented as the horses with serpents for tails and flame-throwers for mouths. The beast of chapter 13 represents the papacy.<sup>9</sup>

Some historicists apply the "year-for-a-day principle." According to this principle one need only interpret the days given in Revelation as years in order to come up with the exact dates that events are to happen. Through the use of this, and other principles in the historicist method, the rise of Mohammedanism has been identified with the fifth trumpet and even the Protestant Reformation is found in Christ's admonitions to the church at Sardis.

---

<sup>9</sup> Steve Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views, A Parallel Commentary* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), p. 34.

Some difficulties in the historicist method are: 1) the lack of ability of its advocates to come to any original and independent agreement regarding the specific fulfillment of the prophecies; 2) the tendency historicists have to find the culmination of the prophecies happening in their own generation; 3) the failure to take into consideration things happening in the church outside of Europe; 4) the difficulty which arises when one considers that, as history continues, it broadens the scope of time for these prophecies to be fulfilled, thus rendering it almost impossible to determine genuine time frames.<sup>10</sup>

The historicist approach has very few adherents today. Though the following (some to a limited degree) have used it in their understanding of certain events in history: John Wycliffe, John Knox, William Tyndale, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, Philip Melancthon, Sir Isaac Newton, Jan Huss, John Fox, John Wesley, Jonathon Edwards, George Whitefield, Charles Finney, Charles Spurgeon, Matthew Henry and other notable theologians. I must also point out that for many theologians of antiquity, eschatology wasn't a completely thought-out doctrine. For example, many of those listed above would employ the preterist, futurist or idealist method as well as the historicist method when it came to certain passages.

## **B. The Idealist (Symbolic or Spiritual)**

The idealist does not look for any specific historic fulfillment of the prophecies of Revelation. What the reader finds in the Revelation is a recurring (generally thought to be seven) expression of the triumph of good over evil. The book is to be taken symbolically and not literally at all. There is encouragement for believers in all ages because the themes are continually present in the Church. Christians can continue to take joy in Christ's victory over Satan, the vindication of martyrs, the sovereignty of God and love for His Church, etc. William Hendriksen states,

**“The theme is the victory of Christ and of His Church over the dragon (Satan) and his helpers.”<sup>11</sup>**

---

<sup>10</sup> Gregg, Revelation, *Four Views, A Parallel Commentary* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), pp. 36,37.

<sup>11</sup> William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, (Baker Book House, 1940), p. 8.

According to some idealists, the beast from the sea may be identified as the satanically inspired political opposition to the church in any age. The Harlot represents either the compromised church or the seduction of the world in general. Calamities, wars and plagues are things that happen on a repetitive basis throughout history. There is no need to identify these things with any specific historic event.<sup>12</sup>

Many good theologians have held this position through history and it definitely has some strengths. For example, even if the events aren't specific in nature, that is, not physically happening during the real course of history, it would not exclude the idealistic and spiritual encouragement all Christians would receive with their recognition of how their God works. If your pastor gives an illustration to make a point during a sermon, it doesn't make a great deal of difference whether it is fictitious or not. You still learn the principle.

The problem with the idealist view is that the tenor of the Revelation doesn't seem to be merely symbolic in its entirety. Chapter one, verse one reads as if some real event "must shortly come to pass." If your pastor starts telling you stories that aren't reality and tries to pass them off as reality, you might have a problem.

### **C. The Futurist**

The futurist approach is clearly the most popular position today. Adherents of this position include C. I. Scofield, Lewis Sperry Chafer, John Walvoord, Chuck Swindoll, Chuck Smith, Billy Graham, Charles Ryrie, Hal Lindsey and pretty much every popular, high-profile media theologian today.

The futurist places the rapture of the Church at Revelation 4:1. So the bulk of what happens in Revelation happens with the church absent from the world. As the name indicates, the futurist understands the vast majority of what is written in Revelation is to happen in the future: not the immediate future from the Apostle John's perspective, but rather the distant future. Most of what one reads in Revelation, according to the futurist, happens after the

---

<sup>12</sup> Gregg, Revelation, *Four Views, A Parallel Commentary* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), p. 43.

rapture of the Church, which (depending on a tribulation argument among futurists) is seven years prior to the second coming of Christ.

The futurist generally uses literalism as their primary hermeneutic. Therefore, they must obviously reject the idealist approach. And since there was never a time when the sun was darkened, and the moon did not give its light or the stars fell from heaven or a third of the sea turned to blood, it is not possible that these things have already happened. And since the Church must be raptured before any of this takes place the historicist must be wrong as well.

The futurist would understand the majority of the material found in chapters 6 through 19 of Revelation to be a seven year period of tribulation, the second half being worse than the first. The futurist understands the Apostle John as giving his best effort to explain the visions he had of twentieth (or now twenty-first) century technology through the words of a first century man. He sees literal hundred pound hailstones, locusts that sting like scorpions, and an actual physical mark of the beast that would be likened to a sort of tattoo.

Many futurists go so far in their literal quest that sensible literalism disappears altogether. For example, it is not uncommon for the futurist to find in John's visions 200 million Chinese troops, cobra helicopters, nuclear war and a global cash-less economic system. None of this is literally taught in Revelation. Not only this, but the literalism can only go so far. For example no one expects real stars to fall out of the heavens and no one thinks they're going to see a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns. Literalism, pushed too far actually becomes quite absurd.

Earlier we discussed the analogy of faith. The book of Revelation has over 500 allusions to the Old Testament (e.g. the eating of a scroll or cherubim and seraphim). It has over 100 allusions to the New Testament. All in all there are, in merely 22 chapters, over 600 allusions to other books in the Bible.<sup>13</sup> With increased emphasis it must be stated that, of all the books in the Bible, the Revelation must be interpreted by the analogy of faith.

One problem with the futurist position is that in all its attempts to literally interpret symbolic visions, it fails to take a literal approach

---

<sup>13</sup> Dr. Greg Bahnsen, *The Message of the Revelation* (Covenant Media, Tape Series), tape 2.



to the portion of the text that is clearly to be taken literally. The context is set in chapter one, verses one and three. Using very literal language, without a hint of symbolism, it is asserted, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—*things which must shortly take place*” (italics mine). Many efforts have been made to dismiss what this seems to say in a very straightforward manner (something we will discuss later), but verse three buttresses the point beyond debate: “Blessed *is* he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; *for the time is near*” (italics mine).

Another problem with the futurist position is that it renders the book of Revelation 90 percent irrelevant to its original readers (another important hermeneutic) since they weren’t within 2000 years of the fulfillment of the vast majority of subjects covered in the text. Since the rapture occurs at chapter four, the book is also irrelevant for the vast majority of Christians in history also, even those who are alive in the last days, since every person who would be reading the book, for the most part, is raptured. Other problems with this position will be discussed as the topics demand.

#### **D. The Preterist**

The preterist sees the vast majority of what is written in the Revelation as having been fulfilled in the past (or John’s near future). Over and against the historic method it sees the fulfillment of these prophecies (especially the judgments) as not happening over thousands of years, but shortly after the time of the writing, namely the siege of Jerusalem by Rome in A. D. 70.

It must be noted that radical preterism is considered heretical by virtue of ecumenical creeds, councils and confessions. It denies the second coming of Christ as an actual future event, which will be the consummation of history. This is not an orthodox understanding of eschatology. What will be put forth here is moderate or partial preterism. Along with all the orthodox creeds and councils, moderate preterism (which we will merely call preterism) believes in a future second coming of Christ and a physical resurrection of the righteous and unrighteous.

