

AMILLENNIALISM

INTRODUCTION

Among conservative Christians there are three basic prophetic views regarding the millennium as it relates to our Lord's Second Coming. These views are Premillennial, Postmillennial and Amillennial). *Premillennial* teachers promote the view that Christ will return before His literal, 1000-year, millennial Kingdom reign on earth. A consistent literal hermeneutic will lead to this view. The *Postmillennial* view is "that the Kingdom of God is now being extended in the world through the preaching of the Gospel..., that the world eventually is to be Christianized, and that the return of Christ is to occur at the close of a long period of righteousness and peace [the 'golden age'] commonly called the 'Millennium'... an indefinitely long period of time."¹ Most Postmillennial promoters are Amillennial in not believing in a literal 1000-year millennium. The *Amillennial* (or non-millenarian) view is not so optimistic regarding this present age. Amillennial teachers promote the view that Christ will return after this present "kingdom age" which is a sort of "realized millennium."² Christ is reigning in the hearts of living saints in a world that continues getting worse with "seasons of ever-increasing wickedness..."³ Most Amillennial promoters are Postmillennial in believing that Christ will return after the "millennium," however defined. There are different views on Scriptural interpretation within each group. This paper will review some of the Amillennial views, using primarily Amillennial sources,⁴ indicating how and why those views are in conflict with Scripture.

AMILLENNIAL BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Amillennial view: "[Amillennialism] is, as the name indicates ... holds that there is no sufficient Scriptural ground for the expectation of a millennium."⁵ Prominent Amillennial scholars have clearly stated that "amillennialists do not believe in a literal thousand-year earthly reign which will follow the return of Christ."⁶ "The thousand-year period is symbolical. It stands for the whole time between the life of Jesus on earth and His Second Coming."⁷ Another Amillennial teacher gives this brief summary: "The... 'thousand years' described in Revelation 20 is figurative of Christ's spiritual reign in this Gospel Age — i.e., now. All the OT promises were fulfilled in Christ; Satan was 'bound' at the cross and resurrection of Christ; there is now only one 'Israel' — the Church made up of both Jews and Gentiles; Satan will be 'loosed' just before the Second Coming; the 'rapture' of the saints, the resurrection, and Christ's Second Coming...all a simultaneous event,

¹ Lorraine Boettner, *The Millennium*, Revised Edition (Phillipsburg, NJ.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1984), 14. Or see www.mbrem.com/eschatology/post3.htm. Boettner is Postmillennial.

² Many Amillennial scholars, such as the Presbyterian, Jay Adams, are not happy with the term *amillennialism*. Since they believe that we are now in the millennium, they would prefer a term such as *realized millennialism*. See Jay E. Adams, *The Time Is at Hand* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1970), 7-11.

³ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary, Thessalonians, Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1979), 282-83. Hendriksen is Amillennial.

⁴ Many of our sample quotes, though typical of Amillennial convictions, do not speak for all conservative Amillennial teachers.

⁵ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1941), 708. Berkhof is Amillennial.

⁶ Anthony A. Hoekema, "Amillennialism: Part 1- Introduction" (Posted 6/15/2001). www.graceonlinelibrary.org/theology/full.asp?ID=635

⁷ Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 234.

followed immediately by the one general Judgment and then the eternal state (the ‘new heavens and new earth’).”⁸

AMILLENNIAL HISTORICAL SKETCH

It is acknowledged by Oswald T. Allis, Amillennial scholar, that premillennialism “was extensively held in the early church.”⁹ The church historian, Philip Schaff, confirms that “the most striking point in the eschatology of the ante-Nicene age [from Pentecost to 325 AD] is the prominent chiliasm,¹⁰ or millenarianism, that is the belief of a visible reign of Christ in glory on earth with the risen saints for a thousand years, before the general resurrection and judgment.”¹¹ “Of the three views concerning the Millennium, the Premillennial view is the oldest. Some of the earliest adherents to the Premillennial view included: Clement of Rome [40-100 A.D.] ... Ignatius of Antioch [50-115 A.D. and] ... Hippolytus [160-240 A.D.]”¹² It is evident to most scholars that the “premillennial view was also shared by Irenaeus, Melito..., Tertullian, and Lactantius. In fact, the Gnostics were the first to reject the premillennial view.”¹³ Representatives of the Alexandrian school of theology, which included men such as Clement of Alexandria (around 190 AD), Origen (185–254) and Dionysius (190–265), generally viewed all of Scripture as allegory. And this eventually led to an increased promotion and acceptance of Amillennial views.

Influenced by the allegorical approach of this Alexandrian theology, Augustine (354-430) made a switch from his earlier Premillennial position to that of Amillennial but limiting the allegorical approach more to eschatology. “For this reason, most amillenarians [and many Postmillennial teachers] trace their view to Augustine... Augustine was the father of amillennialism because he discarded the allegorical system of interpretation of the Bible as a whole as advanced by the school at Alexandria in favor of limiting allegorical interpretation to prophetic Scriptures only... [He held that] prophecy is a special case requiring nonliteral interpretation.”¹⁴ The Amillennial view “was especially championed in the writings of St. Augustine and had a significant following in the church for several centuries after that until the mid-19th century,” when Postmillennial and Premillennial views began to flourish.¹⁵ Amillennial views, based on related hermeneutical presuppositions, have remained dominant in the Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed and Presbyterian

⁸ William Kilgore, “Realized Millennialism: A Brief Description of the Amillennial Position.” www.flash.net/~thinkman/articles/amill.htm

⁹ Bobby Hayes in “Premillennialism,” Mal Couch, Gen., Ed., *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, (Grand rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1996), 311

¹⁰ A transliteration from the Greek word root, *chilia*, meaning “1000.”

¹¹ Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1910, reprinted 1995), Vol. II, 614.

¹² Hayes, “Premillennialism,” *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, 311.

¹³ Norman L. Geisler, “A Premillennial View of Law and Government,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 142:567 (Jul 85), 250.

¹⁴ John F. Walvoord, “Interpreting Prophecy Today, Part 1,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 139:553 (Jan 82), 6. It should be noted that throughout most of church history the terms for Premillennial, Postmillennial and Amillennial were not used. The only clear distinction was between chiliasm and non-chiliasm. The latter included those with Postmillennial and/or Amillennial views. In 1938, B. B. Warfield indicated that “the name [amillennialism] is new indeed, but the view to which it has applied is as old as Christianity.” Cited in Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 708.

