



**Study guide for  
POSTMILLENNIAL  
ESCHATOLOGY**

# Introduction

Before we dig into postmillennialism back up and assess the theological landscape so we approach the topic from within its proper context. The terms frame our conversation.

Eschatology which means the study of last things. It is an aspect of systematic theology. One concerned in eschatology deals with how to understand the 1,000 years mentioned in Rev. 20:2–7. Should the number be viewed as literal or figurative. Three interpretations of the millennium of Rev. 20 have been proposed . Three main views are premillennialism, postmillennialism and amillennialism.

When we talk of Eschatology and especially the millennium, people reach for their guns, looking to go heretic hunting. And while I don't mind going 'Olsteen-ing'. I do think disagreements over the millennium should not end in buckshots to the booty. So let's begin by considering what all the views have in common. (fuller treatment is found in the addendum)

## Final Consensus

In short all three systems agree in asserting:

- The Scriptures are the Word of God and authoritative
- There will be a visible, personal coming of Christ
- Every individual is to receive a resurrection body
- All are to stand before the judgment seat of Christ
- The righteous are to be rewarded in heaven, the wicked are to be punished in hell.
- All three are consistently evangelical and have been held by Godly and sincere men and women of the faith.

Differences between the three systems

The differences between the three is how they relate to

- (1) the time and purpose of Christ's coming,
- (2) the nature of the kingdom to be set up at His coming.

## Some Interpretive Distinctions of Postmillennialism

- Reading prophecy: a figurative reading is preferred to a literal reading
- Method of interpretation: Covenant-historical / Redemptive-historical
- Israel and the church: the church is the fulfillment of Israel.
- Preterist approach is utilized in postmillennialism interpretation. Higher degrees of interpreting First Century events as the fulfillment of biblical prophecy
- Postmillennialist interpret the cloudy texts by the clear texts. They use the didactic (teaching) texts of the NT as an interpretive key for understanding more symbolic texts like Revelation. Other camps believe in a plain grammatical historical interpretation of revelation, with no outside corrupting influence from guys like Peter and Paul.

# Definitions of Postmillennialism

## 1. From an Objective Detractor

“The belief that Christ's second coming will be preceded by the Millennium, a golden age of gospel blessing upon the ministry of the church. At Christ's coming there will be the general resurrection, the general judgment, followed by the creation of the new heavens and the new earth, and the eternal state.”<sup>1</sup> - Alan Cairns

## 2. From an Adherent

“We have defined Postmillennialism as that view of the last things which holds that the Kingdom of God is now being extended in the world through the preaching of the Gospel and the saving work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of individuals, that the world eventually is to be Christianized, and that the return of Christ is to occur at the close of a long period of righteousness and peace commonly called the ‘Millennium.’ It should be added that on postmillennial principles the second coming of Christ will be followed immediately by the general resurrection, the general judgment, and the introduction of heaven and hell in their fullness. The Millennium to which the Postmillennialist looks forward is thus a golden age of spiritual prosperity during this present dispensation, that is, during the Church age, and is to be brought about through forces now active in the world. It is an indefinitely long period of time, perhaps much longer than a literal one thousand years. The changed character of individuals will be reflected in an uplifted social, economic, political and cultural life of mankind. The world at large will then enjoy a state of righteousness such as at the present time has been seen only in relatively small and isolated groups, as for example in some family circles, some local church groups and kindred organizations. This does not mean that there ever will be a time on this earth when every person will be a Christian, or that all sin will be abolished. But it does mean that evil in all its many forms eventually will be reduced to negligible proportions, that Christian principles will be the rule, not the exception, and that Christ will return to a truly Christianized world,”<sup>2</sup> - Loraine Boettner

“Postmillennialism expects the proclaiming of the Spirit-blessed gospel of Jesus Christ to win the vast majority of human beings to salvation in the present age. Increasing gospel success will gradually produce a time in history [which they identify with the “millennium”] prior to Christ’s return in which faith, righteousness, peace, and prosperity will prevail in the affairs of people and of nations. After an extensive era of such conditions the Lord will return visibly, bodily, and in great glory, ending history with the general resurrection and the great judgment of all humankind. Hence, our system is postmillennial in that the Lord’s glorious return occurs after an era of ‘millennial’ conditions”<sup>3</sup> - Kenneth Gentry

“The postmillennial conception of victory is of a progressive cultural victory and expansive influence of Christianity in history. . . . The personal status of the believer and the corporate standing of the Church in salvation is . . . one of present victory – in principle. . . . The distinctive postmillennial view of Christianity’s progressive victory, in time and history, into

---

<sup>1</sup> Alan Cairns, “Postmillennialism” Dictionary of Theological Terms, rev. and enlarged ed., (Greenville, SC: Ambassador–Emerald, 2002). 334

<sup>2</sup> Loraine Boettner, The Millennium, (New Jersey, P&R Pub, 1986), 14

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth Gentry “Postmillennialism,” in Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond, 13-14

all of human life and culture, is postmillennialism's application of the doctrine of Christ's definitively completed salvation"<sup>4</sup> - Gary North

### 3. Contrast with Premillennialism for Clarity

"In contrast to premillennialism, the postmillennialists emphasize the present aspects of God's kingdom, which will reach fruition in the future. They believe that the millennium will come through Christian preaching and teaching. Such activity will result in a more godly, peaceful, and prosperous world. The new age will not be essentially different from the present, and it will come about as more people are converted to Christ. Evil will not be totally eliminated during the millennium, but it will be reduced to a minimum as the moral and spiritual influence of Christians is increased."<sup>5</sup>

### 4. From a Fictitious Detractor

Lastly, a definition from a dispensational independent Baptist Pastor who wished to remain unnamed..

Postmillennialism is..... Hersey!!! Unscriptural, Liberal poppycock born in the flaming bowels of Hades, nursed at beelzebub's bosom and popularized by Satan himself!... [unrepeatable string of Christain expletives].... It is humanistic, synergistic, and theologically optimistic, an unholy mess of Scatological thinking. [long pause]...Did I say it's a Damnable Hersey? Because it is!!! Yep, Amen to that, praise Jesus"<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> "Whose Victory in History?" in Gary North, ed., *Theonomy: An Informed Response* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), 215

<sup>5</sup>"Millenium, Views of the" ed. Elwell, Walter A. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand rapids Baker, 2001) 771.

<sup>6</sup> In case you don't catch it this is a fake quote, it's a joke.

## POSTMILLENNIALISM.

A theological term derived from the reference to a thousand years in Revelation 20, designating the view that Christ will return at the end of an extended period of righteousness and prosperity (the millennium).

### 1. Theological formulation.

Representative postmillennialists differ on questions of detail as do representatives of other systems, but the basic features are clear.

The pivotal event of world history is the life, death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus Christ. His mediatorial accomplishment ended the administration of grace in terms of the old covenant, but the Church that He established is the Israel of the new covenant. God will continue to carry out His sovereign gracious purpose in terms of the new covenant until it is fulfilled and Christ returns as judge. The judgment will immediately issue in the eternal state.

Jesus established the kingdom of God in a new and powerful way as He began to defeat opposition to divine rule and brought men into willing subjection to Himself. He gave His Church the task of proclaiming the Gospel of sovereign grace on a worldwide scale. The Church can pursue this task in the confidence that men will turn to Christ in repentance and faith because the king of the Church reigns in power and adds daily to the number of the saved.

According to postmillennialism, the major factor contributing to the observed impotence of the visible Church is the common assumption that the Gospel proclamation will not meet with success or that conditions will deteriorate before the advent. This attitude prevents the Church from laying hold sincerely upon the resources that Christ has placed at its disposal.

