

EXCERPT

## THE MILLENNIUM

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## CHAPTER 55

# The Millennium

*What is the millennium?*

*When does it occur?*

*Will Christians go through the Great Tribulation?*

### EXPLANATION AND SCRIPTURAL BASIS

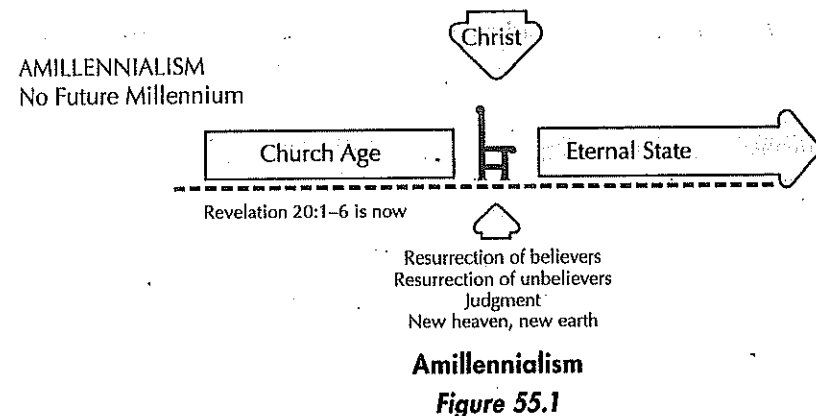
The word *millennium* means “one thousand years” (from Lat. *millennium*, “thousand years”). The term comes from Revelation 20:4–5, where it says that certain people “came to life and reigned with Christ *for a thousand years*. The rest of the dead did not come to life until *the thousand years* were ended.” Just prior to this statement, we read that an angel came down from heaven and seized the devil “and bound him for *a thousand years*, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until *the thousand years* were ended” (Rev. 20:2–3).

Throughout the history of the church there have been three major views on the time and nature of this “millennium.”

#### A. EXPLANATION OF THE THREE MAJOR VIEWS

##### 1. Amillennialism

We begin with the simplest view, amillennialism. It can be pictured as in figure 55.1.



According to this position the passage in Revelation 20:1–10 describes *the present church age*. This is an age in which Satan’s influence over the nations has been greatly

reduced so that the gospel can be preached to the whole world. Those who are said to be reigning with Christ for the thousand years are Christians who have died and are already reigning with Christ in heaven. Christ's reign in the millennium, according to this view, is not a bodily reign here on earth but rather the heavenly reign he spoke of when he said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matt. 28:18).

This view is called "amillennial" because it maintains that there is *no future millennium yet to come*. Since amillennialists believe that Revelation 20 is now being fulfilled in the church age, they hold that the "millennium" described there is currently happening. The exact duration of the church age cannot be known, and the expression "thousand years" is simply a figure of speech for a long period of time in which God's perfect purposes will be accomplished.

According to this position, the present church age will continue until the time of Christ's return (see figure 55.1). When Christ returns, there will be a resurrection of both believers and unbelievers. The bodies of believers will rise to be reunited with their spirits and enter into full enjoyment of heaven forever. Unbelievers will be raised to face the final judgment and eternal condemnation. Believers will also stand before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10), but this judgment will only determine degrees of reward in heaven, for only unbelievers will be condemned eternally. At this time also the new heavens and new earth will begin. Immediately after the final judgment, the eternal state will commence and continue forever.

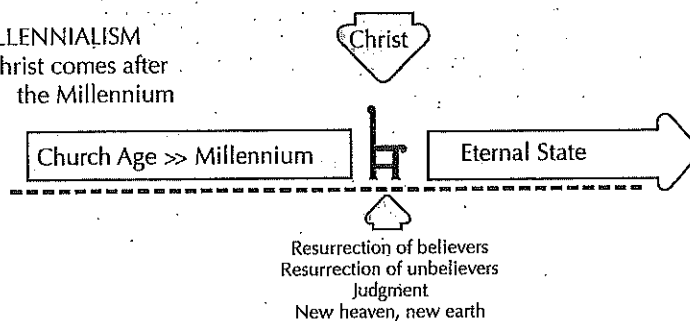
This scheme is quite simple because all of the end time events happen at once, immediately after Christ's return. Some amillennialists say that Christ could return at any time, while others (such as Beikhof) argue that certain signs have yet to be fulfilled.

## 2. Postmillennialism

The prefix *post-* means "after." According to this view, Christ will return *after* the millennium. The postmillennial view may be represented as in figure 55.2.

### POSTMILLENNIALISM

Christ comes after  
the Millennium



### Postmillennialism

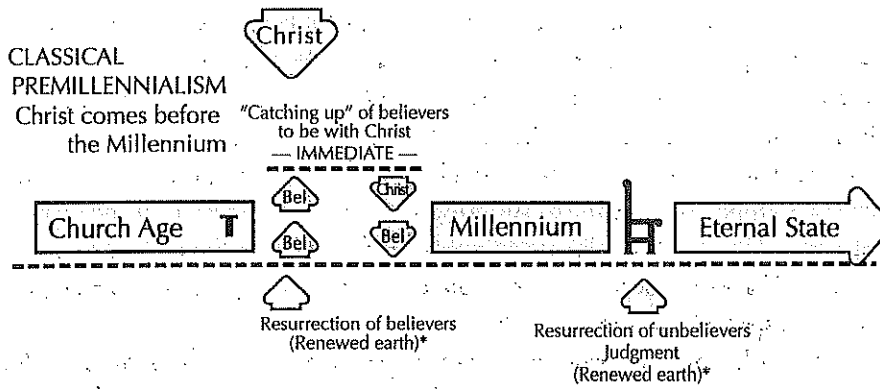
Figure 55.2

According to this view, the progress of the gospel and the growth of the church will gradually increase, so that a larger and larger proportion of the world's population will be Christians. As a result, there will be significant Christian influences on society, society will function more and more according to God's standards, and gradually a "millennial age" of peace and righteousness will occur on the earth. This "millennium" will last for a long period of time (not necessarily a literal one thousand years), and finally, *at the end of this period, Christ will return to earth*, believers and unbelievers will be raised, the final judgment will occur, and there will be a new heaven and new earth. We will then enter into the eternal state.

The primary characteristic of postmillennialism is that it is very optimistic about the power of the gospel to change lives and bring about much good in the world. Belief in postmillennialism tends to increase in times when the church is experiencing great revival, when there is an absence of war and international conflict, and when it appears that great progress is being made in overcoming the evil and suffering in the world. But postmillennialism in its most responsible form is not based simply on the observation of events in the world around us but on arguments from various Scripture passages, which will be examined below.

**3: Premillennialism**

a. **Classic or Historic Premillennialism.** The prefix *pre-* means "before," and the "pre-millennial" position says that Christ will come back *before* the millennium.<sup>1</sup> This viewpoint has a long history from the earliest centuries onward. It may be represented as in figure 55.3.



\* Classical Premillennialists differ over whether the renewed earth will begin in the millennium or the eternal state.

**Classic or Historic Premillennialism**

**Figure 55.3**

1. Another name sometimes used to refer to premillennialism is *chiliasm*, from the Greek word *chilioi*, "a thousand."

This term is more often found in older literature and is rarely used today.

According to this viewpoint, the present church age will continue until, as it nears the end, a time of great tribulation and suffering comes on the earth (T in the figure above stands for tribulation).<sup>2</sup> After that time of tribulation *at the end of the church age, Christ will return to earth to establish a millennial kingdom.* When he comes back, believers who have died will be raised from the dead, their bodies will be reunited with their spirits, and *these believers will reign with Christ on earth for one thousand years.* (Some premillennialists take this to be a literal one thousand years, and others understand it to be a symbolic expression for a long period of time.) During this time, Christ will be physically present on the earth in his resurrected body and will reign as King over the earth. The *believers* who have been raised from the dead, along with those who are still alive on earth when Christ returns, will receive glorified resurrection bodies that will never die, and in these resurrection bodies they will live on the earth and reign with Christ. Of the *unbelievers* who remain on earth, many (but not all) will turn to Christ and be saved. Jesus will reign in perfect righteousness, and there will be peace throughout the earth. Many premillennialists hold that the earth will be renewed, and we will in fact see the new heavens and new earth at this time (but it is not essential to premillennialism to hold to this, for one could be a premillennialist and hold that the new heavens and new earth will not occur until after the final judgment). At the beginning of this time Satan will be bound and cast into the bottomless pit so that he will have no influence on the earth during the millennium (Rev. 20:1-3).

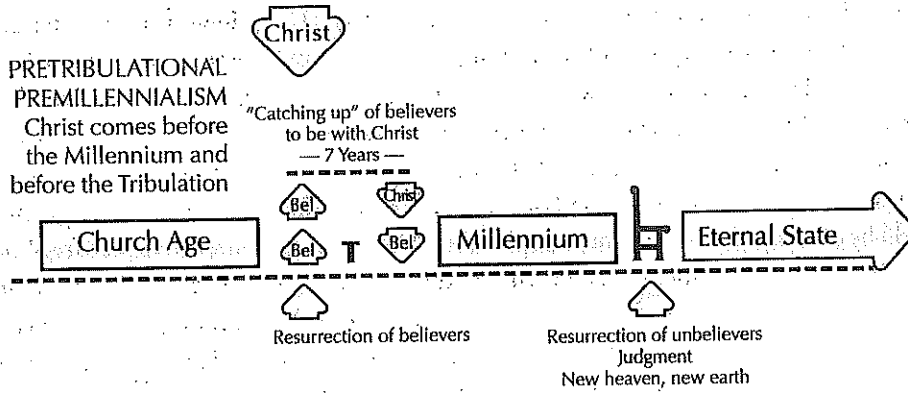
According to this premillennial viewpoint, at the end of the thousand years Satan will be loosed from the bottomless pit and will join forces with many unbelievers who have submitted outwardly to Christ's reign but have inwardly been seething in rebellion against him. Satan will gather these rebellious people for battle against Christ, but they will be decisively defeated. Christ will then raise from the dead all the unbelievers who have died throughout history, and they will stand before him for final judgment. After the final judgment has occurred, believers will enter into the eternal state.