¹⁵ From an historicist Amillennial website: www.geocities.com/mosouthron/historicism/amill.html. In fact, no discussion of Amillennial, as distinct from Postmillennial, was included in either the *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, (1907) or *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (first copyrighted in 1929). However, after two world wars, understandably Postmillennial views were gradually supplanted by Amillennial views within Reformed circles. More recently, however, Postmillennial views have been making a comeback.

churches throughout most of church history.

AMILLENNIAL HERMENEUTICS

1. Covenantism and Dispensationalism

Amillennial view: A foundational hermeneutical presupposition has to do with Covenant theology¹⁶ of the Reformed churches which “represents the whole of Scripture as being covered by two covenants: (1) the covenant of works [between God and Adam]...and (2) the covenant of grace...treated under two aspects.”¹⁷ These two “aspects” of the covenant of grace are distinguished by some Amillennial authorities as two distinct covenants, “the covenant of redemption [between God and Christ] and the covenant of grace [between God and ‘elect sinners’]. The two are so closely related that they can be and sometimes are, considered as one. The former is the eternal foundation of the latter...[and] includes only a part of mankind and is therefore particular. Adults can enter the covenant as a purely legal arrangement only by faith... Children of believers, however, enter...by birth.”¹⁸ Although they “are recognized as covenant children...[and] receive the seal of baptism,” when “they grow up they must accept their covenant responsibilities voluntarily by a true confession of faith. Failure to do this makes them covenant breakers. ...[U]nregenerate persons may temporarily be in the covenant as a purely legal relationship.”¹⁹ This “gracious agreement” is one “in which God promises salvation through faith in Christ, and the sinner accepts this believingly, promising a life of faith and obedience.”²⁰ This covenant is thought to provide a *unifying*, Calvinistic philosophy and goal of history, namely, God’s glory through the salvation of “the elect.”

Covenant theologians normally distinguish “just two dispensations or administrations, namely that of the Old, and that of the New Testament; and to subdivide the former into several periods or stages in the revelation of the covenant of grace.”²¹ This affects Amillennial exegesis of Old Testament scripture, as one has written, “The Reformed exegete approaches the prophets from the perspective of the unity of the covenant. Although God has entered into several administrations of grace (Abrahamic, Mosaic, and New), there is but one covenant of grace. The various administrations are expressions of one covenant between the Father and the elect and whose Mediator is Jesus Christ.”²² This “Covenant of Grace which is first mentioned in Genesis 3 and further developed...with Abraham and Moses, reaches its final state of fulfillment in the New Testament Dispensation... There is abundant evidence that this New Testament Covenant does not differ from the Old Testament Covenant in essence. Essentially, they are the same.”²³ [The] “covenant of Sinai was essentially the same as that established with Abraham, though the form differed somewhat... [The] covenant of grace, as it is revealed in the New Testament, is essentially the same as that which governed the relation of Old Testament believers to God.”²⁴ Especially since the days of the

¹⁶ See the paper on *Dispensational and Covenant Theologies* by the Biblical Resource Group.

¹⁷ G. Collins, “Covenant Theology,” *Bakers Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1960), 144.

¹⁸ Berkhof, *A Summary of Christian Doctrine*, (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1938), 74, 77.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 77-78.

²⁰ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 277.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 293.

²² Willem A. VanGemeren, “Israel As the Hermeneutical Crux in the Interpretation of Prophecy (II),” *Westminster Theological Journal*, 46:2 (Fall 1984), 269.

²³ Masselink, 62; cf. also Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 279.

²⁴ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 297-9.

reformation there has been ongoing debate about whether the covenant of grace is bilateral and *conditional* or unilateral and *unconditional*.²⁵

Premillennial view: This view is rooted in dispensational theology. As stated by Renald Showers [dispensationalists believe] “that the ultimate purpose of history is the glory of God through the demonstration that He alone is the sovereign God.”²⁶ Throughout history He will continue to receive glory and honor through His sovereign programs for the church, for unbelievers, for national Israel, for all other nations, for Satan and fallen angels, for good angels and for all of creation. This will become gloriously evident *within history* especially during events including the Rapture, the great tribulation, the 2nd Coming, the Millennium and final judgment. All this will precede the glorious eternal state with its new heavens and new earth, which are *beyond history*. Believers are to be optimistic about history in spite of the intensification of evil because of having confidence “that God will make an incursion into *history* and establish his Kingdom on this earth.”²⁷

The so-called covenant of grace is a *theological* concept rather than a *biblical* one. There are both similarities and differences between all the *biblical* covenants and their related economies. The *covenant of grace* concept seems to be partly the result of covenant theology’s failure to recognize dispensational distinctives revealed progressively over history. In addition to the dispensational distinctives already presented in this paper the following are added: 1) The Gospel of the Kingdom preached by John the Baptist (Matt. 3:2), Jesus (Matt. 4:17) and the disciples (Matt. 10:7) was obviously different from Paul’s Gospel about the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (1 Cor. 15:1-4). When Jesus prophesied of these things just prior to their fulfillment, the disciples still had no comprehension whatsoever (Lk. 18:31-34). So, their “gospel” was certainly not “the preaching of the cross,” the heart of Paul’s Gospel of “Christ crucified” (1 Cor. 1:17-23; 2:2). 2) There was a drastic change in Christ’s earlier commission focused strictly on Israel (Matt. 10:5-10) and that given to the same group after His rejection by Israel and His subsequent crucifixion and resurrection (Matt. 28:19-20). 3) The temporal, bilateral, conditional, Mosaic covenant is not “essentially the same” as the eternal, unilateral, unconditional, Abrahamic (Gal. 3:17-25) Davidic (2 Sam. 7:10-16) and new (Jer. 31:31; 2 Cor. 3:6) covenants. By placing these covenants together under one so-called “covenant of grace,” (whether considered as unconditional or conditional) has led to failure in making another clear dispensational distinction between law and grace.

2. Law and Grace:

Amillennial view:²⁸ It is claimed that “the way of salvation revealed in the covenant [of grace] is the same [in Old and New Testaments] ... The promises, for the realization of which the believers hoped, were also the same... And the sacraments [circumcision and baptism], though different in form, have essentially the same signification in both dispensations.”²⁹ Therefore many have seen

²⁵ See David Engelsma, “The Unconditional Covenant in Contemporary Debate and the Protestant Reformed Seminary,” www.prca.org/standard_bearer/volume79/2003jan01.html. See also Ronald M. Johnson, “Covenant Hermeneutics,” *Conservative Theological Journal*, 3:10 (Dec. 1999), 316-28. Berkhof saw the covenant as “both conditional and unconditional.” *A Summary of Christian Doctrine*, 77.