The postmillennialist is confident, however, that God will accomplish His purpose to save the world, and therefore does not think of the world as lost and only individuals as saved, but rather of the world as saved and individuals as lost. Concretely, he expects a future period when revealed truth will be diffused throughout the world and accepted by the vast majority. The millennial era will therefore be a time of peace, material prosperity, and spiritual glory.

The millennium will be of extended duration though not necessarily a precise 1,000 years. Because it is established through means presently operative, its beginning is imperceptible. Some postmillennialists provide for a gradual establishment of the millennium; others for a more abrupt beginning. Most, but not all, allow for a brief apostasy or resurgence of evil just prior to the advent and in preparation for the judgment. Even during the millennium, the world will not be entirely without sin, and not every person will be converted.

### 2. Biblical basis.

Both post- and amillennialists argue for the unity of the eschatological complex of events, against premillennialists, on the ground that the relevant passages (Matt 24 and parallels; Rom 8:17-23; 1 Cor 15:22-28, 50-58; 1 Thess 1:4-10; 4:13-18; 2 Pet 3:3-15) do not allow for the insertion of a millennium between advent and consummation. Amillennialists also espouse the postmillennial timing of the advent, but differ sharply from postmillennialists on the nature of the millennium.

Postmillennialism takes seriously the fact that the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rom 1:16; 1 Cor 1:18, 24). Christ has promised His personal presence (Matt 18:20; 26:64; 28:20; Acts 18:10) and the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in the Church (John 14:16f., 26; 16:7-15). He also has promised to do what His disciples ask of Him (Matt 21:21f.; John 14:12-14) and the conversion of sinners is the delight of the Father's will (Ezek 18:23; 1 Tim

2:4). In view of its commission and resources, there is no reason why the Church should not be successful in carrying out the missionary enterprise.

The case for a future era of righteousness and prosperity rests largely on passages found in the Psalms and Prophets of the OT (e.g., Num 14:21; Pss 2:8; 22:27-29; 47; 72; 86:9; Isa 2:2-4; 11:6-9; 25:6-9; 65; 66; Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 34:26f.; Dan 2:35, 44; 7:27; Mic 4:1-4; Zech 9:9f.; 13:1; 14:9). These passages speak of the universal and triumphant reign of the Messiah. Since they cannot refer to a postadventual reign of Christ and because nothing that has taken place in history does justice to the glory of the prophetic vision, the golden age must be yet future, but prior to Messiah's return.

Confirmation is found in the NT. The terms of the great commission imply its successful completion (Matt 28:19f.) and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit signals the beginning of that process (Acts 2:16-47). The parable of the leaven points to the universal extension of the kingdom (Matt 13:33). Romans 11 holds forth the prospect of the extensive conversion of both Jews and Gentiles. All of this is in keeping with the fact that the object of Christ's redemption is the world (John 3:16, 17; cf. Rev 11:15).

Matthew 24 can be interpreted as describing events already past or in progress; Revelation 20 describes a future binding and loosing of Satan. The Lord's question, "Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Luke 18:8), does not imply that He will not find faith but is designed to stimulate the disciples to perseverance in faith.

The postmillennialist counters the objection that he "spiritualizes" the prophecies by charging his opponents with "literalizing" them. He seeks to allow the text to interpret itself without the imposition of extra-canonical hermeneutical criteria.

### 3. History.

Although some theologians of the post-Reformation period might be classified as postmillennialists, the viewpoint became prominent in the latter half of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Leading theologians such as the Hodges (C., A. A., and C. W.), W. G. T. Shedd, R. L. Dabney, and B. B. Warfield are to be reckoned as postmillennialists. The events of recent history, including two world wars, contributed to the rapid decline and virtual demise of postmillennialism as a viable option, but there is some evidence of revived interest.

The theology of the social gospel (e.g., W. Rauschenbusch, S. J. Case) has been labeled postmillennialism, but must be distinguished radically from orthodox postmillennialism. Instead of a millennium wrought by the power of God, the gospel of social betterment offered an optimism rooted in naturalistic evolution culminating in a man-made utopia. This is, in effect, a demythologized postmillennialism, no longer popular in its original form, but reasserting itself in new forms from time to time.

This entry is from Zondervan Illustrated Encyclopedia of The Bible<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.biblicaltraining.org/library/postmillennialism>

# Central concepts of Postmillennialism

1. The Kingdom of God - The Kingdom of God, according to Postmillennialism is the rule or reign of God spiritually in/over the hearts of men. Thus the kingdom is truly present in this age and is visibly represented by the church of Jesus Christ. The kingdom shows us and is really present wherever and whenever people believe the gospel and commit themselves to the sovereignty of Jesus Christ as Lord. It is a kingdom that is already without the not yet.

- A. Important features of the kingdom from this perspective:
  - a. The kingdom will not arrive instantaneously but develops progressively. In their view, Christ will return only after the kingdom has come in its fullness. The “arrival” of the kingdom, therefore, is gradual by degrees.
  - b. The gospel is the means by which the kingdom extends through the world. The continuing spread and influence of the gospel will also introduce the kingdom. This gradual spread of the gospel will be brought about by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Church. Eventually most of the world’s population will be converted to Christ.

“the essential distinctive of postmillennialism is its scripturally derived, sure expectation of gospel prosperity for the church during the present age,”<sup>8</sup>

- c. Key text on this spread of the gospel advancement of the kingdom leading up to the second coming is B. B. Warfield’s interpretation of Revelation 19:

“The section opens with a vision of the victory of the Word of God, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords over all His enemies. We see Him come forth from heaven girt for war, followed by the armies of heaven. . . . The thing symbolized is obviously the complete victory of the Son of God over all the hosts of wickedness. . . . The conquest is wrought by the spoken word---in short, by the preaching of the gospel. . . . What we have here, in effect, is a picture of the whole period between the first and second advents, seen from the point of view of heaven. It is the period of advancing victory of the Son of God over the world. . . . As emphatically as Paul, John teaches that the earthly history of the Church is not a history merely of conflict with evil, but of conquest over evil: and even more richly than Paul, John teaches that this conquest will be decisive and complete. The whole meaning of the vision of Revelation 19:11-21 is that Jesus Christ comes forth not to war merely but to victory; and every detail of the picture is laid in with a view precisely to emphasizing the thoroughness of this victory. The Gospel of Christ is, John being witness, completely to conquer the world. . . . A progressively advancing conquest of the earth by Christ’s gospel implies a coming age deserving at least the relative name of ‘golden,’”<sup>9</sup>

By way of contrast, Rev 19 is seen by Amillennialists and Premillennialists as describing Christ’s coming at the end of the age.

When does the “millennium” begin? Postmillennialists give two views

---

<sup>8</sup> Greg Bahnsen, “The Prima Facie Acceptability of Postmillennialism,” in *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, III, Winter 1976-77, p. 66)

<sup>9</sup> B.B. Warfield, “The Millennium and the Apocalypse,” *Biblical Doctrines*, pp. 647-648, 662

1. The millennium covers the entire inter-advent age (i.e., the whole period of time between Christ's first and second comings), Thus the millennial kingdom is present throughout the whole of the current age
  2. The present age is blending or merging into the millennium. Whereas others reserve the word millennium for the latter day, seeing the kingdom today as spiritual and the millennial kingdom as the realization of the spiritual into a publicly discernible, prosperity of the Christian Church.
- d. The success of the gospel will bring a reduction not an elimination of the influence and presence of sin. Righteousness, peace, and prosperity will flourish.