It seems that premillennialism has tended to increase in popularity as the church has experienced persecution and as suffering and evil have increased in the earth. But, as in the case of postmillennialism, the arguments for the premillennial position are not based on an observation of current events but on specific passages of Scripture, especially (but not exclusively) Revelation 20:1-10.

**b. Pretribulational Premillennialism (or Dispensational Premillennialism).** Another variety of premillennialism gained widespread popularity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, particularly in the United Kingdom and the United States. According to this position, Christ will return not only before the millennium (Christ's return is *premillennial*), but also it will occur *before* the great tribulation (Christ's return

2. An alternative type of premillennialism holds that Christ will come back *before* the period of great tribulation begins on earth. We shall examine that alternative form of premillennialism below.

is *pretribulational*). This position is similar to the classical premillennial position mentioned above but with one important difference: it will add another return of Christ before his return to reign on earth in the millennium. This return is thought to be a secret return of Christ to take believers out of the world.<sup>3</sup> The pretribulational premillennial view may be represented as in figure 55.4.



### Pretribulational Premillennialism

Figure 55.4

According to this view, this present church age will continue until, *suddenly, unexpectedly, and secretly*, Christ will return part way to earth and then will call believers to himself: "The dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4:16–17). Christ will then return to heaven with the believers who have been removed from the earth. When that happens, there will be a great tribulation on the earth for a period of seven years.<sup>4</sup>

This *pretribulation* premillennial view explains that during this seven-year period of tribulation, many of the signs that were predicted to precede Christ's return will be fulfilled.<sup>5</sup> The great ingathering of the fullness of the Jewish people will occur, as they trust Christ as their Messiah. In the midst of great suffering there will also be much effective evangelism, especially carried out by the new Jewish Christians. *At the end of the tribulation, Christ will then come back with his saints to reign on the earth for one thousand years.* After this millennial period there will be a rebellion, resulting in the

3. Sometimes this secret coming of Christ for believers is called the "rapture," from the Latin word *rapio*, meaning "seize, snatch, carry away."

4. Some interpreters hold to a variation of this view, such that Christ comes back in the middle of the tribulation and rescues believers. After that, there will be three-and-one-half additional years of tribulation on the earth. This is called the

"midtribulation rapture" view. For further discussion of this view, see Gleason Archer, "The Case for the Mid-Seventieth-Week Rapture Position" in Gleason Archer, Paul Feinberg, Douglas Moo, and Richard Reiter, *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulational?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 113–45.

5. See chapter 54, pp. 1350–52, for a discussion of the signs that will precede Christ's return.

final defeat of Satan and his forces, and then will come the resurrection of unbelievers, the last judgment, and the beginning of the eternal state.

One further characteristic of pretribulational premillennialism should be mentioned: this view is found almost exclusively among dispensationalists who wish to maintain a clear distinction between the church and Israel. This pretribulational viewpoint allows the distinction to be maintained, since the church is taken out of the world before the widespread conversion of the Jewish people. These Jewish people therefore remain a distinct group from the church. Another characteristic of pretribulational premillennialism is its insistence on interpreting biblical prophecies "literally where possible." This especially applies to prophecies in the Old Testament concerning Israel. Those who hold this view argue that those prophecies of God's future blessing to Israel will yet be fulfilled among the Jewish people themselves; they are not to be "spiritualized" by finding their fulfillment in the church. Finally, one attractive feature about pretribulational premillennialism is that it allows people to insist that Christ's return could occur "at any moment" and therefore does justice to the full force of the passages that encourage us to be ready for Christ's return, while it still allows for a very literal fulfillment of the signs preceding Christ's return, since it says these will come to pass in the tribulation.

Before examining the arguments for these three (or four) positions, it is important to realize that the interpretation of the details of prophetic passages regarding future events is often a complex and difficult task involving many variable factors. Therefore, the degree of certainty that attaches to our conclusions in this area will be less than with many other doctrines. Even though I will argue for one position (classical premillennialism), I also think it important for evangelicals to recognize that this area of study is complex and to extend a large measure of grace to others who hold different views regarding the millennium and the tribulation period.

## B. A CONSIDERATION OF THE ARGUMENTS FOR AMILLENNIALISM

In favor of the amillennial view, the following arguments are advanced.<sup>6</sup>

1. When we look through the whole of the Bible, amillennialists will say, *only one passage* (Rev. 20:1-6) appears to teach a future earthly millennial rule of Christ, and that passage is itself obscure. It is unwise to base such a major doctrine on one passage of uncertain and widely disputed interpretation.

But how do amillennialists understand Revelation 20:1-6? The amillennial interpretation sees this passage as referring to the present church age. The passage reads as follows:

6. For a recent and very extensive argument in support of an amillennial viewpoint, see Sam Storms, *Kingdom Come: The Amillennial Alternative* (Ross-Shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2013).



Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

According to an amillennial interpretation<sup>7</sup> the binding of Satan in verses 1–2 is the binding that occurred during Jesus' earthly ministry. He spoke of binding the strong man in order that he may plunder his house (Matt. 12:29) and said that the Spirit of God was at that time present in power to triumph over demonic forces: "If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matt. 12:28). Similarly, with respect to the breaking of Satan's power, Jesus said during his ministry, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18).

The amillennialist argues that this binding of Satan in Revelation 20:1–3 is for a specific purpose: "that he might not deceive the nations any longer" (v. 3). This is exactly what happened when Jesus came and the gospel began to be proclaimed not simply to Jews but, after Pentecost, to all the nations of the world. In fact, the worldwide missionary activity of the church, as well as the presence of the church in most or all of the nations of the world, shows that the power Satan had in the Old Testament to "deceive the nations" and keep them in darkness has been broken.

On the amillennialist view the scene described in verse 4 occurs in heaven. John said, "I saw the *souls* of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus. . . . They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years" (v. 4). Since John sees "souls" and not physical bodies, it is argued, this scene must be occurring in heaven. When the text says that "they came to life," it does not mean that they received a bodily resurrection. It possibly means simply that "they lived," since the aorist verb *ezēsan* can readily

7. I am largely following the excellent and widely recognized discussion of Anthony A. Hoekema, "Amillennialism," in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. Robert

G. Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 155–87. I will also interact with some of the arguments put forth by Sam Storms, *Kingdom Come*.



be interpreted to be a statement of an event that occurred over a long period of time. (The verb for "they reigned" is also an aorist indicative and refers to an occurrence over a thousand years, so the verb for "they lived" should have a similar meaning.) On the other hand, some amillennial interpreters will take the verb *ezēsan* to mean "they came to life" in the sense of coming into heavenly existence in the presence of Christ and beginning to reign with him from heaven.

According to this view, the phrase "first resurrection" (v. 5) refers to going to heaven to be with the Lord in the intermediate state (see chapter 41). This is not a *bodily* resurrection but living spiritually in the presence of God in heaven. (Another amillennial view of "first resurrection" is that it refers to the resurrection of Christ, and to believers' participation in Christ's resurrection through union with Christ.)

The overall structure of the book of Revelation is also seen to favor the amillennial view. On this view, Revelation consists of "seven sections which run parallel to each other, each of which depicts the church and the world from the time of Christ's first coming to the time of his second."<sup>8</sup> But the seventh parallel section is Revelation 20–22, which means that Revelation 20 must also be describing the present church age in which we live.<sup>9</sup>

2. A second argument often proposed in favor of amillennialism is the fact that Scripture teaches only *one resurrection*, when both believers and unbelievers will be raised, not two resurrections (a resurrection of believers before the millennium begins and a resurrection of unbelievers to judgment after the end of the millennium). This is an important argument because the premillennial view requires two separate resurrections, separated by a thousand years.

Evidence in favor of only one resurrection is found in at least three passages. Jesus says, "An hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment" (John 5:28–29). Here Jesus speaks of a single "hour" when both believing and unbelieving dead will come forth from the tombs. Similarly, when Paul is on trial before Felix he explains that he has a hope in God that his Jewish opponents also accept "that *there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust*" (Acts 24:15). Once again, he speaks of a single resurrection of both believers and unbelievers. Finally, we read in Daniel: "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan. 12:2).

3. *The idea of glorified believers and sinners living on earth together is too difficult to accept.* Berkhof says, "It is impossible to understand how a part of the old earth and of sinful humanity can exist alongside a part of the new earth and of a humanity that is

8. Hoekema, "Amillennialism," in Clouse, *Meaning of the Millennium*, 156–57.

9. Storms also adopts this view of the structure of Revelation; see *Kingdom Come*, 387–406, 427–28.

glorified. How can perfect saints in glorified bodies have communion with sinners in the flesh? How can glorified sinners live in this sin-laden atmosphere and amid scenes of death and decay?"<sup>10</sup>

4. *If Christ comes in glory to reign on the earth, then how could people still persist in sin?* Once Jesus is actually present in his resurrection body and reigning as King over the earth, does it not seem highly unlikely that people would still reject him and that evil and rebellion would grow on the earth until eventually Satan could gather the nations for battle against Christ?<sup>11</sup>

5. There seems to be no convincing *purpose* for such a millennium. Once the church age has ended and Christ has returned, then what is the reason for delaying the start of the eternal state?