The strengths of the preterist view lie in the fact that: 1) it renders the book very relevant to its original readers; they were being

heavily persecuted by the Jews and Rome. John was assuring them that there would be a time of vindication. 2) It can take the opening address (1:1,3) and closing words of chapter 22 literally. These verses demand a soon-to-be-expected working out of the events prophesied. 3) It is consistent with Jesus' teaching in the Olivet discourse (Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21) which refers to the destruction of the temple (Matthew 24:2), which Jesus taught would happen in that generation (Matthew 24:34). 4) A review of Josephus' account of the fall of Jerusalem is quite consistent with the verbiage of Revelation. Other strengths of this position will be brought to light as topics are discussed.

## ***IV. The Millennium***

The millennium is also an important issue in eschatology. Millennium is a term which means, “a thousand years”. It is found only in the twentieth chapter of Revelation. The four most dominant views of the millennium are known as: historic premillennialism, dispensational premillennialism, amillennialism and postmillennialism. The prefix tells you when they think the second coming will occur. The amillennial position, similar to postmillennialists, asserts that the second coming of Christ will be after the millennium. Both premillennial positions assert that the second coming of Christ will happen prior to the millennium.

The methods of approaching prophecy previously discussed (futurist, preterist, historicist, idealist) do not necessarily line up with a specific millennial position. Some postmillennialists are preterists and others historicists, etc. Some positions may be an easier fit with others, but it is important to note that the differing methods of approaching prophecy do not necessarily yield the same millennial outcomes. It must also be noted however that all dispensational premillennialists are futurists.

### **A. Historic Premillennialism**

The historic premillennial position will sound quite familiar in many ways to the dominant modern premillennial position. By the title we know it teaches that Christ comes before the millennium. At the end of the church age there will be the Tribulation. This will be followed by the second coming. At this point the Antichrist will be judged and there will be the resurrection of the righteous (but not the unrighteous). Satan will be bound at this point also.

Also, at this point an unprecedented time of blessing will begin for the Church for a literal thousand years. This will have been established by the physical presence of the glorified Christ. At the end of the thousand years Satan will be released for a short time, seek to create a rebellion, but fail in a short period of time. Finally, there

will be the resurrection and judgment of the unrighteous, followed by the eternal state. One of the strongest proponents of this position was George Eldon Ladd. He wrote *The Gospel of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959) and the *Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974).

One of the biggest differences between the historic and dispensational positions are their views regarding the physical nation of Israel. The historic position does not see Israel as a major player in eschatology. Their views of the dispensations would also be markedly different.

One of the greatest short-comings of the historic premillennial position is the splitting up of the resurrection of the righteous and the unrighteous by a thousand years. Jesus taught,

**“Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation” (John 5:28,29).**

This does not seem to allow a thousand year interval between the resurrections. The kingdom parables seem to indicate the same thing.

**“Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, ‘First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn’” (Matthew 13:30).**

If anything, the tares go first.

**“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats” (Matthew 25:31,32).**

Again, there is no gap of time between the treatment of the sheep and the goats. Some argue that we shouldn't get too much theology out of a parable, but it seems that judgment day is the very point of the parable.

## **B. Dispensational Premillennialism**

Dispensational premillennialism is the most popular view in western evangelicalism today. According to this view the dispensation in which we presently live will end in dismal failure. Evil will grow until it dominates the world. An Antichrist figure will win the affections of most of humanity and will eventually require full submission to him in order to function within society. Fortunately (at least according to some who hold this view) the Church will be raptured before the Great Tribulation that is brought on by this Antichrist.

The Great Tribulation will be a seven-year period where being a Christian will mean certain death. The second three and a half years will be worse than the first. The Tribulation will end with the battle of Armageddon. In the midst of this battle Christ will return to destroy His enemies. At this point He will judge the nations and a literal thousand-year millennium will begin.

The glorified Jesus will then rule the world from the throne of David in Jerusalem where the temple sacrifices will be reinstated as a memorial.<sup>14</sup> Virtually all the promises made to the physical nation of Israel will be fulfilled during this period. Israel will be given the place of honor among the nations. The world will consist of the glorified Christ and resurrected Christians (who have their incorruptible bodies) alongside men and women still living in their natural, pre-resurrected bodies. There will be both saved and unsaved people living in the millennium. They will live to be very old but still die.

At the end of the thousand years, Satan will be released and lead unbelievers in rebellion against Christ and the New Jerusalem. The rebellion will be crushed by fire from heaven. Satan will be cast into the lake of fire and the resurrection of the unjust will take place. After this, the eternal state will begin.

---

<sup>14</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible* (Moody Press, 1976), p. 1299.

The classic dispensationalist views the present dispensation as a parenthesis in history. In short, the prophets of the Old Testament did not see the dispensation of the church age. They saw the cross, then the millennium but not the age in between. It has been compared to two mountain peaks, which seem to be next to each other but are actually separated by a great valley.<sup>15</sup>

The number of difficulties with this view are too numerous to mention here. It has the same resurrection problem as the historic view. Some hold to five distinct judgments and three distinct resurrections.<sup>16</sup> Because it necessitates a futurist view it must ignore the clear time frames of Revelation 1:1,3; Matthew 24:34, etc. It fails to acknowledge Paul's teaching of the unity brought about by the cross: that there is no longer Jew nor gentile in the eyes of God. There was at one time a wall, which separated the two in the temple court. Read Paul's words in Ephesians:

**“Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is*, the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Now,**

---

<sup>15</sup> Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), p. 28.

<sup>16</sup> Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible* (Moody Press, 1976), p. 1954.

**therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:11-22).**

Paul uses terms like “commonwealth of Israel,” creating “one new man from the two,” “fellow citizens,” etc. It is hard to imagine that a Jewish Christian sitting next to a gentile Christian in that church could look across the pew and still think there are promises for him that are not for his Christian brother, in any respect. The dispensationalist is building up the wall that Christ tore down.

Other problems with this view are: 1) The idea that Jesus’ work on the cross was insufficient to accomplish the promises of God. He must return and finish the job. 2) The kingdom (which is equated with the millennium) would be fully established in a cataclysmic way rather than like leaven or a mustard seed. They seem to be making the same error we saw in the triumphal entry. 3) The idea of sacrificing an animal before the glorified Christ, even as a memorial, is abominable. 4) The requirement of the failure of Christianity seems inconsistent with the victorious tone of the Great Commission. 5) The idea of the parenthesis would negate any notion of any prophecy being fulfilled in the church age. If this is the case, then Israel becoming a nation in 1948 couldn’t possibly have been prophesied in the Old Testament. 6) The idea of the glorified Christ living alongside non-Christians on the earth opens the door for some difficult christological problems. Other problems with this system will be addressed along the way.

### **C. Amillennialism**

The amillennialist sees the millennium as the period between the first and second advents. It is a time of the spiritual reign of Christ. Amillennialists see the kingdom of God and the kingdom of

Satan both growing stronger with time. The wheat and the tares are both forces. There will be a limited amount of influence the Christian faith will have on the world, and the prophecies, which indicate global conversion, are to be taken very metaphorically or spiritually.

They also see a brief rebellion by Satan at the end of the millennium. The millennium will be followed by the final resurrection and judgment. The eternal state will then commence. This may be the view that has been held by the majority of Christians in history. We see it as a dominant Roman Catholic view as well as the view of many Reformers.