“over the long range the world will experience a period of extraordinary righteousness and prosperity as the church triumphs in the preaching of the gospel and discipling the nations through the supernatural agency of the Holy Spirit,”<sup>10</sup>

- Greg Bahnsen

Further explained:

“the gospel will continue to grow and flourish throughout the world, more and more individuals will be converted, the nations will stream to Christ, and the Great Commission will finally be successfully completed. The earth will be as full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. When that happens, generation after generation will love and serve the Lord faithfully. And then the end will come”<sup>11</sup>

- Doug Wilson

Yet much is quaffed with this important point:

"It should be understood that the postmillennial perspective provides a forecast for the global and long-term prospects of Christianity, but not for the local, short-term prospects of denominations or churches in the nation. . . . [Thus] the merits of the argument for the postmillennial perspective are not to be tied to the judgments about the present or near-term prospects of the Christian church in America"<sup>12</sup>

- John Jefferson Davis,

- e. The gospel has a transforming effect on society and culture. Said in a more militant way, the church will take the seven mountains of culture. The economic, political, and cultural life of mankind will improve. Every aspect of human activity will be renewed according to Christian principles and thus brought into service for the glory of Jesus Christ. For the church, victory in the present age will not be seen as simply the spiritual/invisible victories over the flesh nor the internal blessings privately experienced by the Church. The prosperity is such as will be visibly and publicly acknowledged. (The world will tell the church you're living your best life now!)
- f. At the end of the present age, after the kingdom has spread visibly and powerfully throughout the world but just before Christ returns, there will be a brief time of increased Satanic activity and apostasy. Satan's last hurrah! Like a 45-year-old weekend warrior trying to capture one last taste of athletic glory, Satan will attempt one final rebellion. Only to be crushed by the glorious return of Jesus Christ to the

---

<sup>10</sup> Greg Bahnsen, p. 63

<sup>11</sup> Doug Wilson, *Heaven Misplaced*, (Moscow, Canon Press, 2008) 10

<sup>12</sup> John Jefferson Davis, *Christ's Victorious Kingdom: Postmillennialism Reconsidered* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1986, 15



earth, at which time there will immediately follow the general resurrection, final judgment, and eternal state.

“In short, postmillennialism is set apart from the other two schools of thought [premillennialism and amillennialism] by its essential optimism for the kingdom in the present age,”<sup>13</sup> - Greg Bahnsen

## 2. Biblical Texts cited in support of Postmillennialism

- (1) In the OT - Num. 14:21; Psalms 2:6-9; 22:27-28; 47; 72:8-11; 110:1-2; 138:4-5 (cf. 102:15); Isa. 2:2-4; 9:6-7; 11:6-10; 45:22-25; 65; 66; Jer. 31:31-34; Daniel 2:31-35; Zech. 9:9f.; 13:1; 14:9.
- (2) In the NT - Matt. 13:31-33; 28:18-20; John 12:31-32; 16:33; I John 2:13-14; 3:8; 4:4,14; 5:4-5; Acts 2:32-36,41; Rom. 11:25-32; I Cor. 15:20-26, 57-58; Hebrews 1:8-9,13; 2:5-9; Rev. 2:25-27; 3:7-9; 7:9-10; 11:15; 19:11-21.

\* I realize no one will look up so many verses but that is how theologians trick ya by the preponderance of unlooked-up “scriptural” evidence.

## 3. Summary of Postmillennialism

“The thing that distinguishes the biblical postmillennialist, then, from amillennialism and premillennialism is his belief that Scripture teaches the success of the great commission in this age of the church. The optimistic confidence that the world nations will become disciples of Christ, that the church will grow to fill the earth, and that Christianity will become the dominant principle rather than the exception to the rule distinguishes postmillennialism from the other viewpoints. All and only postmillennialists believe this, and only the refutation of that confidence can undermine this school of eschatological interpretation. In the final analysis, what is characteristic of postmillennialism is not a uniform answer to any one particular exegetical question . . . , but rather a commitment to the gospel as the power of God which, in the agency of the Holy Spirit, shall convert the vast majority of the world to Christ and bring widespread obedience to His kingdom rule. This confidence will, from person to person, be biblically supported in various ways . . . . The postmillennialist is in this day marked out by his belief that the commission and resources are with the kingdom of Christ to accomplish the discipling of the nations to Jesus Christ prior to His second advent; whatever historical decline is seen in the missionary enterprise of the church and its task of edifying or sanctifying the nations in the word of truth must be attributed, not to anything inherent in the present course of human history, but to the unfaithfulness of the church,”<sup>14</sup>

- Greg Bahnsen

---

<sup>13</sup>Greg Bahnsen, p. 66

<sup>14</sup>Greg Bahnsen, p. 68

## Historical developments in the doctrine

“The ideas of the twelfth-century abbot Joachim inspired a new form of eschatological expectation which in the later Middle Ages and the sixteenth century was the major alternative to the Augustinian view. Before the end of history there would be an age of the Spirit, a period of spiritual prosperity and peace for the church on earth, which was identified with the millennium of Rev. 20, though not primarily derived from that text. This expectation can be called postmillennialist, since it held that the millennium would be inaugurated by a spiritual intervention of Christ in the power of his Spirit, not by his bodily advent, which would follow the millennium. Joachimism appealed to some early Protestants, who saw in the success of the Reformation gospel the dawning of a new age of prosperity for the church. Joachimist influence, Protestant optimism about the trends of history, and exegesis of Revelation combined to produce Protestant postmillennialism, whose first influential exponent was Thomas Brightman (1562–1607) and which first flourished in the seventeenth century. In this view, the millennium would come about through the Spirit-empowered preaching of the gospel, resulting in the conversion of the world and the worldwide spiritual reign of Christ through the gospel. The eighteenth century was the great age of postmillennialism, which played a key role in the development of missionary thinking. The revivals were seen as the first ripples of the movement of conversion which would engulf the world, and a view which gave human activity a significant role in God's purpose of establishing his kingdom was a major stimulus to missionary activity. But in the nineteenth century, postmillennial expectation increasingly approximated to the secular doctrine of \*progress and merged into liberal theology's identification of the kingdom of God with moral and social improvement. The modern decline of postmillennialism coincides with the loss of Christian credibility that doctrines of progress have suffered.”<sup>15</sup>

### The Rise of Post and Pre in modern context

Millennialism flourished again among various sects during the English Civil War (1638–49) and the succeeding dictatorship of Oliver Cromwell, notably among the Fifth Monarchy Men. But earlier in the century, two Puritan writers, Thomas Brightman and Joseph Mede, both Cambridge scholars, initiated (respectively) postmillennialism and premillennialism. Postmillennialism was the view that Christ would return after (Lat. post) the millennium. That implied that the gospel would spread and the world become increasingly peaceful before the second advent. Premillennialism was the view that Christ would return before (Lat. pre) the millennium. That implied that conditions on earth would become progressively worse until Christ defeated evil at the second advent. In the eighteenth century, the leaders of the Evangelical Revival, such as Jonathan \*Edwards, leant towards postmillennialism, although John \*Wesley appears to have held the more complex view of the great pietist scholar of Halle, Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687–1752), that there would be two millennia, one before and one after the second advent. The evangelical movement for ‘foreign missions’ led by William Carey, Thomas Chalmers, John Venn and many others was accordingly predominantly postmillennialist. The spread of the gospel would usher in the universal reign of Christ. This vision continued to inspire the American revivalist, Charles Finney, and the Scottish missionary, David Livingstone in the mid-nineteenth century. The missionary societies therefore engaged in medical and educational work to improve society, Livingstone advocating an alliance of Christianity, commerce and civilization to counter the Arab slave trade in East Africa. But from the 1820s a more pessimistic premillennialism began to stir. Edward \*Irving's teaching led to