6. In conclusion, amillennialists say that Scripture seems to indicate that *all the major events yet to come* before the eternal state will occur at once. Christ will return, there will be one resurrection of believers and unbelievers, the final judgment will take place, and a new heaven and new earth will be established. Then we will enter immediately into the eternal state, with no future millennium.<sup>12</sup>

At this point we can respond briefly to these amillennialist arguments, though on some points a fuller answer will be developed in the arguments for premillennialism.

1. In response to the objection that only one passage teaches a future earthly millennium, several comments can be made:

a. The Bible only needs to say something once in order for it to be true and something that we must believe. The story of the confusion of languages at the tower of Babel, for example, is only taught in Genesis 11:1–9, yet we believe it to be true because Scripture teaches it. Similarly, even if only one passage taught a future millennial reign of Christ, we still should believe it.

Moreover, it is not surprising that this doctrine should be clearly taught in the book of Revelation. There was somewhat of a similar situation at the end of the Old Testament era: The entire Old Testament has no explicit teaching to the effect that the Messiah would come twice, once as a suffering Messiah who would die and rise again, earning our salvation, and then later as a conquering King to rule over the earth. The first and second comings of Christ may be hinted at in the Old Testament prophets, but they are nowhere explicitly taught because God did not deem it necessary to reveal that amount

10. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), 715.

11. This argument is especially developed in Arthur H. Lewis, *The Dark Side of the Millennium* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980).

12. Since they believe that Rev. 20:1–6 applies to the present age, amillennialists sometimes say, "Premillennialists are *waiting* for the millennium, postmillennialists are *working* for it, but we are *enjoying* it."

It should be noted that some amillennialists dislike the term *amillennial* because it implies they do not believe in any millennium at all, whereas it is more accurate to say that they do not believe in a *future* millennium. They prefer a more positive term such as "realized millennialism," which allows them more easily to point out that they do believe in the millennial reign of Christ taught in Rev. 20:1–6; however, they believe the passage speaks of the present church age. (See Jay Adams, *The Time Is at Hand* [Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970], 7–11.)

of detail about his plan of redemption before it happened. Similarly, in several of the Old and New Testament books leading up to the time of the writing of Revelation, there are *hints* of a future earthly millennium prior to the eternal state, but the explicit teaching about it was left until John wrote Revelation. Since Revelation is the New Testament book that most explicitly teaches about things yet future, it is appropriate that this more explicit revelation of the future millennium would be put at this point in the Bible.

b. In response to the allegation that the passage that teaches a millennium is obscure, premillennialists respond that they do not find it obscure at all. They argue that one advantage of the premillennial position is that it understands Revelation 20:1–6 in a straightforward sense: the text says that Satan will be bound and cast into the bottomless pit for a thousand years, and the premillennialist says a time is coming when Satan will be bound and cast into a bottomless pit for a thousand years. The text speaks of a thousand-year reign of Christ, and the premillennialist expects a future thousand-year reign of Christ on earth. It speaks of those raised in the “first resurrection,” and the premillennialist says that there will be a first resurrection of believers who are “blessed and holy” (Rev. 20:6) and a second resurrection at the end of the thousand years for “the rest of the dead” (v. 5). According to premillennialists, “obscurity” only enters the passage when an interpreter tries to find in it something other than such a straightforward interpretation.

c. Finally, many premillennialists argue that several other passages, especially in the Old Testament, require us to believe in a future period that is far greater than the present age but that still falls short of the eternal state (see Ps. 72:8–14; Isa. 11:2–9; 65:20; Zech. 14:6–21; 1 Cor. 15:24; Rev. 2:27; 12:5; 19:15).<sup>13</sup> These passages, they say, portray a period that looks very much like the millennium as they understand it.

d. With respect to the interpretation of Revelation 20:1–6 as given by amillennialists, several difficulties arise. Although Matthew 12:28–29 and Luke 10:18 do speak of a “binding” of Satan during Jesus’ earthly ministry, the binding of Satan described in Revelation 20 seems to be much more extensive than that. The passage does not simply say that Satan is bound at this time, but speaks of “the bottomless pit” and says that the angel that came down from heaven “*threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him*, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended” (Rev. 20:2–3). More than a mere binding or restriction of activity is in view here. The imagery of throwing Satan into a pit and shutting it and sealing it over him gives *a picture of total removal from influence on the earth*. This is true even though the verse uses images of physical realities (such as key and a chain and a cover for a pit) to speak of invisible spiritual realities.<sup>14</sup> To say that Satan is now in a bottomless pit that is shut

13. See below, pp. 1390–94, for a discussion of these passages.

14. Sam Storms, as an amillennialist, argues that it is wrong for a premillennial interpreter to insist that the binding of Satan in Revelation 20 “must be interpreted in a literal,

spatial way” (*Kingdom Come*, 442). But I am not arguing that these verses speak of a literal, physical key and chain and door to a pit, but that the total picture given by these symbolic elements is one of complete removal of Satan’s influence from the earth.

and sealed over simply does not fit the present world situation during the church age, in which Satan's activity is still very strong, in which he "prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8), in which he can fill someone's heart "to lie to the Holy Spirit" (Acts 5:3), and in which "what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God" (1 Cor. 10:20).

Moreover, even after the binding of Satan during Jesus' ministry, it remains true that "the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:4). This is why Christians still must contend not "against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12). This is because even during the church age, although the gospel is able to come with triumph and break down the forces of demonic opposition to the spread of the kingdom of God, Satan's influence has not fully been removed from the world: "The spirit of the antichrist . . . is in the world already" (1 John 4:3), and, in fact, "We know that we are from God, and *the whole world lies in the power of the evil one*" (1 John 5:19). This repeated theme in the New Testament, the theme of Satan's continual activity on earth throughout the church age, makes it extremely difficult to think that Satan has been thrown into the bottomless pit, which has been shut and sealed over for a thousand years. That imagery can only speak of the total removal of Satan's active influence from the earth.

But what can be said with respect to the fact that amillennialists say that the binding and imprisonment of Satan in Revelation 20 is said to be "that he might not *deceive the nations any longer*" (v. 3)? Does that not simply mean that the gospel can now be preached effectively among the nations?<sup>15</sup> While the phrase might mean that, it seems more consistent with the use of the word *deceived* (Gk. *planaō*), especially in Revelation, to say that this is a *deception that is now going on during the entire church age* and that ends only when the millennium begins. Satan is called "the deceiver of the whole world" (Rev. 12:9), and the sorcery of Babylon is said to have "deceived" "all nations" before its judgment comes (Rev. 18:23).<sup>16</sup> Therefore, it seems more appropriate to say that Satan is *now* still deceiving the nations, but at the beginning of the millennium this deceptive influence will be removed. There was an even *greater* deception before Christ came, but there is still significant deception that remains today. There is no great difficulty with saying that God partially removes Satan's ability to deceive the world during the church age and then completely removes it during the millennium.

15. Writing from an amillennial perspective, Sam Storms advocates an alternative interpretation, namely, that this binding of Satan in Revelation 20 means that "Satan will never be permitted to incite and organize the unbelieving nations of the world in a final, catastrophic assault against the church, until such time as God in his providence so determines" (*Kingdom Come*, 440). This is a much narrower scope for such binding,

but my arguments showing that Revelation 20 pictures a much more extensive binding of Satan are still applicable as an answer to this position as well.

16. Both of these passages use the same term *planaō*. The same verb is used in Matthew 24:4, 5, 11, 24 to speak of Jesus' warnings that many will be deceived or led astray by false christ and false prophets.

The fact that John saw "souls" in his vision does not require that the scene be set in heaven. Since these souls are persons who then "came to life" in "the first resurrection," we should see these as *people* who obtained resurrection bodies and who began to reign on the earth. Moreover, Revelation 20:1 indicates that the scene is focused on events on the earth, for it says, "Then I saw an angel *coming down from heaven*." But if the angel came down from heaven, then he carries out his activity on the earth, and the entire scene is set on the earth.

Moreover, amillennialist interpretations of the phrase "first resurrection" are unconvincing. Elsewhere, the word *resurrection* (Gk. *anastasis*) never means "going to heaven" or "going into the presence of God in the intermediate state" but rather signifies a *bodily* resurrection. This is the sense in which first-century readers would have understood the word. The other amillennialist view, which understands "the first resurrection" to be Christ's resurrection (and our union with him) does not seem likely because those who "came to life" are the ones who had been "beheaded for the testimony of Jesus" (v. 4), which suggests a bodily resurrection after death.<sup>17</sup>

What about the argument that the *structure* of Revelation, with seven parallel sections, shows that Revelation 20 is the seventh description of the present church age? We can readily admit that Revelation has such a skillfully constructed seven-fold structure, but that does not require that the seventh section must speak of the *same events* as the previous six sections. Hoekema himself, in arguing for an amillennial position, admits that "though these seven sections are parallel to each other, they also reveal a certain amount of eschatological progress. The last section, for example, takes us further into the future than the other sections."<sup>18</sup> If the wording of Revelation 20 shows that it speaks about a millennial age that had not been mentioned in the previous six sections, then we simply must understand it as a culminating section that reveals much more about future events than we learned in chapters 1–19. In fact, chapters 21 and 22 clearly do that already.