²⁶ Showers, *There Really is a Difference*, 53

²⁷ Paul D. Feinberg review of A. A. Hoekema’s, *The Bible and the Future*, from *Trinity Journal* 1:1 (Spring 1980), 108.

²⁸ Bob Nyberg deals with this aspect of Covenant Theology in his paper, “Covenant Theology Versus Dispensationalism, A Matter of Law Versus Grace.” www.4himnet.com/bnyberg/dispensationalism01.html

²⁹ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 280. In Amillennial thinking, since *church baptism*, the sign of the new covenant, is

“the law” as “a declaration of the will of God for man’s salvation.”³⁰ Others in criticism of dispensationalism have stated that “the so-called dispensation of grace did not abrogate the law as a rule of life. Grace offers escape from the law only as a condition of salvation—as it is in the covenant of works—from the curse of the law, and from the law as an extraneous power.”³¹

Premillennial view: Galatians makes a clear distinction between law and grace. The Mosaic covenant between God and Israel was never a *way of salvation* for Jews or anyone else (Gal. 2:21). Salvation from sin has always been by grace through faith, not works of the law. Although God graciously saved all true believers, before, during and after the Mosaic covenant was in force, the law served as a temporary *rule of life* for Israel and as a tutor to lead them to Christ (Gal. 3:23-25). Although glorious, the Mosaic covenant was a “ministry of death” and “condemnation” (2 Cor. 3:7, 9), not salvation. Nor was the law ever intended to be a *rule of life* for believers during this church age. That would entangle the church with an unbearable yoke of bondage God never intended for the church to bear. Believers are “not children of the bondwoman” who was cast out (Gal. 4:21-5:1). “The Church Age believer is not in any way, shape, or form under the obligations of the Mosaic Law, but under the Law of Christ and the Spirit (Rom. 3:21-27; 6:14-15; Gal. 2:16; 3:10, 16-18, 24-26; 4:21-31; Heb. 10:11-17). The Mosaic Covenant did not change the provision of the Abrahamic Covenant but was added for a limited time only — till Christ should come (Gal. 3:17-19).³² It is therefore encouraging to know that at least one scholar from the Reformed tradition believes that “the Christian is totally free from the Mosaic covenant, that it is a mistake in theology to take the law as recorded in the Decalogue as a ‘rule of life’”³³

3. Israel and the Church:

Covenant teachers generally see our present age as “the last days.” And their view of the salvation of the elect as God’s goal for history makes it difficult for them to see any future for Israel as a distinct people. This view has contributed to the development of what has been called *replacement theology*.³⁴ This “is the view that the Church has permanently replaced Israel as the instrument through which God works and that national Israel does not have a future in the plan of God.”³⁵

Amillennial view: This is basic to Amillennial (and Postmillennial) thinking. Since believers can be

seen as *Jewish circumcision*, the sign of the old covenant, now *church infants* are baptized same as *Jewish infants* were circumcised.

³⁰ Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1945), 39. This sort of thinking must at least partially account for the legalism evident in Reformed covenant theology.

³¹ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 291. Cited in Charles L. Feinberg, *Millennialism, The Two Major Views...*, Third and Enlarged Edition (Chicago IL: Moody, 1980), 219.

³² Thomas Ice, “Covenants and Dispensations – Part 4,” *Pre-Trib Perspectives*, Vol. 8, #32, (Mar. 2006), 7.

³³ Michael Eaton, *No Condemnation, A New Theology of Assurance* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 13. The author has also observed “striking contrasts between the two covenants, the Abrahamic and the Mosaic.” Yet he has recognized that Reformed theologians (such as Barth, H. Berkhof, and others) “are often centered around ‘the covenant’ ...but Paul speaks of covenants in the plural (Rom. 9:4; Eph. 2:12); and never of ‘the covenant’ as an overarching and including the Mosaic epoch.” This is part of Eaton’s extensive arguments to combat the incredible need in Reformed, Calvinistic theology to take “seriously the Pauline teaching concerning freedom from Mosaism” and to promote “the possibility of a Christian’s being radically free from the Mosaic law.” (pp. 30-32, 91, 110)

³⁴ While this is a common term used by dispensationalists, Amills look at it as inaccurate and pejorative. They prefer to say that Israel has been “fulfilled”.

³⁵ Thomas Ice, cited in Michael J. Vlach, “Has The Church Replaced Israel In God’s Plan? A Historical and Theological Survey of Replacement Theology,” *Conservative Theological Journal*, 4:11 (April 2000), 6.

traced back to Adam, some Amillennial teachers believe the church must be dated from Adam. However, most probably agree that the “establishment of the covenant [of grace] with Abraham marked the beginning of an institutional church... The New Testament church is essentially one with the church of the old dispensation.”³⁶ It is claimed that the New Testament teaches the “hard fact that national Israel and its law have been permanently replaced by the church and the New Covenant... The Jewish *nation* no longer has a place as the special people of God; that place has been taken by the Christian community which fulfills God’s purpose for Israel.”³⁷ Some Amillennial teachers acknowledge that “if the principle of interpretation is adopted that Israel always means Israel, that it does not mean the Church, *then it follows of necessity that practically all of our information regarding the millennium will concern a Jewish or Israelitish age.*”³⁸ (Italics added) However, Amillennial teachers spiritualize *Israel* to mean *the church*, especially in the context of prophecies unfulfilled literally. On the assumption that “the *New Testament* [re]interprets the *Old Testament*,” it is claimed that “Paul [in Gal 6:16] clearly identifies the church as the true Israel. This would imply that promises, which had been made to Israel during Old Testament times, are fulfilled in the New Testament church.”³⁹