The strength of this view is found by it's general confessional consistency. That is, there is nothing in this view which is inherently unorthodox or inconsistent with the way the vast majority of the Christian Church has understood what the Bible teaches regarding all forms of theology. For example it doesn't require multiple resurrections or added appearances by Jesus to finish an undone job. Some question the legitimacy of understanding the millennium as not being a literal thousand years. The exercise of the analogy of faith dismisses this criticism. In Scripture, the number one thousand is used quite freely in a metaphorical sense.

**“For every beast of the forest *is* Mine, *and* the cattle on a thousand hills” (Psalm 50:10).**

**“May the LORD God of your fathers make you a thousand times more numerous than you are, and bless you as He has promised you” (Deuteronomy 1:11).**

**“Therefore know that the LORD your God, He *is* God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments” (Deuteronomy 7:9).**

**“How could one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, unless their Rock had sold them, and the LORD had surrendered them” Deuteronomy 32:30)?**



**“Remember His covenant forever, the word which He commanded, for a thousand generations” (1 Chronicles 16:15).**

**“Truly I know *it is* so, but how can a man be righteous before God? If one wished to contend with Him, He could not answer Him one time out of a thousand” (Job 9:2,3).**

**“A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation. I, the Lord, will hasten it in its time” (Isaiah 60:22).**

**“But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day *is* as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (1 Peter 3:8).**

The greatest difficulty with this view (and perhaps its biggest distinction with postmillennialism) is its lack of acknowledgment of the victorious effects of the gospel on the earth. The gates of hell will not prevail against the onslaught of the kingdom of God (Matthew 16:18). There may be wheat and tares but we must remember as Dr. Bahnsen stated, “It is, after all, a wheat field and not a tare field.” Their understanding of Isaiah 65 being the eternal state is strained since people die in it (Isaiah 65:20). Their general understanding of the victory of Christ merely being in the spiritual or ethereal realm leaves a great deal to be desired when one recognizes that the spiritual failure of Adam and Eve affected both the spiritual and physical world. Certainly the victory of Christ will affect both as well.

#### **D. Postmillennialism**

Similar to amillennialism, postmillennialism teaches the millennium to be between the first and second advents of Christ.<sup>17</sup> The greatest distinction between amillennialism and

---

<sup>17</sup> Some postmillennialists believe in a literal thousand years. That is, at a certain point in history, between the two advents of Christ, a thousand year period of blessedness will begin and end with the second coming. That is not the view put forth here.

postmillennialism is one of optimism. Their time frames, in terms of the course of events, are the same. They both believe in a general resurrection and judgment day. They both believe in the spiritual victories accomplished by Christ. The postmillennialist, however, believes that the gospel will change the world the way it changes an individual, i.e., inwardly and outwardly.

The Holy Spirit will draw multitudes to Christ by the preaching of the gospel. This will include ethnic Israel as well. Although they do not teach that every single person on earth will be saved, they do assert that the kingdom of Christ will prevail in every aspect of life and that false kingdoms which rise up against the true kingdom will always fall. Only the kingdom of Christ stands through history. The promises given in the Scriptures regarding a global conversion will be realized by the power of the cross, the preaching of the gospel and the coming of the Spirit. The Great Commission will be fulfilled.

Some of the passages postmillennialists hold to be fulfilled in the present age are:

**“And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:3).**

As Mathison states, “Whatever else ‘all the families of the earth’ means, it does not mean a minuscule percentage of the families of the earth.”<sup>18</sup>

**“The LORD said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool’” (Psalm 110:1).**

This is the most quoted Old Testament passage in the New Testament.

**“All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before You. For the kingdom is the**

---

<sup>18</sup> Mathison, *Postmillennialism, An Eschatology of Hope* (P & R Publishing, 1999), p.

**Lord’s, and He rules over the nations” (Psalm 22:27,28).**

This Messianic Psalm proclaims Christ’s rule after clear allusions to the cross without an intervening dispensation. It also seems to indicate a literal, physical, fulfillment in history.

**“For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of *His* government and peace *there will be* no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this” (Isaiah 9:6,7).**

This very familiar passage moves from the birth of the child to the establishment of His kingdom with no mention of an intervening period.

**“They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9).**

The postmillennialist sees these, and other passages like these, to be fulfilled in such a way as to genuinely affect the human race in every aspect, both spiritually and physically. This will happen as a result of Christ’s finished work on the cross as opposed to His finishing the job at the second coming.

Criticisms of this position are: 1) It’s view of the length of the millennium. This was addressed earlier in the amillennial portion. The number one thousand is freely used in a metaphorical sense in Scripture. 2) It’s promotion of triumphalism. It must be pointed out that triumph (if it is triumph of good over evil) is not bad or unbiblical. 3) It’s assertion that men will create a utopian society through their own carnal efforts. The postmillennialist does not

believe that a changed world will happen as a result of the carnal efforts of men. They believe the zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this. In the same way an individual Christian's life actually and really changes by the power of the Spirit, so will the world actually and really change by the power of the Spirit. Men will change the world, but only because God changes men.

## *V. But What About...?*

Now that we have discussed the importance of eschatology, the methods of hermeneutics (analogy of faith versus literalism, dispensationalism versus covenant theology, implied continuity versus implied discontinuity and historicist, idealist, futurist and preterist methods) and the millennial positions, let's move on to some specific topics to be understood.

As I stated earlier, I taught a class on the Westminster Confession that concluded with the study of last things. It simply asserted that Jesus would return to judge at the final resurrection. The hands flew up and I was bombarded with questions. I will seek to answer these questions (and others I anticipate) here. Again, I will give answers from as many positions as I believe to be prudent, then I will give what I believe to be the most Biblical.

### **A. What About the Temple?**

**“Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, “Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot *for* forty-two months” (Revelation 11:1,2).**

There is a great deal of talk, among futurists, about a rebuilt temple which is destroyed. If the Revelation were written after the destruction of the temple in A. D. 70, it would have to be rebuilt in order for this passage to be fulfilled. On the other hand, if the Revelation were written prior to A. D. 70 (as many preterists conclude) we would see a fulfillment of this prophecy in the siege of Jerusalem by Rome. So, when was the Revelation actually written?

At best, the date of Revelation is a guess. There is no place in the book where the date is given. All who hold to a late date of Revelation have a similar source, who is Irenaeus (A. D. 130-202). Even what Irenaeus said was unclear. He either said the vision was seen or John was seen during the reign of Domitian which might give the book a late date (90s). We also must realize that Irenaeus is not necessarily a reliable historian. He taught, for example, that Jesus' ministry lasted almost fifteen years and that He lived to almost fifty (*Against Heresies*, 2.22.5).

Ken Gentry thoroughly examines the dating of Revelation in his book *Before Jerusalem Fell*.<sup>19</sup> Gentry gives a number of arguments for the early dating of the book. Among the arguments are: 1) The nearness of Christ's coming, which is a repeated theme in the book, is inconsistent with this being fulfilled thousands of years later. 2) The sixth king, said to be the one who is presently reigning (Revelation 17:9,10), was Nero. Nero reigned from 54 to 68. 3) The existence of the temple. Revelation 11:1,2 indicates the temple is still standing. It was destroyed in 70. 4) The strong presence of Jewish Christianity which dwindled after the Fall of Jerusalem. Gentry gives many other reasons for the early date. One must also wonder, if the Fall of Jerusalem had already happened, why would it not be mentioned at all in a book like Revelation?

Historicists see the temple as the Church receiving persecution by the papacy. Idealists see the temple as the Church as well. I believe this is the destruction of the temple in A. D. 70, which was the final blow to the old covenant and the full beginning of the new covenant.