2. Does Scripture teach only *one* resurrection, so that believers and unbelievers will be raised at the same time? It is hard to accept this when we realize that Revelation 20 explicitly speaks about "the *first* resurrection," thus implying that there will be a second resurrection as well. Speaking of those who came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years, we read, "This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power" (vv. 5–6).

17. Other reasons to reject this interpretation are (1) "The rest of the dead" are said to "come to life" after the thousand years are ended (v. 5)—a reference to the bodily resurrection of unbelievers—but this implies that the phrase "came to life" refers to bodily resurrection in both cases, not just to spiritual union with Christ in his resurrection; and (2) when the text

says, "This is the first resurrection" (v. 5), the most evident antecedent in context is the coming to life of believers in v. 4, but no mention of Christ's resurrection occurs in the context.

18. Hoekema, "Amillennialism," in Clouse, *Meaning of the Millennium*, 158.

The passage distinguishes those who share in this first resurrection and are blessed from others who do not share in it. They are "the rest of the dead" and the implication is that "the second death" (that is, facing final judgment and being condemned to eternal punishment away from the presence of God) does have power over them; and they will experience it. But if this passage clearly teaches a first resurrection and that the rest of the dead will come to life at the end of a thousand years, then there is clear teaching on two separate resurrections here in Revelation 20.

As for the other passages that amillennialists claim to support the view that there is only one resurrection; it must be said that those passages do not exclude the idea of two resurrections, but they simply do not specify whether or not the resurrection of believers and unbelievers will be separated in time. In fact, Jesus' statement in John 5 does hint at the possibility of two resurrections. He says that those who are in the tombs will come forth, "those who have done good *to the resurrection of life*, and those who have done evil *to the resurrection of judgment*" (John 5:28–29). In this way Jesus in fact speaks of two different resurrections.<sup>19</sup>

As for Daniel 12:2, it simply says that those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, "some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt," but it does not specify whether this will happen simultaneously or at different times. It simply says that both types of people will be raised. The same is true of Acts 24:15, where Paul says there will be "a resurrection of both the just and the unjust." This affirms that both types of people will be raised from the dead, but it does not exclude the possibility that this would happen at different times. All of these verses, in the absence of Revelation 20:5–6, might or might not be speaking of a single future time of resurrection. But with the explicit teaching of Revelation 20:5–6 about two resurrections, these verses must be understood to refer to the future certainty of a resurrection for each type of person, without specifying that those resurrections will be separated in time.

3. The idea of glorified believers and sinners living on earth together during the millennium does sound strange to us now, but it is certainly not impossible for God to bring this about. We must realize that Jesus lived on the earth with a glorified body for

19. The fact that Jesus says in this context, "An hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice" does not require that both resurrections happen at the same time, for the word *hour* elsewhere in John's gospel can refer to a long period of time; just three verses previously, Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, *an hour* is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live" (John 5:25). Here the "hour" refers to the entire church age when those who are spiritually dead hear Jesus' voice and come to life. John can also use the word *hour* (Gk. *hōra*) to speak of the time when true worshipers worship the Father in spirit and in truth (John 4:21, 23), or when intense persecution will

come on the disciples (John 16:2). These examples also speak of long periods of time, even entire ages.

A similar way of speaking is possible in English: I can tell a class of sixty students, "Don't be discouraged—*graduation day is coming* for every one of you." But I know that some will graduate this year, some will graduate next year, and some will graduate two or three years later. I can still speak of "graduation day" rather than "graduation days" because it is clear that I am speaking about the kind of day it is, not about the time it will occur or whether it will be one day or several that are of the same type.

forty days after his resurrection, and apparently there were many other people who lived with glorified bodies on earth during that time as well (Matt. 27:53).<sup>20</sup> It will indeed be a kind of world situation that is far different and far more God-glorifying than the world is now, but it does not seem that we are justified in asserting that God could not or would not bring about such a state of affairs. Certainly he *could* do it, and several passages seem to indicate that he has a good purpose and intention of doing it as well.

4. It is certainly not impossible that evil and secret rebellion could persist on the earth in spite of the bodily presence of Christ reigning as King. We must remember that Judas lived with Jesus on the closest terms for three years and still betrayed him. Moreover, many of the Pharisees *saw* Jesus' miracles, and even saw him raising people from the dead, and they still did not believe. In fact, even when the disciples were in the presence of the glorified Lord Jesus, we read that "some doubted" (Matt. 28:17). Such persistent unbelief in the very presence of Christ is hard to understand, but we must remember that Satan himself fell from an exalted position in the presence of God in heaven.

When the amillennialists object that people could not persist in sin in the presence of Christ's bodily reign on the earth, their position simply fails to realize the deep-seated and highly irrational nature of sin. It also fails fully to reckon with the fact that even "massive proof" and "undeniable evidence" cannot compel genuine conversion. Genuine repentance and faith is brought about by the enabling and persuasive work of the Holy Spirit in people's hearts. Such is the irrational nature of sin that those who are "dead in trespasses and sins" will often persist in rebellion and unbelief even in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary.<sup>21</sup>

This is not to say that no one will be converted to Christ during the millennium. No doubt millions of people will become Christians during that time, and the influence of the reign of Christ will permeate into every aspect of every society in the world. Yet at the same time it is not at all difficult to understand how evil and rebellion will grow simultaneously.

5. God may have several purposes in mind for a future millennium, not all of which may now be clear to us. But certainly such a millennium would show *the outworking of God's good purposes in the structures of society*, especially the structures of the family and civil government. During the church age, the good purposes of God are primarily seen in individual lives and the blessings that come to those who believe in Christ. To some extent now (and to a greater extent in times of revival) this affects civil government and educational institutions and corporations and to a larger extent it affects the family. But in none of these structures are God's good purposes manifested to the extent they could

20. See chapter 42, p. 1025, on Matt. 27:52-53.

21. A somewhat similar example is the fact that many people today refuse to believe that there is a God who created the universe, in spite of the incredible complexity of every living

being, and in spite of what is for all practical purposes the mathematical impossibility that the entire universe could have come about by chance.



be, showing God's great wisdom and goodness not only in his plans for individuals but also for societal structures. In the millennium the beauty of God's wisdom will show forth to his glory from all of these societal structures.

Moreover, the millennium will further vindicate God's righteousness. The fact that some continue in sin and unbelief will show that "sin—rebellion against God—is not due to an evil society or to a bad environment. It is due to the sinfulness of the hearts of men. Thus the justice of God will be fully vindicated in the day of final judgment."<sup>22</sup> With Satan bound for a thousand years, the fact that sin can persist will also show that the ultimate blame for sin is not demonic influence in people's lives but deep-rooted sinfulness in people's hearts.

Third, the entire scope of the Bible reveals to us that it is God's good pleasure to unfold his purposes and reveal more and more of his glory *gradually* over time. From the calling of Abraham to the birth of Isaac, the sojourn in Egypt and the exodus, the establishment of the people in the promised land, the Davidic kingdom and the divided monarchy, the exile and return with the rebuilding of the temple, the preservation of a faithful remnant, and finally the coming of Jesus in the flesh, God's purposes were increasingly seen to be glorious and wonderful. Even in Jesus' life the progressive revealing of his glory took thirty-three years, culminating in the last three years of his life. Then in Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven, the completion of our redemption was accomplished. Yet the spread of the church throughout all nations has now occupied nearly 2,000 years, and we do not know how long it is to continue. All this is to say that God's way is not to bring to realization all of his good purposes at once, but to unfold them gradually over time. This is so even in the individual lives of Christians, who grow daily in grace and in fellowship with God and in likeness to Christ. Therefore, it would not be surprising if, before the eternal state, God instituted one final step in the progressive unfolding of the history of redemption. It would serve to increase his glory as men and angels look on in amazement at the wonder of God's wisdom and plan.

6. Finally, a major objection to amillennialism must continue to be the fact that it can propose no really satisfying explanation of Revelation 20.<sup>23</sup>

### C. A CONSIDERATION OF ARGUMENTS FOR POSTMILLENNIALISM

The arguments in favor of postmillennialism are as follows.

1. The Great Commission leads us to expect that the gospel will go forth in power and eventually result in a largely Christian world: Jesus explicitly said, "*All authority in heaven and on earth* has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,

22. George Ladd, "Historic Premillennialism," in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, 40.

23. Some other interpretations of Rev. 20 have been proposed by amillennialists, but they all have the disadvantage of having to labor under the burden of explaining away what seems

to be a straightforward understanding of the text because they are convinced that the rest of Scripture does not teach a future earthly millennium. But if the rest of Scripture does not deny it (and in some places hints at it), and if this text does teach it, then it would seem much more appropriate to accept it.

baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:18–20). Since Christ has all authority in heaven and on earth, and since he promises to be with us in the fulfillment of this commission, we would expect that it would transpire without hindrance and eventually triumph in the whole world.

2. Parables of the gradual growth of the kingdom indicate that it eventually will fill the earth with its influence. Here postmillennialists point to the following: "He put another parable before them, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches'" (Matt. 13:31–32). We can also note the following verse: "He told them another parable. 'The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened'" (Matt. 13:33). According to postmillennialists both of these parables indicate that the kingdom will grow in influence until it permeates and in some measure transforms the entire world.