A few examples may be helpful to illustrate the application of this presupposition: The Amillennial view, “which relates Israel to the Church and which sees in this chapter [Joel 3] the fortunes of Israel and the fortunes of the Church, the Israel of God, merging together... [also sees] symbolized in the victories here described the overthrow of all those who are opponents of the gospel of grace. [Judah and Jerusalem (Joel 3:20) is] not earthly Judah, nor earthly Jerusalem...[but] the one people of God, the true Judah...the Israel which is indeed Israel, [or the church].”⁴⁰ Ezekiel 37:21-28 “is futuristic. It describes the ideal, Messianic kingdom of the last days...the golden age...[which] has dawned in the coming of Jesus the Messiah”⁴¹ “Any literal futurist prophetic interpretation [of Eze. 40-48] is to be rejected in part because the “heirs of the kingdom are no longer the Jewish nation but the Church, the new Israel, in which the old Israel may find its true place.”⁴² Based on Galatians 4:25-26, a distinction is made in Zechariah 12-14 between “the Jewish church that rejected Christ, and...the Christian church, the spiritual Jerusalem... The church is Jerusalem, the heavenly Jerusalem; all true believers, that have their conversation in heaven are inhabitants of this Jerusalem and to them this promise belongs.”⁴³ “So all the nations of the world gathered against Jerusalem are ‘the enemies of the church.’ When it speaks of our Lord standing ‘in that day *upon the mount of Olives*’ (14:4), this was literally fulfilled when our Lord Jesus was often upon this mountain...[from which] he *ascended up into heaven.*”⁴⁴ The “sealed multitude of Revelation 7 [1-17] symbolizes the entire Church militant of the old and new dispensation... The 144,000 sealed individuals out of the twelve tribes of literal Israel [Rev. 7:4-8] symbolize spiritual Israel, the Church

³⁶ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 295, 571.

³⁷ Bruce K. Waltke, Kingdom Promises as Spiritual, *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1988), 274-5. Cited in Michael J. Vlach, *CTJ*, op. cit. 6.

³⁸ Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1945), 244. Cited in Mike Stallard, “Hermeneutics and Matthew 13, Part I,” *Conservative Theological Journal*, (Aug 2001), 136.

³⁹ Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 197. Cited in Vlach, *CTJ*, op. cit. 14.

⁴⁰ J. T. Carson, “Joel,” *The New Bible Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954) 697.

⁴¹ John Taylor, *Ezekiel, An Introduction & Commentary*, (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1969) 239-40. [Postmillennial]

⁴² Gr. R. Beasley-Murray, “Ezekiel,” *The New Bible Commentary*, 669.

⁴³ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1961, 1974), 1189-90.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 1189, 91.

of God on earth.”⁴⁵ Faulty hermeneutical presuppositions DO make a very real difference.

Premillennial view: *Israel* never means *the Church* in Scripture. Besides *Gentiles*, Scripture supports a clear distinction between two other very special “people groups.” These two groups are never to be equated. The first is national or ethnic *Israel*, an elect, holy people (Deut. 7) composed of both believing and unbelieving descendants of Jacob’s sons. The second is *the Church*, also an elect, holy people (Eph. 1:4-5; 1 Pet. 2:9) composed of believing Jews and believing Gentiles. The Church did not exist before Pentecost. It is the Body of Christ (Col. 1:18; 1 Cor. 12:13) by Spirit baptism (Acts 1:5; 2:1-4; 15:11). This *one new man*, a mystery unrevealed in the Old Testament, was founded on the Apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:15-3:12). Since Pentecost, both secular history and Scripture has clearly recognized the existence of all three groups (Gentiles, Israel/Jews and the Church) as distinct people groups. Reference is made to each of these three groups numerous times in Acts, the epistles and Revelation after the church was born. For instance, Paul’s prayer for national *Israel* (Rom. 10:1) is obviously not a prayer for the *church*. He exhorted the Corinthian church not to offend either *Jews*, *Greeks* or the *church* (1 Cor. 10:32). Incredibly, after all these centuries of scattering, anti-Semitism and persecution, Jews and Gentiles alike still know who the Jews are—whether as a nation in Palestine or as a dispersed people. The Church is neither the *new* Israel, nor the *true* Israel nor *spiritual* Israel. The *Israel of God* (Gal. 6:16) is a reference to Jewish Christians included in the church. Any perceived rejection of national Israel by Jesus (Matt. 21:41-43) was obviously *temporary*, not permanent. For God himself had made it clear that “*the seed of Israel*” would never “*cease from being a nation...forever*” (Jer. 31:36). “*Hath God cast away His people* [obviously Israel, not the church]?” Absolutely not! (Rom. 11:1). The *church* is a spiritual brotherhood and cannot be understood as a national entity with national qualities.⁴⁶ Amillennial’s replacement theology is defended with another foundational hermeneutical presupposition regarding the interpretation of prophetic Scripture.

4. Spiritualization and Literalism: Many Amillennial scholars have acknowledged the major hermeneutical distinction between *the non-literal* Amillennial and *literal* Premillennial views in such words as these: “Now we must frankly admit that a literal interpretation of the Old Testament prophecies gives us just such a picture of an earthly reign of the Messiah as the premillennialist pictures. That was the kind of Messianic Kingdom that the Jews of the time of Christ were looking for, on the basis of a literal kingdom interpretation of the Old Testament promises.”⁴⁷ Another admits that “the Old Testament prophecies if literally interpreted cannot be regarded as having been yet fulfilled or as being capable of fulfillment in this present age.”⁴⁸ However, all Amillennial teachers reject literalism in favor of spiritualization for understanding *almost all* prophetic Scripture which remains unfulfilled literally.

Amillennial view: Typical of Amillennial thinking is this: “We...reject the literal interpretation of prophecy because it contradicts the applications made of prophecy in both the Old and New Testament and if consistently carried out it renders one part of God’s Word in contradiction to the other.”⁴⁹ “This is one of the major problems in biblical interpretation and confronts everyone who

⁴⁵ William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 111.

⁴⁶ For a helpful discussion of verses used as support for replacement theology, see Vlach, *CTJ*, op. cit, 12-31

⁴⁷ Floyd E. Hamilton, *The Basis of Millennial Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1942), 38. Cited in Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, Revised and Expanded (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 83

⁴⁸ Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1945), 17. Cited in Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 86.

⁴⁹ William Masselink, *Why A Thousand Years?* (Grand Rapids MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1930), 39. Cited in Payne, “Contemporary Amillennial Literature, Part 1,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 106:422 (Apr 49), 203.

makes a serious study of the Word of God. It is one of the chief keys to the difference of opinion between Premillenarians and the mass of Christian scholars [mostly Amillennial]. The former rejects such spiritualization, the latter employs it...⁵⁰ This is especially true with *apocalyptic* type Scripture (such as Ezekiel, Daniel, and Revelation). This claim is made, “An axiom of Bible study is that most sections demand literal interpretation unless the context or other known Scripture passages demand figurative or spiritual interpretation. In apocalyptic literature the very opposite is true; here *one must interpret figuratively, unless literal interpretation is absolutely demanded*”⁵¹ (emphasis added). So, it is no wonder that Amillennial teachers spiritualize most unfulfilled prophetic portions. It is claimed, for example, that the fulfillment of Isaiah 65:18-25 “is not earthly... is not about the present world, Jerusalem, Jews, long and trouble-free earthly lives, nice houses, good farms, plenty of money, ease, happy times, and tame wolves. It is about Jesus Christ, His church, salvation, eternal life, and a new, different world. It is about a *spiritual* Christ, a *spiritual* people, *spiritual* salvation, *spiritual* blessings, *spiritual* life, and a *spiritual* world.”⁵² This is Amillennial *spiritualization* of prophetic Scripture.