## **B. What About The Olive Tree?**

Romans 9-11 is a matter of theological debate regarding the future of Israel. The Olive tree discussed in Romans 11 is God's stream of covenant blessing which he promised to Abraham in the Abrahamic Covenant. Dispensationalists hold that the provision of salvation is the same for both Jew and gentile but other promises are specifically for the ethnic nation of Israel. Idealists view Israel as the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16) and postmillennialists see in Romans 11 a future conversion of ethnic Israel along with many other nations

---

<sup>19</sup> Ken Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*.(American Visions, 1998).

as well. Again, I must assert that any notion that Paul was teaching separate blessings for ethnic Israelites seems inconsistent with the general tenor of his writings. Enclosed is a copy of a debate between Doug Wilson (preterist and postmillennialist) and Thomas Ice (futurist and dispensational premillennialist).

### C. What About the Olivet Discourse?

In Matthew 24 we read a sermon given by Jesus. Dispensationalists (futurists), although they can't completely ignore the allusion to the temple, understand this sermon as referring to the distant future. Jesus' allusion to false christs, rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes, persecution, apostasy, the abomination of desolation, the Great Tribulation, false reports of Christ's coming, the judgment of Christ, cosmic happenings of the sun, moon and stars, the gathering of the elect, etc. are recorded in the first 34 verses of Matthew 24 and are said to be things which happen just prior to the second coming.

The biggest problem with this view is when you read verse 34. Jesus says, **“Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.”** Dispensationalists will argue that “generation” is either the generation who sees the signs (a generation which is at least 2000 years in the future) or that “generation” can mean that race (the Jews) or era in history which is still continuing to this day.

But for a system which seeks to use the plain, normal, literal, historical and grammatical method of interpretation,<sup>20</sup> this seems strained. Especially when we consider that every other time Matthew uses this phrase, it clearly refers to the generation of Jews to whom Jesus was speaking.

The preterist would understand the language of Jesus in Matthew 24 (and parallel gospels) to be normal Old Testament siege language. The topic of conversation is the temple (Matthew 24:1,2). The statement by Jesus is that this will take place in that generation. The historical reality is that the temple was destroyed in that generation, thus putting the final end to a covenant which was fading away.

---

<sup>20</sup> Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible* (Moody Press, 1976), p. 1952.

**“When He said, ‘A new *covenant*,’ He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear” (Hebrews 8:13).**

But the sun hasn’t been darkened! We must understand this as common prophetic language (Isaiah 13:10; 34:4-5; Ezekiel 32:7; Amos 8:9) used to describe judgments fulfilled in the Old Testament. Often times God used nations to impose judgments on other nations. Also, consider Acts 2. Peter makes the statement in verse 16, **“But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel.”** What does Peter include in this?

**“I will show wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath: Blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood” (Acts 2:19,20).**

Certainly Peter wasn’t a liberal theologian. He wasn’t taking liberties with the word of God as he quoted Joel. It may be of interest to note Peter’s comments alongside that of Ryrie. Of Acts 2:16-21 Ryrie states,

**“The fulfillment of this prophecy will be in the last days, immediately preceding the return of Christ, when all the particulars (e.g. v. 20 and Rev. 6:12) of the prophecy will come to pass. Peter reminded his hearers that, knowing Joel’s prophecy, they should have recognized what they were seeing as a work of the Spirit, not a result of drunkenness.”<sup>21</sup>**

Peter, clearly addressing Pentecost (one of the key beginnings of the new covenant) says, **“This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel.”** Ryrie says this is referring to events which will immediately precede the second coming.

---

<sup>21</sup> Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible* (Moody Press, 1976), pp. 1646, 1647.



## D. What About Daniel's Image and the Roman Empire?

You have probably heard that the "Roman Empire will be revived shortly before the return of Christ to this earth."<sup>22</sup> This is a very common and popular teaching today. From where does this come? It comes from Daniel. Everybody, dispensationalist, covenantalist, preterists, futurist, etc. sees the four kingdoms in Daniel pretty much the same way. In interpreting the king's dream Daniel sees four successive kingdoms: the Babylonian, the Media-Persian, the Greek and the Roman Empire. They also see Christ as the "**stone cut without hands**" (Daniel 2:34), which becomes "**a great mountain**" (Daniel 2:35) and fills "**the whole earth**" (Daniel 2:35). Here's the big difference:

The dispensationalist must somehow find the reconstituted Roman Empire somewhere in history (sometimes associated with a European ten-nation confederacy.<sup>23</sup>) It is in the midst of this revived Roman Empire that Jesus will come and start His kingdom. The covenantal theologian (which includes amillennial, postmillennial, idealist, preterist and perhaps historicist) sees this in a less confusing way. Simply put, Rome was in power when Jesus came and started His kingdom. It is truly quite simple.

## E. What About The Land?

Didn't God promise land to the Israelites that they haven't received yet? Dispensationalists will quote from Genesis 15:18-21 where a land promise is made to the descendants of Abraham. They will assert that God has not yet kept that promise and sometimes accuse non-dispensationalists of maintaining that God doesn't keep His promises. If it weren't so sad it would almost be humorous to follow the notes of the Ryrie Study Bible. Ryrie's comments on Genesis 15:18-21 read,

**"The boundaries of the promised land are now given for the first time. *the river of Egypt*. I.e., the**

---

<sup>22</sup> Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), p. 88.

<sup>23</sup> Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), p. 95.

**Nile. This promise has not yet been fulfilled, but will be when Christ returns.”<sup>24</sup>**

In Ryrie’s cross-reference notes, in his margins, Joshua 21:43 is referenced. It reads as follows.

**“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).**

This reads fairly dynamically. God fulfilled His old covenant promises. It must also be noted that the land was never really the focus of the faithful. Regarding Old Testament saints, the author of Hebrews writes,

**“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced *them* and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that *country* from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly *country*. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them” (Hebrews 11:13-16).**

The land promises were a means to an end. The end was the birth of Christ who began the heavenly kingdom.

---

<sup>24</sup> Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible* (Moody Press, 1976), p. 29.

## F. What About Daniel's Seventy Weeks?

**“Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy” (Daniel 9:24).**

Doing a Christian talk radio show, I was all but laughed at to think this was actually fulfilled! I was actually ridiculed for thinking that Christ had already accomplished this without having to come again to finish the job. Here the amillennialist and postmillennialist have a similar understanding of things. The dispensationalist, however, has a radically different take on this passage.

The entire passage breaks up the seventy weeks into seven weeks, sixty-two weeks and one week. The dispensationalist understands it thus: 1) The fulfillment of the things mentioned in verse 24 will not happen until the second coming of Christ. 2) The seven weeks and the sixty-two weeks terminate shortly before the death of Christ. 3) The parenthesis of the church age happens between the sixty-ninth and seventieth week. 4) The seventieth week is the Great Tribulation<sup>25</sup> which is a seven year period of great distress. 5) The church will be raptured prior to the seventieth week. 6) The temple will be rebuilt. 7) The seventieth week ends with the second coming.

The traditional understanding of this passage has been that the seventy weeks were completed in Christ's first coming and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies. There are several reasons to maintain this understanding of the seventy weeks over and against the dispensational understanding which surfaced in the 1800s. 1) There is no mention of an indefinite gap of time between the sixty-ninth and seventieth week. 2) The things mentioned in verse 24 were fulfilled in the first century (e.g. Israel's transgression climaxed with the crucifixion, Christ made atonement for sin, Christ established everlasting righteousness through His work on the cross, etc.). 3) The period of time where the Messiah is cut off (suffers the death penalty)

---

<sup>25</sup> Larkin *The Great Book on dispensational Truth in the World* (Rev. Clarence Larkin Est. 2802 N. Park Ave., Philadelphia 32, Pa. U. S. A., 1918), p. 133.

is after the sixty-ninth week and therefore in the seventieth week. 4) Christ put an end to sacrifices by His sacrifice. Christ fulfilled the seventy weeks of Daniel in His first advent.

