

**THE MILLENNIAL  
KINGDOM  
A GLORIOUS  
FUTURE**

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**A PREMILLENNIALIST LOOKS AT THE MILLENNIAL KINGDOM OF CHRIST  
AND EXAMINES POSTMILLENNIAL AND AMILLENNIAL OBJECTIONS**

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## A Glorious Future

*The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ (Rev. 11:15).*

Eighty years ago no one could have foreseen that this would be a century of war and violence. Many declared that the establishment of the Hague Tribunal and the general desire of the nations for peace would produce a century of freedom from the turmoil that had characterized the previous century. Yet this has proved to be the bloodiest century in all history. Probably more men have been killed by violence in this century than in all the previous history of the world. Two world wars have been fought on a scale never before equaled. Acts of terrorism or senseless murder have frequently occurred. Advance in technology and increase in violence have accompanied one another.

Early in this century many expected "the evangelization of the world in this generation." Yet today there are large areas of the world where it is illegal for a parent even to speak about God to his child. In recent years many Christians have suffered imprisonment and torture for their faith. Naturally all of us wonder what is ahead.

Human guesses about the future have rarely worked out. There is only one way to know about any aspect of the future, and that is to see what the inerrant Word of God reveals concerning it.

We must be particularly careful not to read our own ideas into the Bible. It is all too easy to adopt an idea after brief consideration of a few verses and then twist everything else into agreement with it. This error should be scrupulously avoided. We should stand on whatever the Bible clearly reveals, and make sure that we do not disregard any part of God's revelation.

If God were to give us a detailed account of everything that He has done or plans to do, it would require millions of books. John said that he supposed if everything Christ did during His earthly life were to be described, the world could not contain all the books that would be required (John 21:25). How much more is this true of the many details of God's plans for the future? Where we do not understand His will we should reserve judgment and humbly wait for further light.

### Three Important Passages

Christians believe that the entire Bible is God's revelation to His people, and that we should emphasize whatever it emphasizes. When we find the same vision given to two different prophets, and described by them in almost identical language, we know that God desires us to pay special heed to the truth that it contains. In this respect the similarity of Micah 4:1-4 and Isaiah 2:1-4 is almost unique in the Old Testament:

And it will come about in the last days that the mountain of the house of the LORD will be established as the chief of the mountains. It will be raised above the hills, and the peoples will stream to it. And many nations will come and say, "Come and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD and to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us about

His ways and that we may walk in His paths." For from Zion will go forth the law, even the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And He will judge between many people and render decisions for mighty, distant nations. Then they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation will not lift up sword against nation, and never again will they train for war. And each of them will sit under his vine and under his fig tree, with no one to make *them* afraid, for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken. Micah 4:1-4 NASB

Further evidence of the importance of this vision is seen in the fact that Micah thought it necessary to add the words "for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it"; and that Isaiah, though he had already given a title to his book at the beginning of chapter 1, found it desirable to repeat part of that title as an introduction to this passage (Isa. 2:1), thus stressing the fact that he himself had received this vision from God.

The prediction contained in this vision, that God thought so important that He gave it to two different prophets, is further developed and emphasized in Isaiah 11:1-9:

Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit. And the Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and strength, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And He will delight in the fear of the LORD, and He will not judge by what His eyes see, nor make a decision by what His ears hear; but with righteousness He will judge the poor, and decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth; and He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked. Also righteousness will be the belt about His loins, and faithfulness the belt about His waist. And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little boy will lead them. Also the cow and the bear will graze; their young will lie down together; and the lion will eat straw like the ox. And the nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den. They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. Isaiah 11:1-9 NASB

These three passages describe a glorious future situation. Before examining them in detail we should note that the phrase "kingdom of God" can be used in three different senses. First, there is the general idea of a kingdom that includes everything God has made. The very breath that a man draws when he curses God is drawn only because God permits it. In this sense the kingdom of God includes everything in the universe.

In the second sense, which is much more common in Scripture, the term refers to the kingship of God over those human beings who recognize His sovereignty. Our Lord told the Pharisees that the kingdom of God was among them. Right in their very midst were Jesus Christ and His disciples, who were subject to Him,

acknowledging His sovereignty. In this sense we have the kingdom of God in the world today. Wherever there are individuals who desire to obey God's will we have, in a very real sense, the kingdom of God.