Premillennial view: This view is based on “the literal, historical-grammatical interpretation” of all Scripture. The Premillennial view follows Cooper’s, “Golden Rule of Interpretation:” “*When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages, and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise.*”⁵³ This also applies to prophecies written with symbols, figures of speech and types. Such literary forms “are all interpreted plainly in this method and they are in no way contrary to literal interpretation. After all, the very existence of any meaning for a figure of speech depends on the reality of the literal meaning of the terms involved. Figures often make the meaning plainer, but it is the literal, normal, or plain meaning that they convey to the reader.”⁵⁴ “The *literalist* (so called) is not one who denies that *figurative* language, that *symbols*, are used in prophecy, nor does he deny that great *spiritual* truths are set forth therein; his position is, simply, that the prophecies are to be *normally* interpreted (i.e., according to the received laws of language) as any other utterances are interpreted — that which is manifestly figurative being so regarded.”⁵⁵ The meanings of literary forms such as symbols, figures of speech and types are largely determined by context and comparison with related Scripture. And such forms normally have reference to *literal* ideas, events, individuals, and nations.

All Biblical prophets prophesied future events. And they often used inspired symbols, figures of speech and types. For instance, Daniel, in his “apocalypse,” prophesied of literal events in the symbolic form of an image depicting literal nations in a literal world, coming to literal power in a literal sequence in a literal future (Dan. 2:31-45). About one-fourth of Scripture is prophetic in nature. And about half of these prophecies, including all those referring to the events surrounding our

⁵⁰ Albertus Pieters [Amillennial scholar], *The Leader*, September 5, 1931. Cited by John F. Walvoord, “The Theological Context of Premillennialism,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 150:600 (Oct 93), 387.

⁵¹ William E. Cox [Amillennial], “Revelation Twenty – Introduction” www.graceonlinelibrary.org

⁵² David J. Engelsma, “A Defense of (Reformed) Amillennialism (9) A Spiritual Interpretation of Isaiah 65:17ff.” <http://members.aol.com/twarren11/amil.html>

⁵³ Mal Couch, “Introductory Thoughts on Allegorical Interpretation and the Book of Revelation, Part I” *Conservative Theological Journal*, 1:1 (April 1997), 19.

⁵⁴ Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 80-81.

⁵⁵ L. P. Lange, *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Revelation* (New York: Charles Scribners, 1872), 98. Cited by Ryrie, *Ibid.*, 81.

Lord's first coming, have already been literally fulfilled with remarkable accuracy. This gives strong indication that prophecies referring to the events surrounding our Lord's 2nd coming should also be taken literally rather than being spiritualized to mean something else—even if these prophecies occur in apocalyptic Scripture.⁵⁶ If prophetic Scripture is not taken literally, how could anyone know if/when the prophecy is fulfilled? If the so-called “axiom” is indeed true that in “apocalyptic literature... *one must interpret figuratively, unless literal interpretation is absolutely demanded,*” then the sky is the limit on exegetical freedom. And this, no doubt, accounts for the wide variation of interpretation among Amillennial teachers regarding prophecies not yet fulfilled literally.

5. Preterism, Historicism, Idealism and Futurism

Amillennial View: If prophecy is taken literally, as in the Premillennial view, it soon becomes very obvious that much of prophecy must yet be fulfilled in the future. However, futurism has little place in the hermeneutics of Amillennial eschatology, particularly as it relates to our Lord's 2nd coming and the prophesied messianic/millennial kingdom. In contrast to, and rejection of, the literal *futurism* of the dispensational, Premillennial position, Amillennial (and Postmillennial) scholars have come up with either: 1) some form of *preterism* (such prophecies were fulfilled in the past during the first century by 70 AD),⁵⁷ or 2) some form of *historicism* (such prophecies have been/are being fulfilled in this present age),⁵⁸ or 3) *idealism* (such prophecies are non-temporal and simply represent principles or lessons)⁵⁹ or 4) some combination of these.⁶⁰ All of these approaches, especially as they relate to the Olivet Discourse, Revelation, and related Scripture to some extent are found within Amillennial views, but historicism and idealism seem to be the most common forms. It is claimed that the “historicist version of Amillennialism was the predominant view in the reformation. Amillennialism in some form (typically idealist) is the predominant view of the church worldwide.”⁶¹ However, many Amillennial preterists, historicists and idealists also use some form of a *futurist* approach to some prophecies that relate to our Lord's 2nd coming. So, it should be

⁵⁶ Amillennial thinkers see “ground for interpreting eschatological fulfillments of prophecy [such as those relating to the second advent] on a different basis than pre-eschatological fulfillments [such as those relating to the first advent].” The former are spiritualized, the latter (having been fulfilled) must, of course, be taken literally. The quote is from Vern Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 105-6. Cited in Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 83.

⁵⁷ There are different forms of preterism ranging from *full/radical* to *partial/moderate*. Radical preterists believe that all prophecy, including our Lord's 2nd coming, was fulfilled in 70 AD. Moderate preterists (such as K. Gentry, R. C. Sproul, G. DeMar) believe that much prophecy was fulfilled in 70 AD but leave room for a coming resurrection, judgment and 2nd coming in some sense. Sproul writes, “Preterists argue not only that the kingdom is a present reality, but also that in a real historical sense the parousia has already occurred... [and] represents a significant visitation of the Lord in judgment and a vitally important ‘Day of the Lord.’” R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1998), 24, 203.

⁵⁸ Various kinds of historicism can be identified including these three: 1) Revelation is a concise summary of phases of interadvent church history, 2) It is a detailed chronological history of the church age and 3) It is an account of the principles which govern church history. Ron Maness review of Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Church and the Last Things* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1998. MLJ embraces this third “spiritual historicist” view. www.bible.org/docs/br/bookreview-28.htm

⁵⁹ For instance, the idealist sees the book of Revelation “as describing the ongoing struggle between the spiritual powers of evil and good represented by the devil and the church.” www.geocities.com/mosouthron/historicism/amill.html

⁶⁰ See Thomas Ice & Tim LaHaye, *The End Times Controversy* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Pub., 2003), 7-66.