3. Postmillennialists will also argue that the world is becoming more Christian. The church is growing and spreading throughout the world, and even when it is persecuted and oppressed it grows remarkably by the power of God.<sup>24</sup>

At this point we must make a very significant distinction, however. The "millennium" that postmillennialists hold to is *very different* from the "millennium" the premillennialists talk about. In a sense, they are not even discussing the same topic. While premillennialists talk about a renewed earth with Jesus Christ physically present and reigning as King, together with glorified believers in resurrection bodies, postmillennialists are simply talking about an earth with many, many Christians influencing society. They do not envisage a millennium consisting of a renewed earth or glorified saints or Christ present in bodily form to reign (for they think that these things will only occur after Christ returns to inaugurate the eternal state).<sup>25</sup> Therefore, the entire discussion of the millennium is more than simply a discussion of the sequence of events surrounding it. It also involves a significant difference over the nature of this period of time.

In fact, though I am not aware if anyone has done this, it would not be impossible for someone to be a postmillennialist and a premillennialist at the same time, with two different senses of the term *millennium*. Someone could conceivably be a postmillennialist

24. The postmillennialist A. H. Strong argues that Rev. 20:4–10 "does not describe the events commonly called the second advent and resurrection, but rather describes the great spiritual changes in the later history of the church, which are typical of, and preliminary to, the second advent and resurrection." He sees Rev. 20, therefore, simply as a prediction of "the latter days of the church militant" and a time when "under the special influence of the Holy Ghost" the church shall "to an

extent unknown before, triumph over the powers of evil, both within and without" (A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* [Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1907], 1013).

25. Similarly, when amillennialists talk about presently "enjoying" the millennium, which they understand on the basis of Rev. 20 to refer to the church age, they are also talking about a very different kind of "millennium" than would be envisaged by either postmillennialists or premillennialists.

and think that the gospel will grow in influence until the world is largely Christian, and that then Christ will return and set up a literal earthly reign, raising believers from the dead to reign with him in glorified bodies. Or, on the other hand, a very optimistic premillennialist could conceivably adopt many of the postmillennialist teachings about the increasingly Christian nature of this present age.<sup>26</sup>

In response to the postmillennialist arguments, the following points may be made:

1. The Great Commission does indeed speak of the authority that is given into Christ's hand, but that does not necessarily imply that Christ will use that authority to bring about the conversion of the majority of the population of the world. To say that Christ's authority is great is simply another way of saying that God's power is infinite, which no one will deny. But the question is the extent to which Christ will *use* his power to bring about the numerical growth of the church. We may *assume* that he will use it to a very full extent and will bring about worldwide Christianization, but such an assumption is merely that—an assumption. It is not based on any specific evidence in the Great Commission or in other texts that talk about Christ's authority and power in this present age.<sup>27</sup>

2. The parables of the mustard seed and the leaven do tell us that the kingdom of God will gradually grow from something very small to something very large, but they do not tell us the *extent* to which the kingdom will grow. For example, the parable of the mustard seed does not tell us that the tree grew so that it spread throughout the whole earth. And the parable of the leaven simply talks about gradual growth that permeates society (as the church has already done), but it says nothing about the degree or effect that that influence has (it does not tell us, for example, whether in the end 5 percent of the loaf was leaven and 95 percent bread dough, or 20 percent leaven and 80 percent bread, or 60 percent leaven and 40 percent bread, and so forth). It is simply pressing the parable beyond its intended purpose to attempt to make it say more than that the kingdom will grow gradually and eventually have an influence on every society in which it is planted.

3. In response to the argument that the world is becoming more Christian, it must be said that the world is also becoming more evil. No student of history or modern society will argue that mankind has made much progress through the centuries in overcoming the depth of perversity and the extent of immorality that remain in people's hearts. Indeed, modernization in western societies in the twentieth century has often been accompanied not by moral improvement but by an unprecedented level of drug abuse,

26. This is not to say that such a position would be free of internal tensions and difficulties (especially the difficulty of explaining how evil could diminish when Christ was absent from the earth but grow into widespread rebellion when he is physically present and reigning), but it is to say that there would be no absolute inconsistency within this position.

27. In 1 Cor. 15:25 Paul says, "For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet," but the immediate context (vv. 24, 26) talks about destroying his enemies (including death in v. 26), not about converting people and bringing them into the church.

marital infidelity, pornography, homosexuality, rebellion against authority, superstition (in astrology and fortune-telling, for example), materialism, greed, theft, and falsehood in speech. Even among professing Christians there is repeated evidence of dismaying imperfection in the Christian life, especially in the realms of personal morality and depth of intimacy with God. In places where Bible-believing Christians comprise large segments of the population, still nothing like an earthly millennial kingdom occurs.<sup>28</sup> It is true that the growth of the church as a percentage of world population has been remarkable in recent decades,<sup>29</sup> and we should be greatly encouraged by this. It is possible that we will someday see a far greater influence of genuine Christianity upon many societies, and if that occurred, it would make the postmillennial position seem more plausible. But such events could also be understood within a premillennial or amillennial framework, so the final decision regarding these competing positions must still be made by interpreting the relevant biblical texts.

4. Finally, we should note that there are several New Testament passages that seem to give explicit denial to the postmillennial position. Jesus said, "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and *those who find it are few*" (Matt. 7:13-14). Rather than teaching that a majority of the world will become Christians, Jesus seems here to be saying that those who are saved will be "few" in contrast to the "many" who travel toward eternal destruction. Similarly, Jesus asks, "*When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?*" (Luke 18:8), a question that suggests that the earth will not be filled with those who believe but rather will be dominated by those who do not have faith.

Contrary to the view that the world will get better and better as the influence of the church grows, Paul predicts that before Christ returns "the *rebellion*" will come and "the *man of lawlessness*" will be revealed, "the son of destruction" who "takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God" (2 Thess. 2:3-4).<sup>30</sup>

28. One interesting example in the United States is the state of Texas. Statistics indicate that over 50 percent of the people of Texas belong to Southern Baptist churches, a denomination that preaches a genuine gospel of salvation by faith alone, and the need for each individual personally to be born again. This in itself is a wonderful fact for which we should be thankful to God, but no one living in Texas today would seriously claim to be living already in the millennium (at least in the way postmillennialists understand it). If we add to the Southern Baptists all the other Bible-believing Christians in the state, far more than half of the state's population consists of born-again Christians. But if a population of 50 percent Christians cannot bring us anywhere near to an earthly millennium, then what percentage of the world would have to become Christian before the postmillennialist's hope would be realized? And where is there evidence throughout history that we are making significant progress toward the realization of such a millennium?

29. "Between 1950 and 1992, Bible believing Christians went from just 3% of the world population to 10% of the world population. This is a jump from 80 million to 540 million" (Rick Wood, "Christianity: Waning or Growing?" in *Mission Frontiers Bulletin*, Pasadena, CA, January-February, 1993, 25). This journal publishes similar statistics from different countries in almost every issue, leading one to conclude that the growth of the church since 1950 is so remarkable as to be without precedent in the history of the world.

30. Some postmillennialists believe that there will be a final rebellion before Christ's return. These verses would not constitute an objection to their position, but the following verses indicating the dominant non-Christian pattern of world affairs just prior to Christ's return would still weigh against such a postmillennial view because they picture a world decisively different from the millennium of peace and righteousness brought about by the spread of the gospel in a postmillennial system.

When writing to Timothy about the last days, Paul says,

*In the last days* there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. (2 Tim. 3:1-5)

He says further,

All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. . . . The time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching; but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. (2 Tim. 3:12-13; 4:3-4)

Finally, and perhaps most conclusively, Matthew 24:15-31 speaks of a great tribulation that will precede the time of Christ's return:

For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. . . . Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. (Matt. 24:21-30)

This passage pictures not a Christianized world but a world of great suffering and evil, a great tribulation that exceeds all previous periods of suffering on the earth. It does not say that the great majority of the world will welcome Christ when he comes. But when the sign of the Son of man appears in heaven, "then all the tribes of the earth will mourn" (Matt. 24:30).

Since Matthew 24 is such a difficult passage from the postmillennialist perspective, there have been several attempts to explain it not as a prediction of events that will occur just prior to Christ's second coming but as something that was mainly fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

To sustain this interpretation, postmillennialists make most of the elements of

Matthew 24:29–31 symbolic:<sup>31</sup> the sun and moon being darkened, the stars falling from heaven, and the powers of the heavens being shaken are not to be understood as literal events but as imagery for God's coming in judgment. Similar imagery for judgment is said to be found in Ezekiel 32:7; Joel 2:10; and Amos 8:9—but these passages simply speak of judgments of darkness, and do not mention the stars falling from heaven or the powers of the heavens being shaken. R. T. France also mentions Isaiah 13:10 and 34:4, which do talk about the sun and moon being darkened and the host of heaven falling, but it is far from certain that France is correct in claiming that those passages are merely symbolic—they are set in contexts in which they could easily be understood as literal predictions of the cosmic changes preceding the final judgment. So it is far from obvious that these passages are merely apocalyptic imagery for judgment on Jerusalem.<sup>32</sup>

Moreover, the interpretation that sees these as merely symbolic statements grows more difficult as the statement of Jesus continues, for he does not only talk about signs in the sun, moon, and stars, but he says immediately after that, “*then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man . . . and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory*” (Matt. 24:30). Consistent with his previous symbolic interpretation of this passage, France says that “all the tribes of the earth” refers merely to the Jews, that is, “all the tribes (families) of the land,”<sup>33</sup> that is, the land of Israel. And he says that the reference to the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory does not refer to Christ's return but to his coming *to the Father in heaven* “to receive vindication and authority.”<sup>34</sup> France quotes with approval the statement of G. B. Caird, who says that “the coming of the Son of Man in the clouds of heaven was never conceived as a primitive form of space travel, but as a symbol for a mighty reversal of fortunes within history and at the national level.”<sup>35</sup> Then the sending out of Christ's angels with a loud trumpet call to gather his elect from one end of heaven to the other is understood to refer to messengers who preach the gospel throughout the earth. The gathering of the elect then is gathering them into the church by the preaching of the gospel.