The third sense is but an extension of the second. The coming of the kingdom of God on earth means the beginning of that time when every individual on earth shall acknowledge his subjection to the law of God. Only then can we say that the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord. The kingdom in this third sense is the subject of our present discussion. It is generally called "the millennial kingdom of Christ."

The term millennium is derived from the Latin for "thousand years"—a phrase that occurs six times in Revelation 20:2-7. It is often said that belief in the coming of such a kingdom rests only on the interpretation of that one passage. Nothing could be further from the truth. Many other Bible passages declare that this earth is to enjoy a long period of universal peace and justice.

### **The Certainty of the Kingdom**

The promised kingdom is not a mere hope but a definite certainty. The second Psalm emphasizes this fact. The kings of the earth are pictured as declaring their determination to break asunder the bands of the Lord, and to refuse to obey Him. In answer He declares the decree: "The Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." The Psalm proclaims that our Lord will some day reign in undisputed sovereignty over the nations of the earth.

In the 110th Psalm we find words which the New Testament writers apply definitely to Christ: "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool," The declaration is here given that God will make all the nations of the earth subject to our Lord Jesus Christ.

The pictures in Isaiah 11 and in Micah 4 are not given as mere hopes that something may occur, but as definite promises of Almighty God. Micah emphasizes this fact. To show the absolute certainty that this prediction will be fulfilled, he adds at the end of verse four: "for the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken it." Here is no mere hope of the writer, but a declaration of that which God has promised. We shall now look at some of the characteristics of this predicted kingdom.

### **An Earthly Kingdom**

The Bible makes it clear that the kingdom promised in Micah 3:12-4:4, Isaiah 2:1-4, and Isaiah 11:1-9 is not a picture of heaven, but of something that will occur on this earth.

Micah 3:12 speaks of the desolation that will come upon Jerusalem. "Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as high places of the forest." The wonderful prediction of future glory that begins in the next two verses uses

identical terms in speaking of what is coming. The very places that would then be plowed as a field would eventually be exalted.

Micah 4:3 and Isaiah 2:4 include the words "they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks." Neither swords nor pruninghooks are natural in a picture of heaven. The prophecy is definitely one of a future situation on this earth.

Isaiah 11:9 says that "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." If space permitted, evidence might be heaped up from passage after passage in the Old Testament to show that the kingdom that is promised to the people of God is to be established on this earth.

### **A Time of External Peace and Safety**

The Old Testament makes it clear that the promised kingdom is to be a time of external peace and safety. Micah 4, Isaiah 11, and many other passages plainly indicate that it is not merely something in the subjective sphere. We read in Micah 4:4 that "they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid." The promise is not that a man shall be enabled to go through great calamity with a peaceful heart. That promise God indeed gives to His people for times of tribulation, but this promise is entirely different. It describes a time when a man need not sit in a house with strong walls and with a lock on the door, in order to be safe. Instead he may sit outside under his vine and under his fig tree with nothing to protect him, for there shall be none to make him afraid. It is to be a time when war and brigandage need no longer be feared.

This thought is brought out very clearly in Isaiah 11:6-9. Animals that are now apt to kill one another will in that day live together in perfect peace. Even if we were to think of the animals as figures for people, the fact would remain that the description is one of an external condition—a time when cruelty and hatred shall have been removed from the world, so that one can live in complete safety.

The 8th verse of Isaiah 11 is very interesting in this connection: "The sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den." This is not a promise that the child shall not fear the asp, but that the asp shall not harm the child. When I was in New Mexico a man told me of an incident that occurred in his little house in the wilderness. He heard a strange sound coming from the front room. Something seemed to hit something else, and then his little child laughed with glee. Again he heard the sound of hitting, and then of the child laughing delightedly. After this had been repeated a few times, he glanced into the room to see what gave the child so much pleasure. He found that the child would hit his hand against the screen door. The door would fly partly open. A large rattlesnake outside the door would jump at the door. The door would shut with a bang. The child would again hit the screen with his hand and it would fly open a few inches, to the irritation of the snake. The child had no fear whatever of the beautiful snake which was leaping at him. Only the thin screen protected the child from the venom of the serpent. The father's blood nearly froze with fear that the screen might break and let the snake harm the child. There was no fear in the heart of the child, but there was tremendous danger in the external situation. It is not a situation like this that Isaiah describes.