---

<sup>15</sup> R. J. Bauckham, “MILLENNIUM” in *New Dictionary of Theology: Historical and Systematic*. 2nd edit. Ed: Martin Davie, Tim Grass, Stephen R. Holmes, John McDowell, T. A. Noble, (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2016) 572

the Albury Park conferences, and despite Irving's rejection by evangelicals, leaders such as Horatius Bonar, Lord Shaftesbury and Henry Grattan Guinness advocated the premillennial view. John Nelson Darby developed out of this the more elaborate scheme of dispensationalism, adopted by some but rejected by others in the new movement of Christian Brethren. The OT prophecies applied to Israel, not to the church, and at the end of the present dispensation, Christian believers would be caught up to meet the Lord in the air in the 'rapture' before the great tribulation, which in turn would end with the second advent which would initiate the millennium. Darby was more successful in propagating his views in the USA. Dispensationalism became widely known through the annual Niagara Bible Conferences from 1883 to 1900 and was taught in the notes of the widely influential Scofield Bible (1909). Postmillennialism continued to influence the wider evangelical movement, although the watchword of the Student Volunteer Movement (founded 1886), 'The evangelization of the world in this generation', was interpreted both ways. But premillennialism (though not necessarily dispensationalism) was stronger among the more conservative evangelicals in Britain in the early twentieth century. The leading Baptist preacher, F. B. Meyer, founded the Advent Testimony and Preparation Movement in 1917, while the fall of Jerusalem to General Allenby and the Balfour Declaration promising Jews a home in Palestine were hailed as events of epochal significance. Full-blown dispensationalism flourished in America, strengthened by the founding of Dallas Theological Seminary by Lewis Sperry Chafer. From the 1970s it was promoted in popular literature by Hal Lindsey in *The Late Great Planet Earth* and the 'Left Behind' series of novels by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins. While American evangelicalism continues to include all views, British evangelicalism and evangelical scholars in both countries and around the world generally reject the idea of a literal millennium as a misreading of Rev. 20:3 and adopt the amillennial views of Augustine and the Reformers.

In academic theology, eschatology began to play a more significant role even in liberal thought with the teaching of Albrecht Ritschl. Hegel's thought had made theologians more conscious of the significance of time and history, but Ritschl rejected both the metaphysical approach of Hegel and Schleiermacher's focus on religious experience to turn to a more historical approach. This began with Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God, understood as a historical movement of moral and social progress initiated by Jesus and continued by the church. This perspective contributed (along with evangelical postmillennialism) to the general nineteenth-century belief in progress. At the same time, Karl Marx, a baptized but apostate Jew, rejected this progressive view for the belief that the revolution of the proletariat would eventually lead to the classless society, a secularized form of eschatology. The 'social gospel' of Walter Rauschenbusch at the beginning of the twentieth century was more in line with the liberal theology of Ritschlian thought.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> T. A. Noble "Eschatology" in *New Dictionary of Theology: Historical and Systematic*. 2nd edit. Ed: Martin Davie, Tim Grass, Stephen R. Holmes, John McDowell, T. A. Noble, (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2016) 297-298

# Misconceptions of Postmillennialism

1. Postmillennialism has been mistakenly linked and often identified with belief in the inherent goodness of man. Yet the majority of postmillennialists are Calvinists.
2. Postmillennialism has been mistakenly perceived as teaching that the kingdom of God would be ushered in by human effort alone, independently of the Holy Spirit. Of all the Millennial views this one is the most Holy Spirit friendly, in that the Holy Spirit plays a central, if not exclusive role in the growth of God's kingdom. They do not believe the kingdom of God can be advanced by good old Fashion hard work but through faith in and dependence on the work of the Spirit. Side note most are avowedly cessationist. (Side-note: I just don't get it! As for me this is like a pizza with anchovies, it just makes no sense.)
3. Postmillennialism has been mistakenly charged with teaching salvific universalism. They hold that many will be saved but not all before the second coming of Christ.
4. Postmillennialism has been mistakenly identified with the notion of evolutionary optimism and other secular notions of historical progress. Mostly because liberal ministers who held to postmillennialism mixed it with evolutionary thought and other ideas of social progress.
5. Postmillennialism has been mistakenly identified with theological liberalism and the so-called "social gospel". Thus the kingdom it espoused came to be perceived as some sort of secular utopia that replaced the return of Jesus as the true hope of the church. Iain Murray explains:

"Instead of dependence on divine grace and upon the powerful operations of the Holy Spirit, the new idea of progress substituted concepts of a universal fatherhood of God and of a human race basically good and therefore capable of unlimited improvement. In the same way emphasis was moved from the promises of God as the only basis for the expectation of success to the philosophy of evolution. It is not therefore surprising that when the new teaching which thus reduced the gospel to the human and temporal became prevalent, evangelical Christians came to suspect all teaching [i.e., postmillennialism] which viewed future history as hopeful. They assumed that any belief in the world-wide success of the gospel must rest on the same errors upon which liberalism relied, and that, just as this naturalistic optimism destroyed faith in eternal salvation by giving Protestantism the false goal of an earthly Utopia, so any outlook which offers an assurance that the victories of the Church will yet be far more extensive in the world must similarly cease to represent Christ's coming as the glorious hope. But these assumptions rested upon a failure to distinguish between two different and indeed inimical schools of thought."<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Iain Murray, *The Puritan Hope: a study in revival in the interpretation of prophecy* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1971), 210

# Weaknesses of Postmillennialism

1. Postmillennialism minimizes one of the primary experiences that will characterize the church and all Christians throughout this present age: suffering with Christ.

2 Corinthians 4:7-12.

In 2 Cor 4, Paul, "effectively distances himself from the (postmil-like) view that the (eschatological) life of (the risen and ascended) Jesus embodies a power/victory principle that progressively ameliorates and reduces the suffering of the church. . . . Until the resurrection of the body at his return Christ's resurrection-life finds expression in the church's sufferings (and . . . nowhere else--so far as the existence and calling of the church are concerned); the locus of Christ's ascension-power is the suffering church" <sup>18</sup>

Romans 8:17-18.

How long will we experience suffering with Christ? How long will the groaning under the weight of weakness last? According to Rom8:19, 21, 23, it will last until the day of our redemption, which is the return of Christ.

"Until then, at Christ's return, the suffering/futility/decay principle in creation remains in force, undiminished (but sure to be overcome); it is an enervating factor that cuts across the church's existence, including its mission, in its entirety. The notion that this frustration factor will be demonstrably reduced, and the church's suffering service noticeably alleviated and even compensated, in a future era before Christ's return is not merely foreign to this passage; it trivializes as well as blurs both the present suffering and future hope/glory in view. Until his return, the church remains one step behind its exalted Lord; his exaltation means its (privileged) humiliation, his return (and not before), its exaltation" <sup>19</sup>

"as Paul reminds the church just a few verses after the Romans 8 passage considered above (v. 37), not 'beyond' or '[only] after' but 'in all these things' ('trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword,' v. 35), 'we are more than conquerors.' Until Jesus comes again, the church 'wins' by 'losing'" <sup>20</sup>

"Any outlook that tends to remove or obscure the (constitutive) dimension of suffering for the Gospel from the present triumph of the church is an illusion. The misplaced expectation, before Christ's return, of a 'golden age' in which, in contrast to the present, opposition to the church will have been reduced to a minimum and suffering will have receded to the periphery for an (at last) 'victorious' Christendom -- that misconception can only distort the church's understanding of its mission in the world. According to Jesus, the church will not have drained the shared cup of his suffering until he returns. The church cannot afford to evade that point. It does so at the risk of jeopardizing its own identity" <sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Richard Gaffin, "Theonomy and Eschatology: Reflections on Postmillennialism," in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* [Zondervan, 1990], 212

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* 214-15

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* 216

<sup>21</sup> Richard Gaffin, 217-18

2. Postmillennialism undermines the NT emphasis on the church's imminent expectation of Christ's return. It undermines the element of watchfulness that is essential to the NT church. See 1 Cor. 16:22; Rom. 13:11-12; Phil. 4:5; Js. 5:8; 1 Pt. 4:7; 1 Jn. 2:18; Rev. 1:3; 22:20.