⁶¹ From an historicist Amillennial website: www.geocities.com/mosouthron/historicism/amill.html

evident that any overall Amillennial picture is far too complex to describe in such a brief paper as this.

Premillennial view: Futurism and Literalism go together. The Premillennial view rejects historicism, preterism and idealism in favor of futurism in understanding prophecies that have not yet been literally fulfilled. And most of these prophecies have to do with the tribulation period, Christ's 2nd coming, and the messianic, millennial kingdom with our Lord Jesus, Messiah, reigning on the throne of David from Jerusalem. To date, none of these many prophecies have been literally fulfilled.

AMILLENNIAL KINGDOM—NOW TEACHING

In attempting to interpret prophetic Scripture that has to do with the millennium and related messianic kingdom passages, conservative scholars generally hold to one of the three temporal-views regarding the kingdom of God. They are: 1) the *kingdom-future* view held by "revised" dispensationalists;⁶² 2) the *kingdom-already-but-not-yet* views embraced by "historic" premillennialists⁶³ and "progressive" dispensationalists;⁶⁴ and 3) the *kingdom-now* views embraced by most classical, reformed/covenant theologians.⁶⁵ The primary concern of this paper involves the third perspective, the *kingdom-now* view of Amillennial theology, in relation to the first perspective, which is the Premillennial, futurist view.

Amillennial views: "According to covenant thinkers, the nation Israel is the church of the Old Testament, and the church in both the Old and New Testament is the Kingdom of God"⁶⁶ that was prophesied so much in Scripture. On the basis of all the aforementioned, hermeneutical presuppositions, Amillennial theologians have come up with several different, *kingdom-now* views. These views have been helpfully grouped into three categories: "1) the historic Augustinian type of amillennialism, which says these prophecies are fulfilled in the present age prior to the second coming of Christ; 2) a more recent form of amillennialism, which says the prophecies are fulfilled in a non-literal way for the believer in heaven (in the intermediate state) prior to the creation of the new heavens and the new earth; 3) a combination of the other two forms, that interprets some kingdom passages as being fulfilled in the present age, some fulfilled in their intermediate state during the present period, and others yet to be fulfilled in the eternal state in the new heavens and the new earth."⁶⁷ This, of course, makes the Amillennial picture even more complicated.

Premillennial view: Consistent with the Premillennial view is the "kingdom-future" group. But clarification is needed regarding what is meant by God's "kingdom" in Scripture. Since His creation of all things, Scripture has revealed progressively that His kingdom is manifest in different forms. There is: 1) The *universal kingdom* of God's supreme rule over all creation (Ps. 103:19; 145:10-13; Dan. 4:3); 2) The *moral kingdom* of God's rule over all moral creatures, angels, and

⁶² Revised dispensationalists include; J. Walvoord, D. Pentecost, C. Ryrie, R. Showers, T. Ice, M. Couch etc. Some use the term "revised" to indicate some differences from Darby, Chafer, Scofield (and later M. Stanford).

⁶³ Historic premillennialists include: H. Ridderbos, E. Ladd, E. Horne, D. Fuller, Buswell. Mostly covenant.

⁶⁴ Progressive dispensationalists include: D. Carson, C. Blaising, D. Bock, R. Saucy. Many Postmillennial enthusiasts probably fit best under this third category.

⁶⁵ This includes most covenant theologians such as: C. Hodge, L. Berkhof, O. Allis, F. Hamilton, R. Lenski, and W. Hendriksen.

⁶⁶ Ronald M. Johnson, "Covenant Hermeneutics," *Conservative Theological Journal*, 3:10 (Dec. 1999), 327-28.

⁶⁷ John F. Walvoord, "Interpreting Prophecy Today, Part 2: The Kingdom of God in the Old Testament," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 139:554 (Apr 82), 126.

men, who follow Him past, present, and future (Jn. 3:3; Heb. 1:4-14); and 3) The future *messianic, Davidic, and millennial kingdom* over which Christ will rule with His saints here on planet earth after His second coming. This “form of the kingdom of God will end after one thousand years. But the kingdom of God in the sense of God’s rule will continue into the Eternal Order,”⁶⁸ to fulfill the *eternal* dynasty of the Davidic Covenant.⁶⁹ This is the kingdom of God that the Jews were looking for during the earthly life of Christ and which Christ offered to Israel.

Because of Jewish rejection, Jesus told the unbelieving Pharisees, “*The kingdom is not coming with signs to be observed [now]... the kingdom of God is in your midst*” (Lk. 17:20-21, NASB), possibly in the form of Him and His disciples. Then He spoke to His disciples of a future time “*in His day*” (17:24) when “*the Son of Man is revealed*” (17:30). But He said that “*first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation*” (Lk. 17:22-25). Christ took literally the glorious promises of the Abrahamic, Davidic and New covenants. And, in contrast to God’s bilateral, *conditional* Mosaic covenant with Israel, God’s other three covenants were all unilateral, *unconditional* covenants with Israel that should be taken literally. This is confirmed in the New Testament by Gabriel (Lk. 1:32-33), by Jesus (Mt. 20:20-23; Lk. 22:29-30), by Paul (Rom. 9-11, esp. 11:1); and by John (Rev. 3:21; 5:10; 20:1-6). The Church of this dispensation is not to be equated with either Israel or the messianic Kingdom when Israel will have a predominant role among the nations. Israel as a nation does have a glorious future within history during the millennium.

AMILLENNIAL TEACHING ON THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Amillennial overview of Revelation: Amillennialism’s idealism normally views Revelation as “a series of symbols and visions in which the universal principles of the Divine Rule are set forth in forms dear to the heart of a Hebrew Mystic and poet.”⁷⁰ These principles seem to refer mostly “to the conflict between the Church and the world which is but the outward manifestation of the war between the Christ and Satan (the dragon)”⁷¹ throughout church history. Many Amillennial theologians embrace what they call “*progressive parallelism*” which views Revelation as consisting of “seven sections...[that] run parallel to one another. Each of them spans the entire dispensation from the first to the second coming of Christ. This period is viewed now from one aspect, now from another.”⁷² And further, “though these seven sections are parallel to each other, they also reveal a certain amount of eschatological progress. The last section [Rev. 20-22], for example, takes us further into the future than the other sections... Hence this method of interpretation is called progressive parallelism.”⁷³

Premillennial view: Revelation is to be understood from the Premillennial, *futurist* perspective. For

⁶⁸ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah, A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*, (Tustin CA: Ariel Ministries Press, 1983), 366.