He predicts a time when a parent need not fear if his innocent child is playing with a serpent. There shall be nothing in this earth to hurt or destroy, "for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

### **Not Fulfilled in Character of Gospel**

Certainly the promises given in these and many similar passages do not refer to this present age. I was amazed to see in a commentary the statement that these prophecies are fulfilled in the character of the Gospel. Truly the Gospel is peaceful in its character. But the character of the Gospel is not the fulfillment of these glorious prophecies of a time of external peace and safety.

In the fourth and fifth centuries of the Christian era, when the Roman peace was triumphant almost everywhere and war was temporarily almost unknown, there were writers who in their enthusiasm tried to show that these prophecies were already then fulfilled through the peace that was established in the earth. But the invasions of the barbarians from the north and the outworking of the decadence that was so widespread in the luxurious life of the later Roman Empire soon put an end to all such hopes. The Middle Ages came with almost universal war and danger, upheaval and turmoil. This prophecy certainly was not then fulfilled. Then the time came in our modern days when arbitration commissions were set up and nations made treaties to settle disagreements by peaceful measures. In 1914 the statement was made by many that a great war could never come again. Arbitration was so firmly established that the nations would never again have a great war. Even as people were talking thus, World War I broke out—the most universal and destructive war that the world had seen up to that time. No, this prediction has not yet been fulfilled. But God has spoken. We can know that it will come to pass, and that God will establish that time of external peace and safety when the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

### **A Universal Kingdom**

We shall glance at some of the evidences for a third feature of this kingdom. It is to be a universal kingdom. The verse that I have just cited brings this out very clearly. "As the waters cover the sea"—there is not a square inch at the bottom of the ocean that does not have water above it. The entire sea is covered with water; and the entire earth, without exception, "shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord." Could the universality of the promised kingdom be made clearer? Psalms 2 and 110 stress this aspect. God will give Christ the nations for His inheritance. Even the uttermost parts of the earth are to be His possession. His enemies are all to be made His footstool. There is to be nothing left that will lift up its head against His control. This thought of the completeness of His victory over this earth is found in the New Testament as well. All the nations of this world are to become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. In 1 Corinthians 15:25 this note of universality is especially stressed: "For He must reign, till He hath put all enemies under His feet." Everything shall be subject to Him. All rule and all authority and all power shall be subject to our Lord.

## **An Indestructible Kingdom**

The fact that this kingdom can never be destroyed could be made clear by the passages already quoted. All enemies are to be put under the Lord's feet.

The prophecies in Daniel bring out this feature very clearly. In Daniel 2 and 7 successive human governments are symbolized in two ways—under the picture of a great statue and under the picture of several great beasts. In chapter 2 the statue is completely destroyed and its place taken by a new regime that covers the whole earth. This new regime will never be destroyed nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever (Dan. 2:44).

In Daniel 7:14 the assertion is made that the new dominion that follows all wicked human governments is to be "an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed."

The application of the term "millennium" to this kingdom is derived from Revelation 20:2-7, where the term thousand years is used six times. John foresaw a great uprising at the end of the thousand years that would attempt to destroy this kingdom but would utterly fail. The kingdom is indestructible. This parallels the statement in 1 Corinthians 15:24 that after He has reigned He will deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father. We do not know just what sort of change in conditions will occur at that time, but the kingdom will certainly not end. It is indestructible.

## **Removal of the Curse**

God did not create this world as a place where pain and suffering would be a normal fact of life. We are told in Genesis 3 that as a result of man's sin God placed a curse upon nature. The earth would bring forth thorns and thistles. There was to be enmity between a part of the animal creation and humanity.

In every part of nature signs of this curse are visible. Animals live upon other animals. Cruelty and suffering are widespread in the animal creation. The infirmity of the human body, with its weakness and its suffering, is part of this curse.