However, on this interpretation France cannot satisfactorily account for the fact that Jesus says that all the tribes of the earth “*will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds*

31. Here I am following the interpretation of R. T. France, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, TNTC (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 343–46.

32. Another argument in favor of the postmillennial view may be taken from the statement “this generation will not pass away until all these things take place” in Matt. 24:34. A postmillennialist can take “this generation” in a perfectly natural sense to refer to the people who heard Jesus as he spoke, and thus support is given to the view that all the events of vv. 29–31 (or even vv. 5–31) occurred by AD 70. But such an interpretation is not necessary to Matt. 24:34 because “this generation” could be understood to refer to the generation that sees “all

these things” (v. 33) take place, whenever that may be. (The “fig tree” in v. 32 should not be understood as a prophetic symbol for a particular time in history—such as the rebirth of Israel as a nation—because Jesus uses it simply as an illustration from nature: when the fig tree puts forth leaves, you know that summer will come soon; similarly, when these signs [vv. 5–31] occur, you know that the Son of man will return soon.)

33. France, *Matthew*, 345.

34. *Ibid.*, 344.

35. *Ibid.*, 344, quoting G. B. Caird, *Jesus and the Jewish Nation* (London: Athlone, 1965), 20.

of heaven with power and great glory” (Matt. 24:30). This is not an invisible heavenly transaction in which Christ receives authority from God the Father, but it is his return with power and great glory which is here predicted. Those who preach the gospel are never elsewhere called angels who give a loud trumpet call, and the preaching of the gospel is not elsewhere called the gathering of “his elect from the four winds; from one end of heaven to the other” (Matt. 24:31). Moreover, when Jesus elsewhere speaks of his coming on the clouds, he speaks not of a coming *to God the Father* in heaven, but a coming *to people on earth*: “Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him” (Rev. 1:7). And when Christ returns, Paul says that we who are alive “will be caught up together with them *in the clouds* to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thess. 4:17). When Christ comes on the clouds of glory with great power and authority, he comes to reign over the earth, and this is the sense of Matthew 24:30–31. (France does not comment on the fact that Jesus says the tribes of the earth who mourn “*will see* the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven” [v. 30]. The fact that these tribes will see Jesus coming makes it difficult to understand any symbolic or invisible heavenly interpretation here.) Moreover, the piling up of factors that we know from other texts to be connected with Christ’s return (cosmic signs, Christ’s coming with power, the loud trumpet call, the angels gathering the elect) provides a cumulative case for believing that Christ’s *second* coming, not just a symbolic representation of his receiving authority, is in view here. And if Matthew 24 talks about Christ’s second coming, then it talks about his coming just *after* a period of great tribulation, not after a millennium of peace and righteousness has been established on the earth.<sup>36</sup>

Finally, all of the passages indicating that Christ could return soon and that we must be ready for him to return at any time<sup>37</sup> must be considered a significant argument against postmillennialism as well. For if Christ could return at any time, and we are to be ready for his return, then the long period required for the establishment of the millennium on earth before Christ returns simply cannot be thought a persuasive theory. The essential element of the postmillennial view—the idea of a gradual, long-term increase in Christian influence on the earth before Christ returns—seems to make it impossible to hold a postmillennial view and also hold that Christ could return at any time.

#### D. A CONSIDERATION OF THE ARGUMENTS FOR PREMILLENNIALISM

The position advocated in this book is historic premillennialism. The arguments against the premillennial position have essentially been presented in the arguments for amillennialism and postmillennialism and will therefore not be repeated again here in a separate section, but incidental objections to these arguments will be considered along the way.

36. It is true that some postmillennialists hold that there will be a time of rebellion at the end of the millennium, just before Christ returns. But a period of rebellion against a dominant millennial kingdom of righteousness and peace is not

the same as a tribulation period in which evil is dominant and Christians experience great persecution.

37. See chapter 54, pp. 1347–49, on the passages teaching Christ’s imminent return.



### 1. Several Old Testament Passages Seem to Fit Neither in the Present Age nor in the Eternal State

These passages indicate some future stage in the history of redemption that is far greater than the present church age but that still does not see the removal of all sin and rebellion and death from the earth.

Speaking of Jerusalem at some time in the future, Isaiah says:

No more shall there be in it

an infant who lives but a few days,

or an old man who does not fill out his days,

for the young man shall die a hundred years old,

and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed. (Isa. 65:20)

Here we read that there will be no more infants who die in infancy, and no more old men who die prematurely, something far different from this present age. But death and sin will still be present, for the child who is one hundred years old shall die, and the sinner who is one hundred years old "shall be accursed." The larger context of this passage may mingle elements of the millennium and the eternal state (cf. vv. 17, 25), but it is in the nature of Old Testament prophecy not to distinguish among events in the future, just as these prophecies do not distinguish between the first and second comings of Christ. Therefore, in the larger context there may be mixed elements, but the point remains that this single element (the infants and old men who live long; the child dying one hundred years old, and the sinner being accursed) indicates a specific time in the future that is different from the present age.

Isaiah seems to predict a millennial kingdom in another place when he says,

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,

and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat,

and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together;

and a little child shall lead them.

The cow and the bear shall graze;

their young shall lie down together;

and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra,

and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.

They shall not hurt or destroy

in all my holy mountain;

for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD

as the waters cover the sea. (Isa. 11:6-9)

This passage clearly speaks of a momentous renewal of nature that takes us far beyond the present age, a time in which "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (v. 9). Yet in the very next verse Isaiah says,

*In that day* the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—*of him shall the nations inquire*, and his resting place shall be glorious.

*In that day* the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush.  
(Isa. 11:10–11)

Here some are still seeking the Messiah and apparently coming to salvation, and here also the Lord is still gathering the remnant of his people from various nations of the earth. It does not seem, therefore, that the eternal state has begun, yet the reversal of nature far exceeds anything that will happen in this present age. Does this not indicate a future millennial kingdom?

Psalm 72 seems to go beyond a description of Solomon's reign and to predict the glories of the reign of the Messiah over the entire earth:

May he have dominion from sea to sea,  
and from the River to the ends of the earth!  
May desert tribes bow down before him,  
and his enemies lick the dust!  
May the kings of Tarshish and of the coastlands render him tribute;  
may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts!  
May all kings fall down before him,  
all nations serve him!  
For he delivers the needy when he calls,  
the poor and him who has no helper.  
He has pity on the weak and the needy,  
and saves the lives of the needy.  
From oppression and violence he redeems their life,  
and precious is their blood in his sight. (Ps. 72:8–14)

This passage certainly speaks of a messianic rule far more extensive than that experienced by David or Solomon because this Messiah's kingdom extends "to the ends of the earth," and "all nations serve him" (vv. 8, 11; note that the psalm also says: "May they fear you while the sun endures, and as long as the moon, throughout all generations!" v. 5). This will be a reign in righteousness, in justice—but it certainly will not be the eternal state. There are still "the needy" and "the poor and him who has no helper";

there are still people who need to be rescued "from oppression and violence" (vv. 12-14). There will still be enemies who "will lick the dust" under the reign of this righteous King (v. 9). All of this speaks of an age far different from the present age but short of the eternal state in which there is no more sin or suffering.

Zechariah also prophesies a coming age in which there is great transformation in the earth, in which the Lord is King over all the earth, and in which there is still rebellion and sin, suffering, and death:

Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him. On that day there shall be no light, cold, or frost. And there shall be a unique day, which is known to the LORD, neither day nor night, but at evening time there shall be light.

On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea. It shall continue in summer as in winter.

And the LORD will be king over all the earth. On that day the LORD will be one and his name one. . . .

And this shall be the plague with which the LORD will strike all the peoples that wage war against Jerusalem: their flesh will rot while they are still standing on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths. . . .

And the wealth of all the surrounding nations shall be collected, gold, silver, and garments in great abundance. . . .

Then everyone who survives of all the nations that have come against Jerusalem shall go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Booths. And if any of the families of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, there will be no rain on them. (Zech. 14:5-17)

Here again the description does not fit the present age, for the Lord is King over all the earth in this situation. But it does not fit the eternal state either because of the disobedience and rebellion against the Lord that is clearly present. One might object that this is a typical Old Testament prophecy in which distinct future events are conflated and not distinguished in the prophet's vision, though they may be separated by long ages when they actually occur. However, it is difficult to make such a distinction in this passage because it is specifically rebellion against the Lord who is King over all the earth that is punished by these plagues and lack of rain.<sup>38</sup>

2. There are also New Testament passages other than Revelation 20 that suggest a future millennium. When the risen Lord Jesus speaks to the church at Thyatira, he says, "*The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority*

38. The passage still describes blessings in terms of old covenant sacrifices and mentions the feast of booths, an old covenant festival. This was the terminology and description

available to the people of that day, but the New Testament can allow for greater (spiritual) fulfillment of a number of these items.

over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father" (Rev. 2:26–27). The imagery used (ruling with a rod of iron; shattering earthen pots) implies a rule of force over rebellious people. But when will believers who conquer over evil participate in this rule? The idea fits well into a future millennial kingdom when glorified saints rule with Christ on the earth, but it does not fit well at any time in the present age or in the eternal state. (The idea of ruling the nations "with a rod of iron" is also found in Rev. 12:5–6 and 19:15.)