3. The OT identifies the "golden" age of consummate success and triumph with the New Heavens and New Earth which come only after the millennium of Rev. 20 (Rev. 21-22).

4. The NT seems to anticipate that the number of those saved when Christ returns will not be as great as the Postmillennialism suggests, and that conditions will be decidedly bad, not good. See Mt. 7:13-14; Lk. 18:8; 2 Thess. 2:3-4; 2 Tim. 3:1-5,12-13; 4:3-4. In the parable of the Tares in Mt. 13:36-43.

5. Postmillennialism interpretation of Rev. 19-20 seems forced and artificial. See B.B. Warfield quote

6. Scripture (esp. the NT) nowhere explicitly teaches the progressive and eventual wholesale reconstruction of society. It seems to speak of us a pilgrim people. The transformation of arts, economics, politics, courts, education, according to Christian principles prior to Christ's return is little more than assumed on the bases of grass roots change and not social renovation. Granted there may be relative success in this regard in isolated instances, among selective groups, at particular times in history. Such things move like the tides.

For example Gary North thinks that essential to any idea of Christians "reigning" in history is "Christians' possession of the judicial authority to impose negative civil sanctions or the private economic power to impose both positive and negative cultural sanctions [in particular, those given in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28]"<sup>22</sup> Such conflating of the political and the religious is not just a bad idea but a dangerous one.

---

<sup>22</sup> Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, 87

# Addendum

## Addendum 1

### All the Millennial views share a Common Eschatology.

1. Eschatology is about hope.

We look forward in hope knowing History as we know it will be brought to a final consummation. The consummation will be brought about by God's sovereign decree and at the time He has appointed. So we have confidence and look forward to the eternal day of perfect fellowship in the presence of God. Premill and Amill have an eternal and eschatological hope not realized until Christ's second coming. Post mill have a historical and realized hope rooted in actual and temporal progress of the gospel and manifesting in an optimism.

2. Eschatology is rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ and centered on the return of Christ. All gospel promises find 'completion' and 'consumption' in the Eschaton (second coming). Jesus Christ will return in this final consummation, and His coming will consist of four things all agree on.

- C. Personal Bodily Return: – Christ Himself, not a “movement” or “influence”. He will personally come as King of King. That means He will Bodily come, not a figurative or “spiritual” coming. Jesus will physically return in bodily form.
- D. Visible - Jesus will return for all mankind to see. As Rev. 1:7 says, “Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him.” I imagine, He will make himself known with the same swagger and confidence a superstar rapper make himself known when he walks on stage, (minus the hubris).
- E. Sudden – not gradual, though preceded by events.
- F. Glorious and triumphant - In contrast to Incarnation his return will be a glorious exaltation of King Jesus. In short he will roll up like a boss and everybody will know it.

3. Eschatology pronounces the coming justice of God

When Jesus comes back, it will be a climactic event that ushers in the consummation of God's purposes. There will be a resurrection of the dead both the just and unjust. God's retributive justice will be evident in a final separation of good and evil; all wrong will be deeply, satisfyingly, proportionally and completely punished and God's true people will be vindicated and rewarded. Lastly, God's restorative justice will be gloriously displayed in the reinstatement of universal shalom through the formation of the new heaven and new earth.

4. Eschatology promotes faithful living.

No matter where you land as to your view of Eschatology. The study of last things should always assure you that God's purposes will prevail and motivates you to live faithfully until they do. When it comes to faithfulness and perseverance knowing who wins in the end makes a difference. The only thing that will hinder that would be a large and complicated chart obstructing your view of the Bible. If eschatology becomes a distraction from the gospel or a diversion from doing good then you're not doing it right. Theological knowledge should be the fuel for our Christian experience. In short, Eschatology is fuel for doxology.

## **Addendum 2**

### **Postmillennialism: Principles of Interpretation by Loraine Boettner**

It is clear that each of the millennial views has been held and at the present time is held by men concerning whose sincerity and loyalty to the evangelical faith there can be no doubt. That believing Christians through the ages, using the same Bible and acknowledging it to be authoritative, have arrived at quite different conclusions appears to be due primarily to different methods of interpretation. Premillennialists place strong emphasis on literal interpretation and pride themselves on taking Scripture just as it is written. Post- and Amillennialists on the other hand, mindful of the fact that much of both the Old and New Testament unquestionably is given in figurative or symbolical language, have no objection on principle against figurative interpretation and readily accept that if the evidence indicates that it is preferable. This causes Premillennialists to charge that Post- and Amillennialists explain away or reject parts of the Bible. One premillennial writer says:

'Premillennialists insist that one general rule of interpretation should be applied to all areas of theology and that prophecy does not require spiritualization any more than other aspects of truth... History is history, not allegory. Facts are facts. Prophesied future events are just what they are prophesied' (Dr. John F. Walvoord, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, July-Sept., 1951, p. 272).

Another says: 'Premillenarians hold to a literal interpretation of the sacred Scriptures, believing that the teachings of Christ and the Apostles are to be understood in a literal sense except in certain places where some other meaning is designated' (Jesse F. Silver, *The Lord's Return*, p. 204).

This general principle of interpretation has been expressed as, 'Literal wherever possible' (H. Bonar), or 'Literal unless absurd' (Govett). One does not have to read far in the Bible to discover that not everything can be taken literally. Silver refers to 'certain places' where some 'other meaning' is designated. But he gives no rule by which those certain places are to be recognized. We find no labels in the Scripture itself telling us, 'Take this literally,' or 'Take that figuratively.' Evidently the individual reader must use his own judgment, backed by as much experience and common sense as he can muster. And that, of course, will vary endlessly from individual to individual.

As an example of what he means by literal interpretation Silver says: 'Every prophecy pointing to the first advent of Christ was literally fulfilled to the letter in every detail' (p. 209). That statement has been made in substance by various other Premillennialists. But it simply is not so. The very first Messianic prophecy in Scripture is found in Genesis 3:15, where, in pronouncing the curse upon the serpent God said, 'He shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.' Now that prophecy certainly was not fulfilled literally by a man crushing the head of a snake, or by a snake biting the heel of a man. Rather it was fulfilled in a highly figurative sense when Christ gained a complete victory and triumphed over the Devil and all his forces of evil at the cross. The last prophecy in the Old Testament is found in Malachi 4:5, and reads as follows: 'Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of Jehovah come.' That prophecy likewise was not fulfilled literally. Christ Himself said that it was fulfilled in the person of John the Baptist (Matt. 11:14), who came in the spirit and power of Elijah.