Paul tells us in Romans 8:18-23 that the day is coming when this curse will be lifted. He says, "For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now" (v. 22). In verse 21 he declares that "the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." As we have already seen, the essential idea of the picture in Isaiah 11:6-9 is not peace in the heart but freedom from external danger. If taken literally the passage says that the animals will no longer be a threat to one another or to human beings. Paul's statements suggest very strongly that such a change will be accomplished and the earth restored to Edenic conditions.

## **The Time of the Kingdom's Establishment**

Having noticed the strong evidence in the Old Testament that this earth is to experience a long period of complete peace and justice, we now ask two questions: 1) how is this to be brought about? 2) when is it to come? Although

various Old Testament passages suggest the answer to these questions, there is comparatively little in the Old Testament that deals directly with them.

The Bible nowhere promises that the period of universal peace and justice is to be produced by the preaching of the Gospel. Jesus did not say to His disciples: "You are to conquer the world for Christ; you are to establish the kingdom by your preaching." He said, "You are to be witnesses unto Me." He told them that there would be wars and rumors of wars before the present age would end (Matt. 24:6).

Many passages in the Old Testament predicted the coming of the great Son of David who would rule the nations with justice and maintain universal peace. Other passages predicted the coming of One who would be humiliated and would give His life a ransom for many. Before the power of sin could be broken, redemption was necessary. The New Testament principally deals with this latter aspect. It tells of the coming of the matchless Son of God, of His victory over the powers of evil, and of His death to expiate the sin of all who would believe in Him. Yet the New Testament also looks beyond the great work of redemption to the triumphant return of the king. In his very first epistle Paul said that the Thessalonian believers had turned to God from idols "to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven" (1 Thess. 1:9-10). Paul continued throughout his life to look forward to his Lord's return to earth, referring to it in one of the last epistles he wrote (cf. 2 Tim. 4:1,8). Other New Testament writers also looked forward to it. The expectation of Christ's return to this earth is frequently mentioned in New Testament books and was specifically taught on various occasions by Christ himself.

At least a dozen verses in the New Testament declare that no human being can predict the time when Jesus Christ Will return. This declaration is often connected with an exhortation to watch and be ready for His coming. Whether the Master of the house comes in the evening, or at midnight, or in the morning, it is important that He find us serving Him faithfully (Mark 13:35-37). Although Jesus told the disciples that they were not to be misled by false rumors that He had already returned, and that there would first be wars and rumors of wars (Matt. 24:6), He declared that they should live in constant anticipation of this event (Luke 12:35-40). To take these many exhortations to be ready for His coming as referring to something that cannot occur until long after a predicted period of universal peace and justice would seem to put the event so far off into the future as to make the exhortations quite meaningless. Thus it would be most logical to think that the return of Christ would come before the period of universal peace rather than afterwards.

### **Were the Disciples Completely Mistaken?**

The disciples were familiar with the Old Testament. When Jesus had taught them "the things concerning the kingdom of God" for forty days after His resurrection (Acts 1:3), they asked a very natural question: "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6) The natural interpretation of these words would be that they wanted to know whether the resurrected Lord was now going to introduce the long period of justice and peace that had been promised. Jesus



answered: "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me...unto the uttermost part of the earth" {Acts 1:7-8).

Jesus did not say that the disciples were mistaken in their expectation. He did not say that the promised kingdom would consist simply of peace in the hearts of believers in the midst of a wicked world. He did not say that their witnessing would be the means of establishing the promised time of universal peace and justice. He merely said that it was not for them to know the times or the seasons. Very soon after he made these statements he ascended into heaven and the disciples were assured that "this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

There is much evidence that during the first few centuries after Christ's ascension, Christians looked with longing and expectation for the return of Christ and the universal establishment of His kingdom. It was only after the persecutions ceased and the Roman Empire became nominally Christian, that some began to say that the kingdom of peace and justice had already arrived.

### **What About Revelation 20?**

It is the writer's belief that the fact that a long period of universal peace and justice is to be introduced by Christ at the time of His return could be proved without the necessity of drawing any evidence from Revelation 20 (the chapter where the term "thousand years" is introduced), but that this chapter gives additional information and clearly shows the relation to each other of two great elements of Christian hope—the return of the King and the establishment of the universal kingdom. Since so much argument has centered around this chapter, it is important that we examine it carefully.