### **G. When Does, or Did, The Kingdom of God Begin?**

What is the kingdom of God and when did, or does, it begin is a matter of much debate. This is too deep a subject to address in detail here. Suffice it to say there are many aspects of the kingdom. In one respect it is within us. It is also something the gates of hell will not prevail against. It is something one cannot see apart from being born again. It is something that starts small like a mustard seed then grows large. It is something that will have an effect upon the whole loaf, like leaven. It is also something you can be in, but still not be saved (Matthew 22:12-14). The apostle Paul considered himself to be in the kingdom already (Colossians 1:13). Since the invisible and eternal aspects of the kingdom cannot be seen or fully known until we are with Christ, the kingdom, according to ancient confessions, is associated with the Church. The Westminster Confession XXV, 2 states,

**“The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children: and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.”<sup>26</sup>**

Although some dispensationalists agree that the spiritual or soteriological (salvation issues) aspects of the kingdom are present, there is uniform agreement that the promises which the presence of the kingdom provides on other levels will not begin until the second coming and the future millennium. It is the assertion of dispensationalists that Christ is prophet and priest, but that He will not be the reigning King until He takes the throne of David and begins His millennial kingdom. As Chafer states, “He is now serving as

---

<sup>26</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*

Priest and not as King.”<sup>27</sup> In short, dispensationalists do not believe that the kingdom of God has begun.

Virtually all other millennial positions disagree with this. Whether it is in an amillennial sense—which would be more of a spiritual kingdom, or in a postmillennial sense—which would be a spiritual kingdom, but having a significant effect upon the physical world—virtually all historic confessions indicate that the kingdom has come and is growing. Over and over again the Scriptures indicate that the kingdom of God is “at hand.” “At hand” cannot mean thousands of years in the future. Not only this, examine Acts 2 regarding the throne of David:

**“Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption” (Acts 2:29-31).**

Notice that the taking of the throne of David is associated with the resurrection of Christ. The resurrection of Christ has already happened. Therefore Jesus has taken David’s throne. Therefore the kingdom has begun.

## **H. Are Things Supposed to Get Worse?**

It is almost impossible to discuss issues of immorality and tragedy on the radio these days without at least a few people calling in with the theological mindset that these bad things, even though they grieve us, are supposed to happen prior to the second coming. We’ve already discussed the failure of Christianity. This failure plays right

---

<sup>27</sup> Chafer, *Major Bible Themes*, (Dunham Publishing Company, 1926), p. 52.

into the dispensational understanding of how history is designed to unfold.<sup>28</sup>

This may be one of the most destructive aspects of the dispensational, futurist theological system. To somehow convince six or eight generations of Christians that it is God's design for Satan to overcome the culture in which they live is formidable. Apart from theological considerations I must say, from a coach's perspective, if you can convince your opponent that they are destined to lose, you've won the game before it begins.

The idealist does not put much stock in history either. They don't necessarily give it over to Satan as the dispensationalist does, but they don't believe it will get noticeably better either. The postmillennialist, on the other hand, sees the influence of the gospel having its way in history. The Great Commission will be fulfilled and this will make the world a better place.

Often times, people will look at the newspaper or the two world wars of the twentieth century and scoff at this position, not dissimilar to Sarah laughing. To this the postmillennialist responds a few ways. 1) The Scriptures give us our theology, not CNN. 2) There might be a poorer moral climate now than there was 150 years ago (even 50 years ago), but pick a 500 year chunk of history in which you would rather live—Spanish Inquisition? Crusades? Dark Ages? Rome? Babylon? Egypt? Pretty much every one of these eras would find faithful Christians in slavery, burned at the stake or fed to lions.

The "Last Days" generally associated with the apostasy are usually talking about the last days of the old covenant and how things would be prior to the fall of Jerusalem. For example, 2 Timothy 3 speaks of how bad things will be in the "last days." Futurists assign this to the last days just prior to the second coming. This ignores the context of Paul's letter. Mathison gives three points which refutes this: 1) Paul is writing about things Timothy must personally deal with (3:10, 14). 2) In Hebrews 1:2; 1 Peter 1:20; 1 John 2:18 and others passages in the New Testament, "last days" clearly refers to the

---

<sup>28</sup> Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), pp. 114-134.

last days of the Jewish age. 3) The passage itself teaches that these evil men “will not make further progress.”<sup>29</sup>

## I. What About the Man of Sin?

**“Let no one deceive you by any means; for *that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God*” (2 Thessalonians 2:3,4).**

The dispensational premillennialist sees this person as a major player in the days just prior to the second coming. He sets himself up to be worshipped at a time when the church is going apostate and when men, in general, will become more and more evil. Associating this man of sin with the anti-Christ and the beast of Revelation is commonly held. Taking his mark will be certain doom but without this mark (covered elsewhere) you cannot buy or sell, etc. Dispensationalists don't see this as ever having taken place in history. Of the man of lawlessness it is stated,

**“This man is also called the ‘beast coming out of the sea’ (Rev. 13:1-10), ‘a scarlet beast’ (17:3), and simply ‘the beast’ (17:8, 16; 19:19-20). He is the Antichrist (1 John 2:18), a pseudo-Christ hostile to the Savior. He will be a real human being, not a principle or a system, or a succession of individuals. Such a person has not yet been spotlighted on the stage of human history.”<sup>30</sup>**

Contained in the quote above is the refuting of the historicist view that the anti-Christ(s) are the popes. This view was held by

---

<sup>29</sup> Mathison, *Postmillennialism, An Eschatology of Hope* (P & R Publishing, 1999), p. 215.

<sup>30</sup> John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Victor Books, 1983), p. 718.

most of the theologians during the Reformation and is theologically plausible when examining the anti-Christ of 1 John.

The preterist would see this man of lawlessness as Nero. At the time of this writing, Nero was not yet emperor so he was restrained (verse 6). He would soon become emperor and his reign was characterized by such evil and debauchery that it disgusted even his own constituency. Nero's death occurred in the midst of the judgment of Jerusalem (verse 8). Nero can easily be associated with the beast of Revelation (covered elsewhere). Whoever this man of lawlessness was, the futurist has a difficult time explaining how he was being restrained during the time of Paul's writing. **“And you know what restrains him *now*, so that in his time he may be revealed” (2 Thessalonians 2:6—italics mine).**

## **J. The Thessalonian Problem**

If you haven't figured it out yet, you will soon realize that 1 and 2 Thessalonians create a difficult problem for all eschatological positions. First Thessalonians 4 contains the passage which all (except full preterists) consider to be an allusion to the second coming. The trumpet blasts, the dead in Christ are raised, then all who remain are caught up to meet Jesus in the air, and from that point on will always be with the Lord.

Futurists will look at chapter 5 as a continued discussion regarding the same event. It talks about the times and seasons and the Lord coming as a thief in the night. The futurist will also look at 2 Thessalonians 2 as referring to the same event. It talks about the coming of the Lord, the man of lawlessness, etc. The preterist, on the other hand, views these three chapters as allusions to two different events. First Thessalonians 4 is the second coming. First Thessalonians 5 and 2 Thessalonians 2 would be referring to the fall of Jerusalem. At first glance it would seem like an imposition to suggest that these are not all addressing the same event. Until a couple of other things are considered.