⁶⁹ This kingdom of God will include both believers and unbelievers as in the past and during the millennium, but only believers during the eternal state.

⁷⁰ S. Cox, *The Preachers Complete Homiletic Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House), 30:404-05. Cited in Mal Couch, “Introductory Thoughts on Allegorical Interpretation and the Book of Revelation, Part II,” *Conservative Theological Journal*, 1:2 (Aug 1997), 94.

⁷¹ William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 134. This is quite typical of idealism.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 18-19. Hendriksen states, “We favour the division given, with slight variations, by L. Berkhof, S. L. Morris, B. B. Warfield, and others,” 21. The seven divisions (by chapters) are these: **1)** 1-3, **2)** 4-7, **3)** 8-11, **4)** 12-14, **5)** 15-16, **6)** 17-19, and **7)** 20-22. But “there is no unanimity with respect to the exact boundaries.” 21. This sounds like a mix of historicism and idealism.

⁷³ Hoekema, “Amillennialism: Part 1.”

a general outline of Revelation, it seems more practical and illuminating to follow something like the simple threefold outline given in Revelation 1:19. In broad outline, it presents a general sequence of *things which John had seen* (the past vision, Ch. 1), the *things which are* (the present church age, 2-3) and the *things which will happen afterwards* (in the future, 4-22). This last section includes the heavenly scene (4-5), the tribulation events (6-18), the second coming of Christ (19), the millennial reign of Christ (20:1-6), the final judgments (20:7-15), the new heaven, earth, and Jerusalem (21-22:5) and conclusion (22:6-21). Even though symbols are a big part of this inspired apocalyptic writing, Revelation depicts numerous *literal* events which occur generally in chronological order with the insertion of a few parenthetical sections (Chs. 7; 10:1–11:14; 12).

The Premillennial view states that the textual evidence supports a chronological sequence in Rev. 19-20. Sometime after the wedding supper of the Lamb in Heaven (19:7-10) our Lord Jesus will return to righteously judge, to make war with His enemies and to rule with a rod of iron on earth (19:11-16). He first will take the false prophet and Antichrist and cast them into the lake of fire (19:17–21). Then Christ will have Satan bound and thrown into the abyss where he will be imprisoned for 1000 years (20:1–3) while Christ reigns on the earth (20:4–6). After this millennial period, Satan is released to deceive the nations for a short time. All that is a big contrast to Amillennial teaching on Revelation 20:1-6 resulting from its theory on *progressive parallelism*.

AMILLENNIAL TEACHING ON THE MILLENNIUM IN REVELATION 20

Amillennial view of the Millennium: This claim is made: “With Revelation 20 we return to the beginning of our present dispensation.”⁷⁴ Amillennial teachers acknowledge “that the Second Coming of Christ has been referred to in the previous chapter (19:11-16). If then, one thinks of Revelation 20 as describing what follows chronologically after what is described in chapter 19, one would indeed conclude that the millennium of Revelation 20:1-6 will come after the return of Christ... [H]owever, chapters 20-22 comprise the last of the seven sections of the book of Revelation and therefore do not describe what follows the return of Christ. Rather, Revelation 20:1 takes us back once again to the beginning of the New Testament era.”⁷⁵ It is thought that since “elsewhere in the New Testament the final judgment is associated with the Second Coming of Christ,”⁷⁶ “the ‘thousand years’ [Rev. 20:1-6] precede the second coming of our Lord in judgment [Rev. 20:11-15],”⁷⁷

It is also boldly claimed, “The book of Revelation is full of symbolic numbers. Obviously, the number ‘thousand’ which is used here must not be interpreted in a literal sense. Since the number ten signifies completeness, and since a thousand is ten to the third power, we may think of the expression ‘a thousand years’ as standing for a complete period, a very long period of indeterminate length... [We] conclude that this thousand-year period extends from Christ’s first coming to just before his Second Coming.” Other Amillennial teachers see the “millennium” as “a kingdom in time (20:4-6) and eternity (21:1-5) ...”⁷⁸

Premillennial view: In contrast, 1) Revelation 20:1-6 provides further light on the final fulfillment of the promised messianic kingdom; 2) Chapter 20 chronologically follows chapter 19 just as much as chapter 20 chronologically precedes chapter 21; 3) The number 1000, which occurs 6 times in

⁷⁴ Hendriksen, *More than Conquers*, 184.

⁷⁵ Hoekema, “Amillennialism: Part 1.” He also thinks of “Revelation 20:1-6 as describing what takes place during the entire history of the church, beginning with the first coming of Christ.”

⁷⁶ Hoekema, “Amillennialism: Part 1.” See also Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 185

⁷⁷ Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 185.

⁷⁸ Hoekema, “Amillennialism: Part 1.”

this context should be understood literally, not symbolically. The repetition emphasizes a significant point; and 4) “While it is true that the millennium (that is, one thousand years) is found only in Revelation 20, the belief in the Messianic Kingdom does not rest on this passage alone [as Amillennial and Premillennial teachers often indicate, explicitly or implicitly.] In fact, it hardly rests on it at all.”⁷⁹

Amillennial view of the binding of Satan (Rev. 20:1-3): It is said that “Christ’s first coming is followed by a long period [1000 years] during which Satan is bound; this in turn is followed by Satan’s little season [when he is loosed]; and that is followed by Christ’s second coming.”⁸⁰ The “binding of Satan... means that throughout the gospel age in which we now live the influence of Satan, though certainly not annihilated, is so curtailed that he cannot prevent the spread of the gospel to the nations of the world. Because of the binding of Satan during this present age, the nations cannot conquer the church, but the church is conquering the nations.”⁸¹ “Colossians 2:15 very definitely associates the despoiling of Satan and his armies with Christ’s triumph on the cross.”⁸² “This does not imply that Satan can do no harm whatever while he is bound. It means only what John says here: While Satan is bound, he cannot deceive the nations in such a way as to keep them from learning about the truth of God.”⁸³