There is no need here to investigate all the details of the Book of Revelation, though we should note that it is the only book of the Bible that includes a special blessing for those who read it (Rev. 1:3) and the only one that includes a very solemn warning against adding anything to it or removing any part of it (Rev. 22:18-19).

It is sometimes asserted that Revelation is entirely a book of symbols, and that therefore nothing in it should be taken as literal. Such an approach would allow every interpreter to find anything he desires in the book and to exclude from it any idea that does not suit him. We must beware of coming under the condemnation of Revelation 22:18-19. It should readily be admitted that the book contains symbols and that some of these are difficult to understand at this point in history, but that is no reason to ignore statements that are not symbolical or to explain away symbols whose meaning is clear from the context or from other parts of Scripture.

### **The Coming of Christ**

The latter part of Revelation 19 contains a symbol that should be quite clear. It describes the coming of a man on a white horse, with an inscription on his robe

bearing the words "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS." He leads his forces into a great battle in which the opposing force is utterly destroyed and all the fowls are filled with their flesh. No Christian could reasonably doubt that this is a symbolic picture of Christ's coming to earth. It must be interpreted in one of two ways. Either it points to Christ's first advent and indicates that the preaching of the Gospel will be completely victorious in bringing to an end all the forces of evil, or it is a symbolic picture of His future return to earth and depicts a literal destruction of evil forces. It seems that the first of these interpretations is decisively ruled out by a figure that is used twice in the passage, that of the destruction being wrought through the agency of a sword that comes out of His mouth (vv. 15 and 21). In 2 Thessalonians 2:8 Paul gives us the inspired interpretation: "And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming." Even though Paul's words do not fully explain the meaning of the figure, they have two important consequences: 1) they show that when Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, he regarded the figure as pointing to something that was still future; 2) they obviously give the inspired interpretation of Isaiah 11:4 and show that Paul considered the glorious period of universal freedom from external danger described in Isaiah 11:6-9 to be a portrayal of the situation that would follow Christ's second advent. Thus John's use of this same figure in Revelation 19 would seem to provide conclusive proof that the event described there is not the first advent of Christ but His return.

### **Is There a Chronological Sequence?**

The next question to be resolved is whether Revelation 20 describes events that follow the return of Christ depicted in the last half of Revelation 19, or whether it should be assumed that a new section of the book begins with Revelation 20. This is a valid question and its answer should not be assumed without definite proof.

Such proof is not hard to find. Revelation 19:20 says that "the beast" and "the false prophet" were cast into a lake of fire burning with brimstone. Revelation 20:10 says that after the thousand years "the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are." Thus it is made clear that the events of Revelation 20 follow those of Revelation 19.

The picture of the millennial kingdom in Revelation 20 fits that derived from the Old Testament passages. Many attempts have been made to explain away its obvious meaning. These various attempts have little in common with one another. Two of them have already been examined—the idea that Revelation 19 pictures the first advent rather than the second; and the suggestion that Revelation 20 begins a new section, rather than following in chronological order. In addition to reemphasizing what other parts of the Bible have revealed about the millennial kingdom, Revelation 20 adds two important facts; the binding of Satan for a thousand years and the resurrection of the righteous dead at the beginning of this period. Each of these has been the object of attacks upon the whole idea of a millennial kingdom.

## **The Binding of Satan**

Revelation 20:2-3 says that Satan was bound for a thousand years "that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season. "When he is loosed he deceives a great number of people and raises an insurrection, but fire from heaven devours those involved in the insurrection and Satan is cast into the lake of fire. The last attempt to destroy the kingdom of Christ fails. Though there may be a change in the administration of the millennial kingdom at this time, the kingdom itself will last forever. (Interpreters differ as to whether Revelation 21 describes a renewed and cleansed earth, or one that is entirely new.)