First, it wouldn't be difficult to understand Paul addressing different events in these three chapters if he had already taught on separate events in his prior meetings with them. That alone, of course, is insufficient. So what are the strongest reasons to believe that Paul is addressing two different events in these three chapters?



One strong argument in favor of 2 Thessalonians 2 referring to the fall of Jerusalem is its language being very similar to the words of Jesus in the Olivet Discourse. These things, Jesus said, would occur in that generation (Matthew 24:34). Secondly, 2 Thessalonians 2:6,7 seems to indicate that the man of lawlessness was presently being restrained and that the mystery of lawlessness was already at work. Thirdly, the Thessalonians were shaken in mind because they thought the **“day of Christ had come”** (2 Thessalonians 2:2). Unless Paul was a terrible teacher or they were inept learners, how could they have possibly thought the final resurrection had already occurred? Fourthly, why would Paul begin instructing them about the man of lawlessness in order to ensure them the final resurrection hadn't happened? Why wouldn't he merely demonstrate that their presence on the earth was enough to show it hadn't yet happened?

On the other hand, it is not inconceivable that the Thessalonians had been instructed along the lines of the Olivet Discourse.

**“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her” (Luke 21:20,21).**

They could have been concerned that they missed their cue to flee to the mountains.



## *VI. The Revelation*

Now we shall take a brief look at Revelation. I will attempt to address the highlights from the varying positions, then give what I believe to be the soundest interpretation.

### **Chapter One**

The first three verses of Revelation are like pointing a gun at a target that's a mile away. If you're off by an inch at the end of the barrel, you'll be off by a mile by the time the bullet reaches the target. Twice, in the first three verses, we are told that the things written of will shortly take place.

The historicist doesn't have a problem with this since they believe that the history of the Church was about to start. They do have a bit of a problem, however, when we look at chapter 22 and realize that the book ends by indicating that it will happen shortly.

The idealist doesn't have a problem with this since they believe all this was, and is, a present spiritual reality for any church in any age. But this seems to ignore the pressing urgency of the words themselves.

The futurist has a very difficult time with these words. They seek to explain away verse one by asserting that the phrase, "must shortly take place," could possibly mean, "a rapidity of execution after the beginning takes place."<sup>31</sup> In other words, once it all starts it will happen quickly. This seems to be strained exegesis at best. The knock out blow comes in verse three where it is said that the time is near. The easiest way the futurist deals with these verses is to call upon Peter's statement regarding God's time frame. To God a day is as a thousand years. The only problem with this is that the letter wasn't written to God. It was written to men to be understood by men. This type of interpretation would render any reference to time,

---

<sup>31</sup> John Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, (Moody Press, 1966), p. 35

anywhere in Scripture, meaningless. Here is a classic example of the literalist not being literal, when it doesn't suit his system.

The preterist has the easiest time with these passages. They simply take them at face value. John was writing to let his readers know of something that was about to happen. This would be a source of warning and encouragement, first, to his readers, secondly to all who would find themselves in similar circumstances in history.

At a time when the Christian faith was relatively insignificant, John encourages his readers that neither Jerusalem (the religious power) nor Rome (the political power) is in charge. In 1:5 Jesus is said here to be the ruler over the kings of the earth.

The idealist, once again, sees this in a spiritual sense without much application or effect in terms of the physical world. The historicist would generally see this as a true statement of a present reality in all realms. The futurist however all but denies the truth of this declaration. Read John Walvoords comments:

**“His fulfillment of the role of ‘ruler of the kings of the earth’ is future, to be achieved after his victory over the beast and the false prophet (Rev. 19)...Jesus has the right to rule, though He is not exercising this right over the kings of the earth now...”<sup>32</sup>**

The preterist takes the words at face value. Jesus is presently the King of kings. He is the ruler over the kings of the earth. Regardless of what the newspapers say or who seems to be in charge. Read of Jesus in Psalm 2.

Many times in Scripture we see the idea of God, or Christ, coming on a cloud or similar language (Ps. 18, 7-15; 104:3; Isa. 19:1, Nah. 1:2-8; Matthew 24; etc.) We see this in 1:7. What does it mean?

Many spiritualists, historicists and futurists see this as the second coming.

Some spiritualist see this as any time in history when God may visit His judgments upon men. The preterist connects this to the context of the opening verses and sees this as part of something that

---

<sup>32</sup> John Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, (Moody Press, 1966), p. 38.

will shortly come to pass. The Ruler of the kings of the earth will soon exact His judgments upon the enemies of God's people.

In the remainder of chapter one we see the deity of Christ (vs. 8); John's presence on Patmos (vs. 9); the seven golden lampstands which are the seven churches (vs. 12,20); the glorified Christ in the midst of the churches (vs. 13); the seven stars which are the seven angels, or pastors, of the churches (vs. 16, 20); and an outline of the Revelation (vs. 19).

## **Chapters Two and Three**

In chapters two and three we see seven letters to seven churches. The letters generally (but not always) contain a description of Jesus which is taken from chapter one, a commendation from Jesus, a criticism from Jesus, an admonition to overcome, and a promise for the one who overcomes.

The historicist and some futurists see in these seven churches the history of the Church in general. For example, Smyrna is the persecution by the Roman emperors; Pergamum is seen as representing the imperial church after Constantine (313-606), etc.<sup>33</sup>

The idealist sees in these seven churches situations and conditions that can and do exist in any church in any age. They agree that these churches did really exist, but that the letters have a universal application throughout history.

The preterist will generally agree in principle with the idealist. In the same way we can benefit from letters written to Galatia or Corinth, we can benefit from letters written to the seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3. But the preterist also acknowledges that these letters had a primary audience. They were written for people who were facing great persecution and were about to undergo a specific event in history. The end of the old covenant was at hand and the temple would soon be destroyed through a great siege.

It is also of interest to note that these seven cities were also seven postal stops, which indicates that the letters may have been cyclical in nature. It is also worth noting that Ephesus was the proconsul center for the Roman Empire, Thyatira had some of the most occult practice of the ancient world and Pergamum was a city

---

<sup>33</sup> Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views, A Parallel Commentary* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), pp. 68-70.

dominated by trade unions where idolatry was engaged in, or you didn't have a job. It was also the center of the emperor cult.<sup>34</sup> This information answers the claims of many futurists that the government of the first century was not capable of imposing upon Christians the things they're capable of doing today.

## Chapter Four

If chapter one was a watershed for understanding Revelation, chapter four is a virtual explosion. The preterist, historicist and idealist all, in one way or another, view the beginning of chapter four as John being introduced into a courtroom scene with the throne depicting judgment. They may all differ on how this works itself out, but there is similarity here.

The dispensational futurist, however, views 4:1 as the rapture of the Church and claims that the Church is not mentioned again until the very end of the book.<sup>35</sup> This hardly seems to be the natural reading of the passage,

**“After this I looked, and, behold, a door *was* opened in heaven: And the first voice which I heard *was* as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter” (Revelation 4:1).**

It seems more like John, and John alone, is called up to witness a vision.

The twenty-four elders are introduced in chapter four. The historicist sees the elders as the Church triumphant, the idealist sees them as celestial representatives of all the redeemed, and the futurist sees them as raptured saints. The preterist would maintain the elders (a term never used to describe an angel or anything other than men) are to be understood as “representatives of God's people, the senate sitting in council around their bishop.”<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Bahnsen, *The Message of the Revelation* (Covenant Media, Tape Series), tape 3.