Again, we have the prophecy of Isaiah: 'The voice of one that crieth, Prepare ye in the wilderness the way of Jehovah; make level in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the uneven shall be made level, and the rough places a plain: and the glory of Jehovah shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of Jehovah hath spoken it' (Is. 40:3-5). This certainly was



not fulfilled by a highway building program in Palestine, but rather in the work of John the Baptist who prepared the way for the public ministry of Jesus. John himself said, 'For this is he that was spoken of through Isaiah the prophet, saying...', and then proceeded to quote these verses (Matt. 3:1-3; Luke 3:3-6).

The words of Isaiah 9:1,2, regarding the people of Zebulun and Naphtali, 'The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined,' are fulfilled figuratively in the ministry of Jesus. For Matthew says: 'Now when he heard that John was delivered up, he withdrew into Galilee; and leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the border of Zebulun, and Naphtali: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophet, saying,

The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, Toward the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, The people that sat in darkness Saw a great light, And to them that sat in the region and shadow of death, To them did light spring up' (Matt. 4:15,16).

In these words Isaiah clearly was speaking of the spiritual darkness that exists wherever sin rules, and of the spiritual light that would be brought to those lands when the Messiah came.

And when Balaam attempted to pronounce a curse upon the people of Israel he pronounced instead a blessing, and said:

'There shall come forth a star out of Jacob, And a sceptre shall rise out of Israel, And shall smite through all the corners of Moab And break down all the sons of tumult' (Nu. 24:17).

These words are commonly understood as embodying a Messianic prophecy, and as having had their fulfillment in the coming of Christ, who arose like a star out of Israel, and whose kingdom eventually is to embrace the whole world.

Many other Old Testament prophecies in figurative language might be cited, but surely these are sufficient to show that it simply is not true that 'Every prophecy pointing to the first advent of Christ was literally fulfilled to the letter in every detail.'

That a great deal of the Bible is given in figurative or symbolical language which by no stretch of the imagination can be taken literally should be apparent to every one. We spiritualize these statements because we regard this as the only way in which their true meaning can be brought out. To cite only a few further examples: In the midst of a very prosaic historical account of the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt the providential and protective power of God is set forth in these words: 'Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself' (Ex. 19:4). Palestine is described as 'a land flowing with milk and honey' (Ex. 3:8). Read the 23rd or 91st Psalm and note the almost continuous use of figurative language.

The New Testament follows the same practice. To his disciples Jesus said, 'Ye are the salt of the earth... Ye are the light of the world... Even so let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven' (Matt. 5:13-16). When instituting the Lord's Supper He said: 'This is my body... This is my blood' (Matt. 26:26, 28). The writer recently heard a Roman Catholic priest argue quite convincingly that these words prove that in the Mass the bread and wine actually are changed into the flesh and blood of Christ. From the standpoint of literalism it would be impossible to refute that doctrine. Speaking to the elders of the Church in Ephesus Paul said: 'I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock' (Acts 20:29). To the Philippians he wrote: 'Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the concision' (3:2). And to the Galatians: 'I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me' (2:20). The word 'blood' is used repeatedly in a figurative sense with reference to

the suffering and death of Christ through which salvation was purchased on Calvary, e.g., '...in whom we have our redemption through his blood' (Eph. 1:7); '...the blood of an eternal covenant' (Heb. 13:20); '...and they washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb' (Rev. 7:14; etc.). In spiritualizing certain Old Testament prophecies we are in good company, for the New Testament writers often do the same. In his discourse on the day of Pentecost Peter spiritualized the rather extended prophecy of Joel (Acts 2:16-21). James' discourse at the Jerusalem Conference spiritualized the prophecy of Amos (Acts 15:14-18). Literally thousands of such figurative and symbolic expressions are found throughout the Bible, usually without explanation. It is assumed that the reader will understand. Furthermore, foot washing is clearly commanded by Jesus (John 13:14), and is commended by Paul (I Tim. 5:10); and five times we have the command, 'Salute one another with a holy kiss' (Rom. 16:16; I Cor. 16:20; II Cor. 13:12; I Thess. 5:28; and I Peter 5:14). Yet only a very few people take these literally.

To spiritualize certain prophecies or other statements does not mean that we explain them away. Sometimes their true meaning is to be found only in the unseen spiritual world. Premillennialists often materialize and literalize the prophecies to such an extent that they keep them on an earthly level and miss their true and deeper meaning. That is exactly what the Jews did in their interpretation of Messianic prophecy. They looked for literal fulfillments with an earthly kingdom and a political ruler, and the result was that they missed the redemptive element so completely that when the Messiah came they did not recognize Him but instead rejected and crucified Him. The fearful consequences of literalistic interpretation as it related to the first coming should put us on guard against making the same mistake in regard to the second coming.

The general principle of rigid literal interpretation leads to the conclusion that when Christ comes again He will re-establish the throne of David in the city of Jerusalem, and that He will reign in an earthly political kingdom of Jewish supremacy for one thousand years. According to that view the Jews are again to possess all of Palestine and the surrounding areas and are to live there, the temple is to be rebuilt, and the priesthood, temple ritual, animal sacrifices, feasts and fasts are to be reinstated.

Premillennialists encounter real difficulty, however, and are forced to abandon their literalism when they come to the prophecies which predict that in the new kingdom all the nations of the earth are to go up to Jerusalem every year, and indeed every Sabbath; 'And it shall come to pass that every one that is left of all the nations that came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, Jehovah of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles' (Zech. 14:16); 'It shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith Jehovah' (Is. 66:23); and, 'Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, No foreigner, uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter into my sanctuary, of any foreigners that are among the children of Israel' (Ezek. 44:9).

It soon becomes evident that such startling literalism goes a great deal farther than its advocates are willing, or indeed, able to carry it. Taken literally these predictions mean that the whole earth is to become one great Israelitish nation and Church, with but one temple, one form of worship, and one common law. Premillennialists do not want to acknowledge that weekly pilgrimages or universal circumcision is to become the rule during the Millennium. Since they cannot go through with the literal interpretation of their own millennial passages it becomes evident that their principle of literal interpretation is basically wrong.

Premillennialists also encounter difficulty with the Messianic and kingdom prophecies which involve the restoration of the historical conditions of Israel's national life, including her national enemies, not only the great powers of Assyria, Egypt, and Babylon, but the smaller nations of Moab, Ammon, Edom and Philistia, nations that have long since vanished from history without

possibility of recall. Note especially: Micah 5:5,6 (following the prediction that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, vs. 2): 'And this man [Messiah] shall be our peace. When the Assyrian shall come into our land, and when he shall tread in our palaces, then shall we raise up against him seven shepherds, and eight principal men. And they shall waste the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod in the entrances thereof: and he shall deliver us from the Assyrian.' Similar references are found relating to Egypt, in Joel 3:19, and to Babylon in Revelation 18:1-24. In the Messianic prophecy found in Isaiah II regarding the relationship of the future kingdom to the smaller surrounding nations we read: 'And they shall fly down upon the shoulders of the Philistines on the west; together shall they despoil the children of the east: they shall put forth their hand upon Edom and Moab; and the children of Ammon shall obey them' (vs. 14).

It would require a miracle of raising from the dead the nations referred to if these verses are to be literally fulfilled. We believe that George B. Fletcher gives the true interpretation when he says: 'These verses are a prophecy of the conversion of the Gentiles (vs. 10), and of the return of the remnant according to the election of grace from among the Jews, that is, their return to God in Christ (vss. 11:16). This prophecy began to be fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost when 'Jews, devout men out of every nation under heaven,' were evangelized by the apostle Peter, and returned home to God in Christ, the mighty God. Under a figure of speech these Hebrew preachers are represented as flying from Jerusalem with eager activity upon Philistia to convert it; as an eagle pounces upon the shoulders of a sheep or other animal, its prey (see Acts 8:26-40, Philip's preaching to the Ethiopian eunuch; and 9:32-43, Peter's mission to Joppa)' — Pamphlet, *The Millennium*, p. 30. This one point alone, that the nations referred to have disappeared from the face of the earth and so could play no part in a future restoration of Israel, should be sufficient proof that the literalistic method of interpretation cannot be defended.