We shall mention three of the various attempts to interpret this binding of Satan as not referring to an event that will follow the return of Christ. One such view is that of the great 19th century Lutheran scholar, E. W. Hengstenberg, who considered the binding of Satan to represent the conversion of the Germans to Christianity at about A. D. 800, and suggested that events in his own day might be evidence that Satan had then been "loosed for a little season." A second view sometimes advanced is that the thousand years represents the condition of Christians between death and resurrection, and the binding of Satan his inability to deceive them during that time. A third view is that the binding of Satan represents Christ's victory at Calvary, that the thousand years represents the greater part of the time between Calvary and the return of Christ, and that the "little season" will be a short time just before Christ's return during which Satan will again be loosed.

The first two of these three views hardly need refutation. The third should be examined. First, it should be noted that he is to be bound so that he can no longer deceive the nations. The history of wicked and ungodly nations during these two thousand years has been too full of wickedness to allow the idea that Satan was bound. More important, we find that the New Testament frequently warns Christians to beware of Satan's clever schemes and also of his fiery darts (e.g. 1 Pet. 5:8; Eph. 6:11,16). If Satan were already bound, such exhortations would be quite unnecessary.

Actually, there is no reasonable way to interpret the prediction of Satan's binding except in connection with the millennial kingdom of Christ.

## **The First Resurrection**

The other new fact revealed in Revelation 20 is the resurrection of the righteous dead at the beginning of the thousand years. Revelation 20:4-5 says that at the beginning of the thousand years the righteous dead were brought to life, "but the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection."

A number of writers insist that what is here called "the first resurrection" refers to the new birth of Christians. Dean Henry Alford, who is widely considered one of the outstanding commentators on the Greek New Testament, strongly rejects this idea, saying:

I cannot consent to distort words from their plain sense and chronological place in the prophecy, on account of any considerations of difficulty, or any risk of abuses which the doctrine of the millennium may bring with it. Those who lived next to the Apostles, and the whole Church for 300 years, understood them in the plain literal sense: and it is a strange sight in these days to see expositors who are among the first in reverence of antiquity complacently casting aside the most cogent instance of consensus which primitive antiquity presents. As regards the text itself, no legitimate treatment of it will extort what is known as the spiritual interpretation now in fashion. If, in a passage [Rev. 20:4-5] where two resurrections are mentioned, where certain [ones lived] *psuchai ezesan* at the first, and the rest of the [dead lived] *nekroi ezesan* only at the end of a specified period after that first—if in such a passage the first resurrection may be understood to mean spiritual rising with Christ, while the second means literal rising from the grave—then there is an end of all significance in language, and Scripture is wiped out as a definite testimony to any thing. If the first resurrection is spiritual, then so is the second, which I suppose none will be hardy enough to maintain; but if the second is literal, then so is the first, which in common with the whole primitive Church and many of the best modern expositors, I do maintain, and receive as an article of faith and hope.

Opposition to the idea of the saved and the lost being raised at different times results from a widespread idea that God will call every individual before Him for judgment at one specific time. Yet this popular idea contradicts the teaching of John 3:18, "He that believeth on him is not condemned; he that believeth not is condemned already." The only way one could prove that all must be judged at the same time or must be raised to life at the same time, would be to assume, on the basis of questionable interpretation of a very few verses, that "judgment day" "the last day," or "the end of time" are technical terms for a particular time. Actually such terms are used in various ways.

It is a rather common error among Bible students to take common terms as always being technical expressions for a precise idea. The Bible was written by many different people at different times, and the precise usage of a word often has to be determined from its use by the particular author. Thus if one should take the word *faith* as having the same identical meaning both in what Paul said and in what James said, he would think they contradicted one another. When we examine the context and see how each is using the word, we find that there is really no contradiction. It is neither reasonable nor scholarly to assume without clear evidence that all judgment must occur at the same time or that all resurrections must be at the same time. One may properly attempt to prove such ideas from Scripture, but it is quite wrong to assume them without proof. The Old Testament often speaks of the coming of the Lord, but does not indicate that there is to be more than one coming. It was only after Christ came that it became clear that some Old Testament predictions refer to His first coming and some to His second coming. Between these two there is a period of at least 1900 years that is not indicated in the Old Testament.

This Writer considers the two new facts added in Revelation 20 as important additions to our knowledge of the future. Yet I do not consider that an interpretation of Revelation 20 which would explain them away would disprove premillennialism, for I find its principal features to be dearly taught elsewhere in the Bible.