<sup>35</sup> Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views, A Parallel Commentary* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), p. 85.

<sup>36</sup> David Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, (Dominion Press, 1987), p. 151.

The remainder of chapter four is a picture of the glory of the throne room of God. This should be an encouragement to Christians who were, and are, tempted to think that the throne rooms of human leaders are insurmountable. The stage is set for judgment.

## **Chapter Five**

In chapter five we are introduced to a scroll with seven seals. As the scroll is opened we see it to be God's judgments. There is an initial fear that no one is worthy to open the scroll but John is told that the Lion of the tribe of Judah is worthy. He turns and looks; he sees, not a Lion, but a Lamb. This is very significant when we consider how God will advance His kingdom and defeat the kingdoms of this world. It is by the power of Christ's sacrifice (vs. 9,10).

The historicist sees these judgments working themselves out in the history of the church. The idealist sees it as the redemptive plan of God. The futurist looks at the scroll as the title deed to history and the releasing of the scroll as events which will take place just prior to the second coming, during the Great Tribulation. The Church has been raptured and watches the rest of Revelation from heaven. The preterist sees the scroll as God's judgment upon Jerusalem.

The remainder of chapter five presents the power and glory of the throne of God

## **Chapter Six**

In chapter six we see the opening of the seals. The first four seals are the four horsemen of the apocalypse. Here we, once again, see significant divergence in interpretation. The first horse is a white horse. He who sat on it had a crown and went out to conquer. Although the historicist, preterist and idealist differ on what happens, they all generally agree that the one on the white horse is Christ (see 19:11-16).

The futurist takes a radically different approach here. The one on the white horse, according to the futurist, is just the opposite of the other views. Read Walvoord's words.

**“While dispute as to the identity of the rider cannot be finally settled, especially in the brief**

**compass of this discussion, the conclusion identifying him as the world ruler of the tribulation, the same individual described as the beast out of the sea in Revelation 13, is preferred.”<sup>37</sup>**

In order for the futurist view to maintain any integrity it seems they must give over to Satan that which all others see as Christ.

The second seal is the red horse who takes peace from the earth. Historicists see this as the accession of Commodus (A. D. 180) to the accession of Diocletian (A. D. 284). The idealist views this as war in general. The futurist views this as the Great Tribulation just prior to the second coming and the preterist sees this as Rome’s attack on Jerusalem.

The third horse is a black horse which represents hardship by example of food and drink. The historicist sees this as fiscal oppression imposed by some of the emperors of the third century. The idealist sees this as something that can occur at any time to any civilization. The futurist sees this as famine, resulting from the warfare in the future Tribulation. The preterist sees this as food shortages suffered by the Jews in Jerusalem during the Roman siege. Josephus records at least one case of a mother eating her infant. The preterist understands this type of event to be consistent with the words of Jesus when He said, “But woe to those who are... nursing babies in those days!”

The fourth horse is a pale horse who was given the power to kill. The historicist sees this as the period of 248 to 268, which was a period of great tyranny in Rome. The idealist sees this horse as the summary of all four horsemen. They view this as repeating itself in history. The futurist views this as worldwide destruction. The preterist sees this as similar to the four severe judgments God used in Ezekiel to judge Jerusalem. The words of Josephus in *Wars*, 5:12,3-4 regarding the fall of Jerusalem, sound as if you’re reading these very words.

The opening of the fifth seal reveals the voices of the martyrs, whose souls are under the altar. The historicist sees this as the ordeal of the church under Diocletian (A.D. 284). The idealist sees this as martyrs from any age. The futurist sees these martyrs as Tribulation saints. All but the 144,000 (covered later) converted after the rapture

---

<sup>37</sup> Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, (Moody Press, 1966), p. 127.



must be martyred. The dispensationalist does not view these martyrs as those martyred during the church era. This is because what they cry out for, namely vengeance, is not very Christian. It has been said, "Their cry for judgment indicates that they stand on other than Christian ground."<sup>38</sup> Compare this statement to the words of Jesus. Speaking of the fall of Jerusalem He states, **"For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled" (Luke 21:22)**. When God exacts judgment, He is not stepping off Christian ground. The preterist sees this as the martyrs crying out for God's justice in history. Matthew 23:35 reveals this to be consistent with the teaching of Christ Himself.

**"...that on you [Jerusalem] may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation."**

The sixth seal reveals major catastrophes. The sun becomes black, stars fall from heaven, etc. The historicist sees this as the fall of paganism to Christianity in the Roman Empire, associated with Constantine's conversion. The idealist views this as judgment day (finishing one of the seven cycles). The futurist sees this all very literally (except for the stars falling). In the sixth seal the futurist sees a nuclear exchange, causing earthquakes, etc. At this point the second coming should be looked for soon. The preterist compares this language to the similar language of the Olivet discourse, which was to happen in that generation. The vision depicts the end of the Jewish state and fall of its leaders.

## Chapter Seven

Before the seventh seal we see a break. Chapter seven opens with God having angels seal His people on their foreheads prior to the destruction. This is very similar to what God did in Ezekiel 9, prior to the Babylonian captivity of 586 B. C. The historicist sees this as

---

<sup>38</sup> Gregg, Revelation, *Four Views, A Parallel Commentary* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), p. 119.

God spiritually sealing His servants prior to the revolution under Constantine. The idealist sees this as a spiritual seal of protection. The futurist sees this as protection for the 144,000 Israelites who are saved during the Tribulation. The preterist sees this as God's protection of a certain group (covered next) during the fall of Jerusalem.

The historicist sees the 144,000 (the ones sealed) as symbolic of the entire church. The idealist, similarly, views the 144,000 as the true Israel of God. The futurist views the 144,000, as Hal Lindsey states, as 144,000 Jewish Billy Grahams during the Great Tribulation. Preterists hold the 144,000 to be either the Jewish Christians who fled to the hills of Judea, per the instruction of Jesus, and escaped the siege of Jerusalem, or the Church in general which escaped the siege. 144,000 can easily be understood as the combination of the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles (144) and all who God saves in history (X 1000.) In verse four, John hears about the 144,000. Arguably, what John says he sees in verse nine is a vision of what he had just heard. What John sees in verse nine is, **"...a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues."** This comes against the 144,000 thousand being a literal 144,000 Jews.

## **Chapters Eight through Ten**

In chapter eight we see the opening of the seventh seal. It is a brief time of silence in heaven, perhaps the calm before the storm. We are now introduced to the seven trumpets. The prayers of the martyrs will soon be answered. The seven trumpets of judgment are catastrophic. The historicist sees this going all the way to the Reformation and the destruction of the papacy. The idealist looks at the trumpet judgments as a series of happenings that will occur in history again and again. The futurist looks at these judgments as befalling unrepentant inhabitants of the earth during the Tribulation. Some see in these chapters things like cobra helicopters, nuclear warfare, etc. The preterist sees these judgments as pertaining to the fall of Jerusalem. The language used is similar to the language of the Old Testament when a siege is described (Isa. 13:9-11, 19; 24:19-23; 34:4,5; Ezek. 32:7,8, 11-12; Joel 2:10, 28-32; Acts 2:16-21; etc.). The 200 million seen in 9:16 is not to be taken literally and should not

be considered the Chinese army. History indicates that Jerusalem was invaded by way of the Euphrates. The number 200 million should be understood as an invincible opponent. There was no chance for Jerusalem.

At the end of chapter ten, John is told he must prophesy again. This time about many peoples, nations, tongues and kings. The seventh trumpet has not yet been sounded. Not until Revelation 11:15.