When Paul talks about the resurrection, he says that each person will receive a resurrection body in his own order: "Christ the firstfruits, *then* [*epeita*] at his coming those who belong to Christ. *Then* [*eita*] comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet" (1 Cor. 15:23–25). The two words translated "then" in this passage (*epeita* and *eita*) both take the sense "after that," not the sense "at that same time." Therefore the passage gives some support to the idea that, just as there is an interval of time between Christ's resurrection and his second coming when we receive a resurrection body (v. 23), so there is an interval of time between Christ's second coming and "the end" (v. 24), when Christ delivers the kingdom to God after having reigned for a time and put all his enemies under his feet.<sup>39</sup>

3. With the background of a number of other passages that hint at or clearly suggest a future time far greater than the present age but short of the eternal state, it is appropriate then to look at Revelation 20 once again. Several statements here are best understood as referring to a future earthly reign of Christ prior to the future judgment.

a. The binding and imprisonment of Satan in the bottomless pit (vv. 2–3) imply a far greater restriction of his activity than anything we know in this present age (see discussion above, under amillennialism).

b. The statement that those who were faithful "came to life" (v. 4) is best taken as referring to a bodily resurrection, for the next verse says, "This is the first resurrection." The verb *exēsan*, "came to life," is the same verb and the same form of the verb used in Revelation 2:8, where Jesus identifies himself as the one "who died and *came to life*," here obviously referring to his resurrection.<sup>40</sup>

c. On a premillennial interpretation, the reigning with Christ (in Rev. 20:4) is something that is still future, not something that is occurring now (as amillennialists claim). This is consistent with the rest of the New Testament, where we are frequently told that

39. The Greek word *eita* does mean "after that" (see Mark 4:17, 28; 1 Cor. 15:5, 7; 1 Tim. 2:13). It does not always indicate temporal sequence, because it can also introduce the next item or argument in a logical progression, but in narrating historical occurrences it indicates something that happens after

something else (see BDAG, 295; also LSJ, 498: "used to denote the sequence of one act or state upon another . . . *then, next*").

40. I understand the aorist indicative *exēsan* in both cases as an inceptive aorist, marking the beginning of an action.

believers will reign with Christ and be given authority by him to reign over the earth (see Luke 19:17, 19; 1 Cor. 6:3; Rev. 2:26–27; 3:21). But nowhere does Scripture say that believers *in the intermediate state* (between their death and Christ's return) are reigning with Christ or sharing in rule with him. In fact, Revelation earlier pictures saints in heaven before Christ's return *waiting* under the altar and crying out to the Lord to begin to judge evildoers on the earth (Rev. 6:9–10). Nowhere is it said that Christians who have died are already reigning with Christ.

Those who come to life and reign with Christ in Revelation 20 include people "*who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands*" (Rev. 20:4). This is a reference to those who did not yield to the persecution by the beast spoken of in Revelation 13:1–18. But if the severity of persecution described in Revelation 13 leads us to conclude that at the present time the beast *has not yet come* on the world scene but is yet future, then the persecution by this beast is still future as well. And *if this persecution is still future, then the scene in Revelation 20* where those "who had not worshiped the beast . . . and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands" (Rev. 20:4) *is still future as well*. This means that Revelation 20:1–6 does not describe the present church age but is best understood to refer to a future millennial reign of Christ.

These considerations combine to make a case in favor of premillennialism. If we are convinced of this position, it really is an incidental question whether the thousand-year period is thought to be a literal thousand years or simply a long period of time of indeterminate duration. And though we may not have much clarity on all the details of the nature of the millennium, we can be reasonably certain that there will be a future earthly reign of Christ that will be markedly different from this present age.

#### E. THE TIME OF THE GREAT TRIBULATION

For those who are persuaded by the arguments in favor of premillennialism, one further question must be decided: Will Christ return before or after the "great tribulation"?

The expression "great tribulation" itself comes from Matthew 24:21 (and parallels), where Jesus says, "For then there will be *great tribulation*, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be." Historic premillennialism believes that Christ will return *after* that tribulation, for the passage continues, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened. . . . Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matt. 24:29–30). But, as explained above, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries a variety of premillennialism that holds to a pretribulational coming of Christ became popular. This is often called a "*pretribulation rapture*" view, because it holds that Christ will return (secretly) *before* that time of tribulation, and when he returns the church will be "raptured" or snatched up into heaven to be with him.

The arguments for such a pretribulation rapture are as follows.<sup>41</sup>

1. The entire period of the tribulation will be a time of the outpouring of God's wrath on all the earth. Therefore it would not be appropriate for Christians to be on the earth at that time.

2. Jesus promises in Revelation 3:10, "I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth." This passage indicates that the church will be taken out of the world before that hour of trial comes.

3. If Christ returns *after* the tribulation and defeats all his enemies (the *post*tribulation view), then where will the unbelievers come from who are necessary to populate the millennial kingdom? The pretribulation position, however, envisages thousands of Jewish believers who have become Christians during the tribulation and who will go into the millennial kingdom in nonglorified bodies.

4. This view makes it possible to believe that Christ could come at any moment (his coming before the tribulation) and yet that many signs must be fulfilled before he comes (his coming after the tribulation, when the signs will be fulfilled).

Although it is not specifically an argument in favor of a pretribulation position, it must also be noted that pretribulationists then view the teaching about the tribulation in Matthew 24 and the warnings and encouragements given to believers in that situation as applying to Jewish believers during the tribulation, and not to the church generally.<sup>42</sup>

In response to these arguments, the following points may be made.

1. It is inconsistent with the New Testament descriptions of the tribulation to say that *all* the suffering that occurs during that time is specifically the result of the wrath of God. Much of the suffering is due to the fact that "lawlessness will be increased" (Matt. 24:12) and the fact that persecution of the church and opposition from Satan greatly increases during this period. Of course all Christians (whether gentile or Jewish believers) will avoid the wrath of God at all times, but this does not mean they will avoid all suffering, even in times of intense hardship.

2. The fact that Jesus tells faithful believers in the church in Philadelphia (Rev. 3:10) that he will keep them from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world is not strong enough evidence to say that the entire church will be taken out of the world before the tribulation. First, this statement is made to one specific church (Philadelphia) and should not be applied to the whole church at some future point in history. Moreover, "the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world" need not refer to the time of the great tribulation; it more likely refers to a time of great suffering and persecution that

41. Much of the argumentation for the pretribulation rapture position is taken from the very thorough essay by Paul D. Feinberg, "The Case for Pretribulation Rapture Position," in *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulation?*, 45–86.

42. Feinberg gives an additional argument on the differences between the passages he sees as describing the rapture

(before the tribulation) and the passages he sees as describing the second coming (after the tribulation). However, most of these differences are not insurmountable contradictions but only cases where an event is mentioned in one passage and not in another (a point well made by Douglas Moo in his "Response," 99–101).

would come upon the entire Roman Empire or the entire inhabited world. Finally, the promise that the church in Philadelphia will be *guarded* does not imply that they will be taken out of the world but simply that they will be kept faithful and will be guarded from being harmed by that period of suffering and testing.

3. It is no argument for the pretribulation view to say that there must be some people in nonglorified bodies who will enter the millennium because (on a posttribulational view) when Christ comes at the end of the tribulation he will *defeat* all the forces arrayed against him, but that does not mean he will kill or annihilate all of them. Many will simply surrender without trusting Christ and will thus enter the millennium as unbelievers. And during the entire period of the millennium, no doubt many will be converted to Christ and become believers as well.

4. The pretribulational view is not the only one consistent with the ideas that Christ could come back at any time and that there are signs that precede his return. The position presented in the previous chapter—that it is unlikely but possible that the signs have been fulfilled—is also consistent with these ideas.<sup>43</sup>

But it must be said that behind this argument of pretribulationists is probably a more fundamental concern: the desire to preserve a distinction between *the church* (which they think will be taken up into heaven to be with Christ) and *Israel* (which they think will constitute the people of God on earth during the tribulation and then during the millennial kingdom). But, as we noted in an earlier chapter,<sup>44</sup> the New Testament does not support a distinction of this kind between Israel and the church. Hence it does not imply a need to see a distinction between these groups at the time of the tribulation and the millennium.

There is a variation of the pretribulation rapture position that is known as the *midtribulation rapture* view. It is defended by Gleason Archer in his essay, "The Case for the Mid-Seventieth-Week Rapture Position."<sup>45</sup> He sees the tribulation as separated into two halves. The first three and a half years are characterized by the wrath of man, and the church is present at that time. The second three and a half years are characterized by the wrath of God, and during that time the church is absent from the earth. The primary argument from Scripture to support a midtribulational rapture is the fact that in Daniel 7:25; 9:27; and 12:7 and 11, as well as in Revelation 12:14, the seven days or times indicated are cut in half, mentioning the interval of three and a half times or three and a half days in a symbolic week, thus indicating a period of three and a half years, after which God's people will be rescued from tribulation. Another argument in favor of this position is that it gives a heightened sense of expectancy of Christ's return, since three and a half years is a shorter period of time than seven years.

43. See chapter 54, pp. 1355–59.

44. See chapter 44, pp. 1054–58, on the question of a distinction between Israel and the church.

45. In *The Rapture*, 113–45.



However, though the passages in Daniel do speak of an *interruption* of the seventieth week, which Daniel predicts for the future, they do not give any clear indication that mid-way through the week believers will be removed from the earth.<sup>46</sup> It is also hard to see that the expectation of a three-and-a-half-year tribulation provides a much greater sense of imminence than does the expectation of a seven-year tribulation.