### **Postmillennialism and Amillennialism**

I have often been puzzled by hearing men say that they knew they were against premillennialism but did not know whether they held the postmillennial view or the amillennial view. Actually these two are at opposite extremes. The postmillennial view holds that there will be a millennium on this earth. The amillennialist denies it. The amillennialist holds that the coming of Christ will be at an unexpected time and might be rather soon. The postmillennialist holds that there must be a long period of universal acceptance of the Gospel before the Lord returns.

Thus postmillennialism and amillennialism are at opposite extremes, with premillennialism halfway between. It accepts the biblical teaching of a period of universal peace and justice on this earth; and also the New Testament teaching that the Lord will come at a time that no one knows, and that we should always be looking forward to His coming with anticipation and should be prepared for it whenever it might come.

Essentially the term amillennialism represents not a view but a denial. It means "no millennium." Those who apply this term to themselves hold a great variety of views. There are even a few who call themselves amillennialists who, though rejecting the literal interpretation of Revelation 20, recognize the essential features of the eschatological teaching of other parts of Scripture, and say that their view differs from premillennialism in that they believe the earthly kingdom will not end after a thousand years. Actually premillennialism does not hold that the kingdom ends after a thousand years—simply that it proves indestructible when the final assault fails, and that there is some kind of change of administration at that time.

Some postmillennialists object to premillennialism on the ground that we should not think the Holy Spirit so weak as to be unable to convert the world. This objection denies the sovereignty of God. He can do what He chooses, but we have no right to assume that it is His will that the entire world be converted by the preaching of the Gospel unless we find this definitely taught in Scripture.

I have often heard premillennialism attacked with the accusation that it would require that people in resurrection bodies and others in natural bodies be on earth at the same time. Regardless of whether premillennialism requires such a coexistence or not, the argument is not valid. Christ, in His resurrection body, spent forty days with His disciples in their natural bodies. No one can put limits on what God may choose to do. The only valid arguments are those based on clear scriptural teaching.

## "Spiritualization"

Most of those who deny premillennialism find it necessary to resort to so-called "spiritualization." This is simply a term for carrying the use of figures to an extreme, making all Old Testament references to a future kingdom become references to the church, and making all Old Testament references to external peace and safety become references to peace in the heart. It is true, of course, that the Bible, like all literature, contains figures of speech; but when the use of figures of speech is carried to an extreme, it causes language to lose all meaning.

Some apply this method only in a few chapters. Others apply it widely. It is not a matter of merely taking figurative language as figurative. Most writings contain figurative expressions. It is a matter of taking the entire framework of a passage figuratively, and passing beyond the bounds of any sane use of figures. A pinch of salt in a dish of soup is good. If one pours a quart of salt into a bucket of soup, the result is disagreeable and dangerous to health. If a man rejects premillennialism, let me plead with him to restrict his spiritualization to a few passages. One who applies it widely may easily approach the attitude of those who consider the bodily resurrection of Christ as merely "an expression of the permanence of personality."

## In Conclusion

Many Christians have found the teaching of Scripture about the premillennial return of Christ to establish His Kingdom of universal righteousness on earth to be a constant inspiration to Christian service and godly Christian living. There seems to be something in this doctrine that results in increased purity of life and increased zeal for service. Most of the great evangelists of recent years have been strongly moved by this great hope. It has occupied a prominent place in the thoughts of most of the great missionary leaders of recent years. I believe that if one takes the whole Bible as God's Word, rather than only certain parts, it teaches the premillennial view of future events. God wishes us to regard His entire Word as precious, and not explain away any part of it.

Yet we must remember that what is most important is not how God will work things out in the future, but what He desires for our lives today. It is possible to have eternal life right now. " He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36). May every reader of this booklet give thought to the most important questions of all: Have you repented of your sin and disobedience to God? Have you received Jesus Christ into your life and asked Him to enable you, by His strength, to live a life of peace and joy? .I would like every reader to accept the plain teachings of God's Word about His plans for the earth; but even more, I hope and pray that each reader may make sure that he can say with certainty, "Jesus Christ is my Savior; He died for me."

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