Premillennial view: The *binding of Satan* (Rev. 20:2) is future, not present, for these and other reasons: 1) The context clearly indicates that this binding chronologically follows the 2nd coming of Christ and judgment of the beast and false prophet (19:11-21). 2) Although not bound, Satan’s activities have always been limited by God’s permissive, sovereign will (as in Job and elsewhere). 3) It is correct to say, “The elaborate measures taken to insure [sic] his custody are most easily understood as implying the complete cessation of his influence on earth (rather than a curbing of his activities).”⁸⁴ 4) World history of the past 2000 years certainly does not demonstrate much, if any, curbing of Satan’s activities. On the contrary it will only continue to increase to its culmination during the great tribulation and at the end of the millennium when he is once again released. 5) Satan, as “the god of this age,” is still at his work of blinding the minds of unbelievers, who make up the nations, to prevent their reception of the Gospel (2 Cor. 4:3-4). 6) In fact, “the whole world lies in *the power* of the evil one” (1 Jn. 5:19 NASB). 7) Satan, the deceiver, is obviously the instigator of the “evil men and impostors” who make up the world of nations and who “shall become worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived” (2 Tim. 3:13). 8) If Satan were currently bound, believers would not be wrestling against cosmic principalities, powers, rulers of the darkness of this world, and spiritual wickedness in high places (Eph. 6:12). 9) Because Satan goes about like a hungry, roaring lion “seeking whom he may devour,” he, Satan, must be steadfastly resisted (1 Pet. 5:8-9). 10) It was Satan himself who filled Ananias’ heart to lie to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3). 11) It is Satan himself who tempts (1 Cor 7:5), hinders and afflicts believers (2 Cor 12:7; 1 Thess. 2:18). 12) Scripture makes it clear that all unbelievers in the world are “children of the devil” (1 John 3:10). 13) The true binding of Satan is partly what makes possible the millennial conditions of the messianic kingdom on earth as promised by our Lord through the prophets.

Amillennial view on the Reign of Christ (Rev. 20:4-6): “The thousand-year reign of Revelation

⁷⁹ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Premillennialism in the Old Testament*, Ch.1

⁸⁰ Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 185

⁸¹ Hoekema, “Amillennialism: Part 1.” See also Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 189.

⁸² Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 187-88.

⁸³ Hoekema, “Amillennialism: Part 1.”

⁸⁴ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), 353.

20:4 is a reign with Christ in heaven of the souls of believers who have died. This reign is not something to be looked for in the future; it is going on now and will be until Christ returns. Hence the term realized millennialism is an apt description of the view here defended — if it be remembered that the millennium in question is not an earthly but a heavenly one.”⁸⁵ “The *souls* reign during this entire present dispensation until Christ’s second coming. Afterwards, it is no longer the *souls* that reign for then body and soul are together again... Then the *saints* reign, not for... a thousand years — but for ever and ever... The first resurrection [v. 6] is the translation of the soul [at death] ... It is followed at Christ’s second coming by the second resurrection when the body, too, will be glorified.”⁸⁶ It is claimed that in “the Apocalypse this period of three years and a half refers to the entire gospel age...”⁸⁷ The beast mentioned here (20:5) must be the first beast (13:1-10) thought by some Amillennial folk to be “Satan’s hand...[who] represents the persecuting power of Satan operating in and through the nations of this world and their governments... Both beasts oppose the Church throughout this dispensation,”⁸⁸ a period of time referred to in Revelation as 42 months (11:2; 13:5) or 1260 days (11:3; 12:6) or “a time, and times, and half a time,” (12:14) which is three years and a half, which is also represented by 1000 years (Rev. 20:1-7).⁸⁹

Premillennial view: The only *souls* mentioned (20:6) are specifically those who are beheaded for their faithfulness to the Word of God, especially in not worshipping either the beast or his image nor taking his mark on either the forehead or the hands (13:1-18). It is far more preferable to view the two beasts as representing satanic persons, the antichrist and false prophet, who perform miracles during the last half of the seven-year tribulation period (13:5). All the numbers representing three years and a half and 1000 years should be taken literally.

CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

It is acknowledged 1) that eschatology is a very difficult, complicated study; 2) that wide differences of opinion in this field of study are understandable; and 3) Although it may not be possible to have ready answers to all the questions that may be asked regarding all the Scripture related to this study, nevertheless the dispensational approach using a literal interpretation of all Scripture leads to the Premillennial view. The Premillennial view best answers most questions that arise from the study of eschatological Scripture. Even though the study of prophecy is difficult, since God inspired all Scripture of which about one-fourth has to do with prophecy, He must desire that believers not simply ignore it, but take it seriously and include it in a lifetime of Bible study. The study of eschatology motivates believers to take evangelism seriously and encourages believers with incredible hope.

Hermeneutics is at the heart of Amillennial-Premillennial differences. Amillennial interpretation of Scripture is rooted in *covenant theology* with its so-called *covenant of grace*, the *spiritualization of prophetic Scripture*, the *reinterpretation of the Old Testament by the New Testament* and *replacement theology* which reinterprets *Israel* in much of prophetic Scripture, as meaning *the church*. Amillennial covenant theology fails to make crucial, dispensational distinctions between the many varied administrations of God’s rule as progressively revealed. All this has altered the clear meaning of numerous passages that make good sense when taken literally and has led to considerable

⁸⁵ Hoekema, “Amillennialism: Part 1.”

⁸⁶ Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 192. (Emphasis ours)

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 128-29, 142-44.

exegetical confusion. There is sufficient Biblical ground for the expectation of a future, literal, millennial kingdom when Christ will literally reign on earth after His 2nd coming. A Premillennial view takes the position 1) that the *thousand* years of Revelation 20 is to be taken literally, not figuratively; 2) that the millennial kingdom is future, not present; 3) that Christ's literal 2nd Coming and the millennial reign of Christ on earth will fulfill all the unfulfilled messianic kingdom prophecies. 4) that the church and Israel are distinct entities, each with its own unique present and future; 5) that Christ's future coming will be premillennial, and 6) that the Rapture and 2nd Coming are two distinct events separated by a period of time, including seven years of tribulation.

SUPPLEMENTARY READING

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Articles:

- Bob Nyberg, "[Covenant Theology Versus Dispensationalism, A Matter of Law Versus Grace.](#)"

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- Ronald Johnson, “Covenant Hermeneutics,” *Conservative Theological Journal*, 3:10 (Dec. 1999) 316-28.
- Thomas Ice, “[Israel / Church Distinction: The 4th Foundation](#).”

⁹⁰ How Augustine’s switch from Premillennial to Amillennial affected his own views (Part 1) and Calvin’s view (Part 2) on salvation.