Rejecting the clearly enunciated Scripture principle that the Church has been established as the instrument through which Christ makes a spiritual conquest of the world — He is to sit at the right hand of God where He now is, the position of power and influence, until His enemies have been made the footstool of His feet (Mark 12:36; 16:19; Heb. 1:13) — Premillennialism substitutes the view that until He comes again the world is to grow progressively worse, and that at His coming He is to conquer the world and overthrow His enemies in the most gigantic and spectacular and sudden military conquest of all time. He is pictured as using overwhelming force in this conquest in that He rains fire and brimstone from heaven upon His enemies and thus utterly defeats Antichrist and all his hosts. Premillennialism seriously misunderstands the genius of Old Testament predictive prophecy in that it interprets in a literal, materialistic sense those foreviews of the Messianic age which can only be understood in a figurative sense.

In the following passage material objects and familiar ideas of the Old Testament era are used to set forth spiritual truth and to describe an era that had not yet dawned and which therefore could be described intelligently only in the thought-forms and language with which the people were familiar. 'And it shall come to pass in the latter days, that the mountain of Jehovah's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many peoples shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem' (Is. 2:2,3).

These words are fulfilled in that the Gospel took its course out from- Jerusalem as the disciples went under orders to evangelize all the world, with the Church over the centuries gradually coming into a position of world-wide prominence, gradually increasing in power and becoming more influential in the lives of men throughout the world until it stands out like a mountain on a

plain. The attempt to assign specific meaning to each figure of the landscape not only mars the beauty of the picture but obscures the real meaning of the prophecy. When God says, 'They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain,' let not the reader absurdly imagine that He had in mind only that insignificant elevation called Zion, in the southeast corner of the city of Jerusalem. 'God's holy mountain,' which at that time was the site of the temple and the center of the true religion, is the familiar and endeared name for the Church or Kingdom in the present Messianic age.

When we are told that God will 'create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy' (Is. 65:18), Jerusalem, the center of the theocracy and symbol of Old Testament Israel, is used to represent the New Testament Church. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews spiritualizes these passages and shows that their true fulfillment is found in the Christian Church when he says of believers: 'For ye are not come unto a mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire... but ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable hosts of angels and to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven' (12:18-23); 'Having then a great high priest, who hath passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God' (4:14); and, 'We have such a high priest, who sat down on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man' (8:1,2). Paul, too, spiritualizes the term Jerusalem when he says that, 'The Jerusalem that is above is free, which is our mother' (Gal. 4:26).

Isaiah says: 'He shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth; and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked' (11:4). Similar language is found in Revelation 19:11-21, where Christ is pictured as the rider on the white horse, who slays His enemies with a sharp sword that proceeds 'out of his mouth,' that is, by the spoken word, the Gospel which is preached by His followers all over the world, and by which He makes a thorough conquest of His enemies. Isaiah says: 'They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks' (2:4) — fulfilled in the gradual elimination of wars as the world is Christianized and the energies and resources of the people are devoted to peaceful purposes. Again, he says: 'And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them... And the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Jehovah, as the waters cover the sea' (11:6-9) — that is, forces naturally antagonistic and at enmity with each other shall be gradually subdued and reconciled with each other in a new relationship so that they cooperate harmoniously in Messiah's Kingdom. A fitting example of the wolf dwelling with the lamb is seen in the change that came over the vicious persecutor Saul of Tarsus, who was a wolf ravening and destroying, but who was so transformed by the Gospel of Christ that he became a lamb. After his conversion he lost his hatred for the Christians, and became instead their humble friend, confidant, defender. The lion eats straw like the ox when men who formerly were strong and cruel and wild by nature are so changed by the Gospel that they become gentle, meek, humble, and feed on the word of life along with those who are members of Christ's Church.

One writer has this to say about Isaiah's prophecy: 'Since we have here a description of Christ's kingdom which is not composed of beasts, wolves, serpents, lions, etc., but of men, we must understand that 'in all My (God's) holy mountain,' that is, the Church of Christ ('Zion'), the peace that is to reign is of such a nature that those people who formerly were like wolves, bloodthirsty lions, insidious adders will by the grace of God put off their old nature, cease to harm one another, and peacefully dwell together as the lambs of Christ and feed on the green pasture of the Gospel. Of this change of nature St. Paul speaks in plain words (II Cor. 5:17), 'If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.' Not only the ferocious persecutor Saul who became the Gospel-preaching, soul-

seeking Paul is an example (I Tim. 1:13), but the entire history of Christian missions abounds with such examples' (L. A. Heerboth, booklet, *The Millennium and the Bible*, p. 12).

When Ezekiel says that Israel is to be restored to her land forever (37:24 — 28), he indicates clearly that those words are not to be taken literally. He says: 'And my servant David shall be king over them... David my servant shall be their prince for ever' (vss. 24,25). Jeremiah likewise says that David is to be their king (30:9). If we take that literally, then David must be raised from the dead to be the millennial king in Palestine,— David, and not Christ. The literalists say that David is here used as a symbol for Christ. But that is not what the Bible says. To take David as a symbol for Christ would be to 'spiritualize' the prophecy away. If the other parts of the prophecy are literal this must be too.

To take these descriptions literally is to miss their real beauty and their great spiritual import. The literalistic premillennial interpretation of many Old Testament passages is, as Rutgers points out, 'even beneath the level of certain passages in the Old Testament itself, which transcend the particular, local color and open up the higher spiritual, ethical and universal. These carnal, materialistic notions,' he very appropriately adds, 'are (but) the 'swaddling clothes' of Judaism' (*Premillennialism in America*, p. 255).

We have indicated earlier that one of the errors of Premillennialism is that it fails to understand that the Church is New Testament Israel. It persists in thinking of 'Israel' as composed only of the physical descendants of Abraham. Dispensationalism carries this principle to an almost unprecedented extreme, and insists that in all cases Israel must mean fleshly Israel, or the Jews, that it can never mean the Church, and that the kingdom prophecies of the Old Testament must be fulfilled to the Jews literally. And since some of these were not fulfilled before the nation of Israel passed out of existence, they tell us that Israel must be re-established in Palestine and these fulfilled in a future age.

But the fact of the matter is that the spiritual relationship is more important than, and takes precedence over, the physical. Paul stated that quite clearly when he said: 'Know therefore that they that are of faith, the same are sons of Abraham'; and again, 'If ye are Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise' (Gal. 3:7,29). And Christ himself placed the spiritual above the physical when he said, 'Whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother' (Matt. 12:50). The Epistle to the Hebrews is one sustained argument that the old forms and ceremonies and relationships have passed away forever, and that all nations and races now stand as equals before God.

### **Addendum 3**

## **The NATURE AND PURPOSE OF PROPHECY**

**by Loraine Boettner**

Also in connection with the subject of interpretation something should be said about the basic nature of prophecy. Premillennialists regard prophecy as history written beforehand.