Finally, some objections to the *pretribulation* rapture position can be stated in the form of arguments in favor of the *posttribulation* rapture view (the historic premillennial view that Christ will return after a period of tribulation on the earth):

1. The New Testament nowhere clearly says that the church will be taken out of the world before the tribulation. If this significant event were to happen, we might at least expect that explicit teaching to that effect would be found in the New Testament. Certainly Jesus tells us that he will come again and take us to be with himself (John 14:3). Paul tells us that we shall be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:17) and that we shall be changed in the twinkling of an eye and receive resurrection bodies (1 Cor. 15:51–52). But each of these passages has been understood by believers throughout history as speaking not of a *secret* rapture of the church before the tribulation but of a very visible *public* rapture (or “taking up”) of the church to be with Christ just a few moments prior to his coming to earth *with them* to reign during the millennial kingdom (or, on the amillennial view, during the eternal state).<sup>47</sup>

Moreover, it is very difficult to understand 1 Thessalonians 4:17, the only passage that explicitly speaks of the fact that the church will be “caught up” (or “raptured”), to speak of the idea of a secret coming. It says, “The Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God” (1 Thess. 4:16). Of these words Leon Morris rightly says, “It may be that from this he intends us to understand that the rapture will take place secretly, and that no one except the saints themselves will know what is going on. But one would hardly gather this from his words. It is difficult to see how he could more plainly describe something that is open and public.”<sup>48</sup>

The doctrine of a pretribulation rapture is an inference from several passages, all of which are disputed. Moreover, even if one believes this doctrine to be in Scripture, it is taught with such little clarity that it was not discovered until the nineteenth century. This does not make it seem likely.

46. See Paul D. Feinberg, “Response,” in *The Rapture*, 147–50.

47. When Paul says that “we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thess. 4:17), he uses the Greek word *apantēsis*, for “meet,” which is used in Greek literature outside the Bible to speak of citizens going out of a city to meet an arriving magistrate, then to return to the city with him. “The word *apantēsis* is to be understood as a technical term for a civic

custom of antiquity whereby a public welcome was accorded by a city to important visitors” (Erik Peterson, “*apantēsis*,” *TDNT*, 1:380). Moulton and Milligan say, “The word seems to have been a kind of technical term for the official welcome of a newly arrived dignitary—a usage which accords excellently with its New Testament usage” (*MM*, 53).

48. Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, NIC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 145.

2. The tribulation is quite clearly linked with the Lord's return in some passages. First, the loud trumpet call to gather the elect in Matthew 24:31, the sound of the trumpet of God in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, and the last trumpet at which our bodies are changed in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, all seem to be the same trumpet—the last trumpet that is blown just before the millennium. If it is indeed the "last trumpet" (1 Cor. 15:52), then it is hard to see how another loud trumpet call (Matt. 24:31) could follow it seven years later.

In addition, Matthew 24 is very difficult to understand as referring not to the church but to Jewish people who would be saved during the tribulation. Jesus is addressing *his disciples* (Matt. 24:1-4) and warning them of persecution and suffering to come. He tells them of the great tribulation to come, and then says that "immediately after the tribulation of those days" cosmic signs will appear and "then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matt. 24:30). But is it likely that Jesus, in saying all these things *to his disciples*, intended his words to apply not to the church but only to a future earthly kingdom of Jewish people who would be converted during the tribulation? How could the disciples have known that he had such a meaning in mind? Nor does it seem likely that the disciples are here as representatives of a future Jewish kingdom and not as representatives of the church, with whose founding they were so integrally connected as to be its foundation (Eph. 2:20).

3. Finally, the New Testament does not seem to justify the idea of two separate returns of Christ (once *for* his church before the tribulation and then seven years later *with* his church to bring judgment on unbelievers). Once again, no such view is explicitly taught in any passage, but it is simply an inference drawn from differences between various passages that describe Christ's return from different perspectives. But it is not at all difficult to see these passages as referring to a single event occurring at one time.<sup>49</sup>

It seems best to conclude, with the great majority of the church throughout history, that the church will go through the time of tribulation predicted by Jesus. We would probably not have chosen this path for ourselves, but the decision was not ours to make. And if God wills that any of us now alive remain on earth until the time of this great tribulation, then we should heed Peter's words, "If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you" (1 Peter 4:14), and "Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps" (1 Peter 2:21). This idea that Christians should be prepared to endure suffering is also seen in Paul's words that we are fellow heirs with Christ, "provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him" (Rom. 8:17). And we may remember that from the time of Noah to the time of the martyrdom of the early apostles, it has frequently been God's way to bring his people through suffering to

49. See n37 above; the primary passages are given on pp. 1347-49.

glory, for thus he did even with his own Son. "For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering" (Heb. 2:10). It is from the Savior who himself has suffered more than any of his children will ever suffer that we have the admonition, "Do not fear what you are about to suffer. . . . Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev. 2:10).

## QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Before reading this chapter, did you have any conviction about whether Christ's return would be amillennial, postmillennial, or premillennial? And whether it would be posttribulational or pretribulational? If so, how has your view now changed, if at all?
2. Explain how your present view of the millennium affects your Christian life today. Similarly, explain how your view of the tribulation affects your present Christian life.
3. What do you think it will feel like to be living on earth with a glorified body, and with Jesus Christ as King over the whole world? Can you describe in any detail some of the attitudes and emotional responses you will have toward various situations in such a kingdom? Do you really look forward to such a kingdom? (Your answers will differ somewhat depending on whether you expect a glorified body during the millennium or not until the eternal state.)
4. What might be both the positive and the negative results of a pretribulation rapture position in the everyday lives and attitudes of Christians? Similarly, what might be the positive and negative results of a posttribulation rapture position?

### Special Terms

*amillennialism*  
*dispensational premillennialism*  
*great tribulation*  
*historic premillennialism*  
*midtribulation rapture*  
*millennium*  
*postmillennialism*  
*posttribulational premillennialism*  
*posttribulation rapture*  
*premillennialism*  
*pretribulational premillennialism*  
*pretribulation rapture*  
*rapture*

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- 1986 ..... Ryrie, 439–52, 461–511
- 2002–2005 .. Geisler, 4:547–96
- 2017 ..... MacArthur and Mayhuc, 884–913

**5. Lutheran**

- 1934 ..... Mueller, 621–25

**6. Reformed (or Presbyterian)**

- 1679–85 ..... Turretin, *IET*, 3:574–82
- 1724–58 ..... Edwards, 2:278–313
- 1871–73 ..... Hodge, 3:861–68
- 1894 ..... Shedd, 863–66
- 1887–1921 ... Warfield, *BD*, 643–64
- 1906–11 ..... Bavinck, *RD*, 4:655–63, 664–90
- 1938 ..... Berkhof, 695–707
- 1998 ..... Reymond 979–1066

- 2008 ..... Van Genderen and Velema, 838–64

- 2011 ..... Horton, 920–56

- 2013 ..... Frame, 1086–96

- 2013 ..... Culver, 1138–52

- 2016 ..... Allen and Swain, 389–91

- 2017 ..... Barrett, 721–56

- 2019 ..... Letham, 842–54

**7. Renewal (or charismatic/Pentecostal)**

- 1988–92 ..... Williams, 3:421–44

- 1993 ..... Menzies and Horton, 227–40

- 1995 ..... Horton, 629–34

- 2008 ..... Duffield and Van Cleave, 553–56

**SECTIONS IN REPRESENTATIVE ROMAN CATHOLIC SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGIES**

**1. Roman Catholic: Traditional**

- 1955 ..... Ott (no explicit treatment)

**2. Roman Catholic: Post-Vatican II**

- 2012 ..... CCC, paragraphs 675–77

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## SCRIPTURE MEMORY PASSAGE

**Revelation 20:4–6:** Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were

ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

## HYMN

### “Jesus Shall Reign Where'er the Sun”

This hymn by Isaac Watts beautifully describes the reign of Christ over the whole earth. Whether our personal convictions on the millennium lead us to understand this hymn as referring to the millennium or to the eternal state, in either case it gives an excellent picture of the kingdom for which our hearts long and the blessings that will come when Jesus is King over the earth.

*Jesus shall reign where'er the sun  
Does his successive journeys run;  
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,  
Til moons shall wax and wane no more.*

*To him shall endless prayer be made,  
And praises throng to crown his head;  
His name, like sweet perfume, shall rise  
With every morning sacrifice.*

*People and realms of every tongue  
Dwell on his love with sweetest song;*

*And infant voices shall proclaim  
Their early blessings on his name.*

*Blessings abound where'er he reigns;  
The pris'ner leaps to loose his chains,  
The weary find eternal rest,  
And all the sons of want are blest.*

*Let every creature rise and bring  
Peculiar honors to our King,  
Angels descend with songs again,  
And earth repeat the loud amen.*

Author: Isaac Watts, 1719

## CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP SONG

### “Revelation Song”

*Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,  
Holy, holy is He.  
Sing a new song to Him who sits on  
Heaven's mercy seat.*

*Chorus  
Holy, holy, holy  
Is the Lord God Almighty,  
Who was and is and is to come.  
With all creation I sing,  
Praise to the King of kings;  
You are my everything,  
And I will adore You.*

*Clothed in rainbows of living color,  
Flashes of lightning, rolls of thunder.  
Blessing and honor, strength and glory  
And power be to You the only wise King.*

*Filled with wonder, awestruck wonder,  
At the mention of Your name.  
Jesus, Your name is power, breath, and living water,  
Such a marvelous mystery.*

Words by Jennie Lee Riddle<sup>50</sup>

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