## **Chapter Eleven**

In chapter eleven the temple is measured for destruction. The two witnesses are introduced as well as the 1260-day period. The historicist and idealist see the temple as the true, persecuted Church. The futurist sees the temple as a rebuilt temple, which is in existence during the future, seven year, Great Tribulation. The preterist sees the temple as the temple that was still standing (hence the early date of Revelation).

The historicist sees the 1260 days as 1260 years. The futurist sees the 1260 days as literal days. The idealist sees the 1260 days as the entire church age and the preterist sees the 1260 days as the days of the Jewish war and Nero's persecution.

The historicist sees the two witnesses as two specific individuals who resisted the papacy. The futurist sees them as future manifestations of Elijah, Enoch or Moses. The idealist sees them as the Church throughout the entire Church age, and the preterist sees them as a historic, prophetic witness against the Jews. The law of Moses required two witnesses.

In verse 15 we see the seventh trumpet is sounded, heralding the establishment of Christ's kingdom forever and ever. Discouraged Christians who felt overwhelmed by the nation of Israel were to be comforted by the proclamation of the true kingdom. But the judgment was not yet over. The other prophecy was still to be proclaimed.

## **Chapter Twelve**

In chapter twelve we're given a glimpse of a heavenly battle. There is a woman, a child, a dragon, demons, angels, etc. The

historicist sees the woman as the true Church and the child as children of the Church. Idealists see the woman as Old Testament Israel and the child as Jesus. Futurists see the woman as Israel and the child as Jesus. The preterist sees the woman as faithful Old Testament Israel and the child as Jesus. From this point on there is a split among preterists. Some believe the chapters to come continue to speak to the fall of Jerusalem. Others believe they speak to the fall of Rome. We will assume the latter for reasons to be shown. The historicist sees the dragon as heathen persecution. The other positions see the dragon as Satan.

This chapter explains the nature of Christ's victory over Satan and the judgments which are accomplished. The new judgment now turns to Rome.

### **Chapter Thirteen**

In chapter 13 we are introduced to the beast, another beast and the mark of the beast. The historicist sees the beasts as aspects of the papacy. The idealist sees them as political and religious powers. The futurist sees them as political and religious individuals of the future. The preterist sees them as Rome (Nero) and the emperor cult, which existed in Asia Minor.

For all but the futurist view, the mark was spiritual (the way the mark of God would be understood). The historicist sees 666 as papal. The idealist sees 666 as representing false religion in general. The futurist sees this as a number which will be literally (somehow) tattooed on people. The preterist believes it to be a reference to Nero, whose name equals the Hebrew equivalent of 666. Cross-reference this with 17:10, which indicates that the sixth emperor was now reigning. The sixth emperor was Nero. Even still, the mark is spiritual.

### **Chapters Fourteen through Sixteen**

In chapters fourteen through sixteen we see the bowls of wrath, seven last plagues. The historicist sees the judgment of the papacy, the French Revolution, Napoleon and the future. The idealist sees this as a repetition in the cycles of the spiritual victory of Christ. The futurist sees global judgments, World War III (or the battle of

Armageddon). The preterist sees this as a judgment on Rome, the city on seven mountains (Rev. 17:9).

## **Chapters Seventeen through Nineteen**

The fall of Babylon according to the historicist is the complete and final fall of the papacy. The white horse in chapter 19 carries Christ during His continuing victories in history. The idealist sees Babylon as the worldly seduction of the ungodly. The white horse is Christ at His second coming. The futurist sees Babylon as revived Rome. In chapter 19 Jesus visibly returns, riding a white horse, to destroy the revived Roman Empire. The preterist identifies Babylon with the Roman Empire (not revived, but original) and Jesus, on the white horse, as One who assures the victory of His church over Rome and through history. The Second Coming is not until chapter 20.

The preterist, especially the postmillennialist, sees here that the initial enemies of Christ's church, Jerusalem and Rome, have been deposed. History has now been opened for the fulfillment of the Great Commission. In chapter 20 we will see that the nations will be deceived no longer.

## **Chapter Twenty**

Revelation 20 is said to be the most controversial chapter in the Bible. Months can be devoted to its study. Briefly, the three major positions (which were covered earlier in greater detail) see the events of chapter 20 as follows:

The premillennialist sees the binding of Satan as a future event which brings in the literal 1000 year millennium. At the end of the millennium, Satan will be loosed for a while then destroyed. This will usher in the resurrection of the wicked only, since the righteous have already been resurrected. The new heavens and new earth will be after the millennium.

The amillennialist sees the binding of Satan as having happened at the cross in a very spiritual sense. The 1000 years represents a long period of time; the time between the first and second advents of Christ. Satan will be loosed briefly at the end of the present age. At the end of the present age there will be a general

resurrection and judgment of the evil and the good. This will be followed by the eternal state.

There are varying positions among postmillennialists. Some see the millennium as actually starting at a certain time in history, ushering in a time of unprecedented acceptance of the gospel. We would not hold to that position. Rather, we see the millennium in very much the same time frame as the amillennialist. The millennium is the period between the first and second advents of Christ. At the end of the age, Satan will be loosed for a short time and then defeated and judged. There is a general resurrection and judgment followed by the eternal state. The main distinction between the amillennialist and the postmillennialist is the general optimism about the success of the gospel and all it accomplishes in history. Some passages that sound optimistic the amillennialist views as either spiritual or in eternity, where the postmillennialist will see many of these in history.

### **Chapters Twenty-One and Twenty-Two**

These chapters cannot be divided along the lines of the four approaches or the millennial views. Some take these words very literally and others very symbolically. Some understand this time to be the Church in the present era of the new covenant. Generally speaking, most all views, in one way or another, understand these last two chapters as the glory of the eternal state. To this we say, "Amen."







# ***Glossary of Terms***

***Amillennial:*** Second coming after millennium

***Analogy of Faith:*** Checking Scripture with Scripture

***Covenantal:*** Progressive view of Scripture

***Dispensationalist:*** Compartmental view of Scripture

***Eschatology:*** Study of last things

***Futurist:*** Revelation will be fulfilled in the future

***Hermeneutics:*** How to interpret the Scriptures

***Historicist:*** Revelation works itself out through history

***Idealist:*** Revelation is mainly spiritual and symbolic of Christ's victory

***Literalism:*** Taking the Scriptures literally

***Millennium:*** Thousand years

***Postmillennial:*** Second coming after millennium with greater effect on earth

***Premillennial:*** Second coming before millennium

***Preterist:*** Most of Revelation was fulfilled in A. D. 70



# ***Bibliography***

Greg Bahnsen, *The Message of the Revelation* (Covenant Media, Tape Series).

Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Major Bible Themes*, (Dunham Publishing Company, 1926).

David Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, (Dominion Press, 1987).

Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Baker Book House, 1984).

Ken Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*.(American Visions, 1998).

Steve Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views, A Parallel Commentary* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997).

William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, (Baker Book House, 1940).

Clarence Larkin *The Great Book on dispensational Truth in the World* (Rev. Clarence Larkin Est. 2802 N. Park Ave., Philadelphia 32, Pa. U. S. A., 1918).

Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Zondervan Publishing House, 1970).

Keith A. Mathison, *Postmillennialism, An Eschatology of Hope*, (P & R Publishing, 1999).

Charles C. Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible* (Moody Press, 1976).

R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus*, (Baker Books, 1998).

John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Victor Books, 1983).

John Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, (Moody Press, 1966).

*Westminster Confession of Faith*