We prefer to say, however, that the primary purpose of prophecy is to inspire faith in those who see its fulfillment, and only secondarily to inform us of what is going to happen in the future. At the time of fulfillment the observer looks back to the author of the prophecy and is led to acknowledge that he could have spoken only by inspiration, and that his message therefore is authoritative and trustworthy. Prophecy thus comes under the general category of miracle, and its primary purpose is to accredit a message or a messenger. This was the purpose set forth when Jesus said: "I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe" (John 14:29); and again, "From henceforth I tell you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am he" (John 13:19). Here the primary purpose of prophecy, like that of a miracle in the physical realm, is to inspire faith. It is in effect a delayed miracle.

As proof that this is the correct principle we find that most of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the First Coming of Christ were so vague and enigmatic that they could not possibly have been understood until after their fulfillment. While some were in language that was easy to understand, such as that He would be born in Bethlehem, that He would be born of a virgin, and that He would heal the sick and afflicted, the meaning of the more important ones relating to the nature of His work of redemption and to the nature of the Kingdom that He was to establish could not be understood until after their accomplishment. As examples of the latter we may cite: the protevangelium, given in Genesis 3:16, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: he shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel"; the extensive prophecy concerning the suffering of Messiah as found in Isaiah 53; various prophecies concerning the nature of the Kingdom that was to be established, as found in Isaiah, chapters 2, 11, 66; the nature of the work of atonement as prefigured in the priesthood, ritual and sacrifices; and the promise made to David that the throne of his kingdom was to be established for ever, involving, as we see in the light of the New Testament, a long line of merely human kings and then a transition to the Messiah who is the true King of Israel. The manner in which the events connected with the crucifixion of Christ as predicted in the Old Testament would be fulfilled could not have been understood until their fulfillment, e.g., that His hands and feet would be pierced (Ps. 22:16); that the soldiers would part His garments among them and cast lots for His robe (Ps. 22:18; John 19:24); that not a bone of His body would be broken (Ex. 12:46; John 19:36); His resurrection (Ps. 16:10; Acts 2:27); and even the death and burial of His betrayer, Judas Iscariot (Ps. 69:25; 109:8; Acts 1:19,20). It was clearly impossible for any Old Testament Jew to draw from these prophecies a plan of the life of the coming Messiah.

The promise given to Abraham that his seed should be very numerous and that through his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed, finds its primary fulfillment, not in the totality of his physical descendants as at first sight would seem to have been indicated, nor even in the descendants through Jacob who stood in a special relationship to God, but in those who are his spiritual descendants (Gal. 3:7,29); and the seed through which all the nations of the earth were to be blessed was not his descendants in general, but one individual, which is Christ: "Now to Abraham were the promises spoken, and to his seed. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ" (Gal. 3:16). Who could have understood that before it was fulfilled?

Concerning this feature of predictive prophecy Campbell has well said:

“The enigmatic form of prophecy precludes the possibility of the merely human actors in the fulfillment being aware that they are participating in the predicted event. It permits the prescience and power of God to appear, while in no way encroaching on the free agency of man. The advent of Christ, His character, ministry, sufferings, death, and enthronement in glory, are all predicted in the Hebrew prophets in such a manner that no one living prior to their fulfillment was able to read their meaning clearly; and yet the diligent reader today who studies the ancient records in the light of the fulfillment cannot fail to see that he has before his eyes clear testimony to the importance and the supernatural origin of the records in which the predictions appear. The disciples of Jesus probably knew well enough what the prophets had spoken; but their familiarity with the written word did not of itself enable them to see the nature or character of the kingdom over which Messiah would reign. Not until they were compelled by contemporary events did they lay aside their racial preconceptions and recognize the glorious vision of all nations of men united in one universal brotherhood under the risen and glorified Christ” (Israel and the New Covenant, p. 170).

It should be further evident that as the Old Testament prophets used figures of speech with which their people were familiar, that is, language borrowed from the vocabulary of the old economy, such as the land, the temple, the sacrifices, etc., to describe the glories of the Messianic era, so no doubt the New Testament uses terms with which we are familiar to describe the future state which we as yet are able to grasp only faintly. We are told enough to make it clear that great and glorious events ahead; but the manner in which those events are to be accomplished, and the details concerning the future course of the Kingdom both on earth and in heaven are left largely unexplained. In all probability the realities of the future state will be as different from our ideas concerning them as the realities of the present era have proved to be different from the ideas of the Old Testament Jews.

We must keep in mind that it was the mechanical, literalistic method of interpreting prophecy that led the Jews at the time of Christ to expect a Messiah who would conquer their enemies and set up an earthly political kingdom in Jerusalem. Fastening their eyes on the very letter of Scripture, they became tragically blind to its real meaning and spirit, with the result that when Christ “came unto his own, “they that were his own received him not” (John 1:11), but rejected and crucified Him. This same literalistic principle can also have tragic results in our day, in that it arouses hopes that are false and disappointing. This is particularly true in regard to the view that the Jews still are to be looked upon as God's favored people, that Palestine belongs to them as a matter of Divine right, and that prophecy foretells a glorious kingdom for them in Palestine. It is productive of even more serious results in the Church when it is employed to teach that Christ is to set up a one thousand year political kingdom in this world, and so to divert attention from the real purpose of the Church, which is to evangelize the world during this present age. Nearly a century ago Dr. Charles Hodge warned against the unnatural insistence of Premillennialists on literalism as an ignis fatuus, as he called it, a false or misleading fire which “leads those who follow it, they know not whither.” That method proved disastrous for the Jews who tried to predict the details of Christ's First Coming. Most likely it will not work any better for those who attempt to set forth in detail the order of events for His Second Coming.

As a matter of fact no Premillennialist can carry out the principle of literal interpretation consistently. No one has yet devised a sure method for distinguishing between the figurative and the literal, Many statements in Scripture clearly are figurative, and the Premillennialist must spiritualize them no matter how critical he may be of Post- or Amillennialism. No one can take literally the statement that the saints in Paradise have “washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 7:14); or that the victorious saint is to be made a “pillar” in the temple of God (Rev. 3:12); or that the Devil, who is a spirit, can be bound with a chain and shut up in a deep pit for a thousand years (Rev. 20:2,3). We do not take literally Christ's

words, “This is my body,” and “This is my blood,” although these two sentences are composed of very plain, short, simple words. Roman Catholics do take those words literally, and get their doctrines of Transubstantiation and the Mass. It is inconsistent for Premillennialists to pick and choose in deciding what statements they will take literally and what ones they will take figuratively while at the same time criticizing Post and Amillennialists for accepting figurative or symbolical interpretations when those seem preferable. If figurative or symbolical — interpretation is wrong in principle it should not be resorted to at all. Otherwise Premillennialists do precisely what they accuse Post and Amillennialists of doing, — take Scripture literally where that seems preferable, and spiritualize where that seems preferable.

Another principle of interpretation is that when a prophecy or promise has been fulfilled once, there is no valid reason why it must be fulfilled again, or repeatedly. A present day condition involving this principle relates to the State of Israel. Some tell us that since Palestine and the surrounding lands were promised to Abraham and to the Children of Israel, and that since those lands never were fully occupied, or because they later were lost, they now rightfully belong to the Israelis. But in Joshua 21:48,45, we read: “So Jehovah gave unto Israel all the land, which he swore to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein.

... There failed not aught of any good thing which Jehovah had spoken unto the house of Israel: all came to pass. In I Kings 4:21 we read: “And Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the River unto the land of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt: they brought tribute, and served Solomon all the days of his life.” And II Chr. 9:26 tells us: “And he (Solomon) ruled over all the kings from the River unto the land of the Philistines, and to the border of Egypt.” Hence we conclude that those promises have been amply fulfilled, and that they do not apply to the present day State of Israel.