

DID THE EARLY POST-APOSTOLIC CHURCH HOLD A
PREMILLENNIAL VIEW OF CHRIST'S RETURN PRIOR TO
ESTABLISHING HIS KINGDOM?

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(Pseudonym)

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ABSTRACT

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Did the early post-apostolic church hold a premillennial view of Christ's return prior to establishing His kingdom?

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Bible prophecy is a subject that most church goers seldom hear on Sunday mornings. In fact, unless it is presented by a special speaker or as a special study in a small group, you are on your own in gleaning information whether events occurring with Israel, in the Middle-East, or the world at large have any theological significance. Most Christians are aware of our Lord's soon second return, but are under the impression that the kingdom He is to establish, as prophesied throughout the Bible, is already existing in the form of the church. Hence, His return will not be *premillennial* to establish His kingdom; but *non-millennial* in accepting, at some future time, what is already here. However, through diligent Bible study, a different perspective arises which has the Old Testament prophets, Christ Himself, and the apostles speaking of our Lord's return *before* establishing the promised covenant kingdom. Did the early post-apostolic church fathers hold to this premillennial view also? If so, did something happen later on to change this early premillennial perspective? Through the presentation of written works, to include the writings of early church fathers, research and analysis will show that the post-apostolic church was premillennial in their view of Christ's return prior to establishing His kingdom.

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

Away from the continuous flow and energy of a stream's swift current, a wise fisherman will find a calm backwater pool along the stream in which to fish. Fish will often congregate in these ebb waters, away from the rigors of the current, seeking respite to search for food. Great is the reward for the fisherman who has the patience and diligence to seek these backwater areas out. The rigorous current, or mainstream as it is often termed, is always moving forward with little regard for its surroundings or where its waterborne inhabitants may seek refuge, or where other materials carried by the current may be deposited. Backwater, as a place of deposition, may hold things hidden from view which over time become lost, buried, and seldom if ever make it back into the mainstream. As such, they are seldom considered part of the mainstream. In fact, many things may have been *surreptitiously* placed into a "backwater pool" to keep them purposely out of the mainstream reminiscent of the old adage *out of sight out of mind*.

From the perspective of biblical doctrine, one such item that fits this back water analogy well is Bible prophecy. It appears as we approach the end of the age world problems and events, which have been forecasted centuries before in Scripture, are unfolding before our very eyes. Yet the world view and its solutions are always secular in nature. Prophetic roadmaps which would greatly aid in identifying problems and providing helpful solutions are completely ignored and substituted by human oriented efforts. The ongoing Palestinian problem with its "two-state solution" is a prime example. The greater church is not much better. As the keeper of the Word and the leader of the flock, the greater

church either echoes the secular talking points or remains quiet going about its business as if nothing is happening. In essence, only a few pulpits present the *full counsel* of God complete with eschatology, or things that pertain to future events. In most pulpits, God's redemptive plan for man and other related doctrines are mainstream issues and prophecy is relegated to backwater status. In 60 plus years of church-going, this writer can count on both hands with fingers to spare the number of actual sermons in which prophecy was used as an evangelistic tool to show the unbeliever that the Bible is more than myths and fairytales; and that perhaps the unbeliever should reconsider his position with God and Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself said in John 14:29, "*I have told you before it happens, so that when it happens you may believe.*"

Though information highlighting Bible prophecy and commentary can be obtained online, through books, multimedia presentations, and prophecy conferences; it appears, however, that this information stream is produced by only a small segment of the greater church. Whereas, the greater church is relatively silent regarding prophecy and its fulfillment. Author and pastor, Dr. David Santos, reasons that, "The study of prophecy provides a foundation for understanding God and seeing his patterns." Santos further explains, "The study of prophecy provides a basis for apologetics in that one can demonstrate that the Bible is unique among all literature....It alone provides passages that can be demonstrated to have been penned long before fulfillment."¹

Prophecy is one means by which God reveals His plan and purpose for man. It is reasonable to assume that God intended prophecy to be understood as much as any other

¹ David Santos, *Predicting History in the Old Testament* (Bonanza, OR: Biblical Connections, 2016), v.

portion of His word. When a church ignores prophecy, it ignores over 30% of the Bible and is therefore not presenting the full counsel of God.² If Scripture does not mean what it says or can be readily ignored, then it is of little value. If an automotive mechanic, in referring to a shop manual to change a vehicle water pump, interprets its instruction with prose and poetry depicting the joys of driving a vehicle with a well cooled engine or just ignores the step-by-step instructions, then the shop manual has little value. Dr. Paul Lee Tan, in commenting on Matthew 24:15 “(whosoever reads, let him understand),” notes that if God did not want man to *read* and *understand* prophecy, He would not have given it to him to use [emphasis added].³

A question that now emerges is if the Bible is the inerrant Word of God, why is 30% of it not being taught, discussed, or even mentioned by the church at large? To answer this we must review some basic theology. Aside from a few “Christian” cults, two basic theological systems permeate Christendom – Covenant Theology and Dispensational Theology.

Covenant Theology (the more prevalent of the two) elicits one people of God in both testaments and one covenant that exists throughout Scripture – the Covenant of Grace. A necessary element within Covenant Theology states that distinctions after the fall of man are different administrations of the same Covenant of Grace. This system, however, exhibits some fundamental flaws. First, Covenant Theology sees only the redemption of man as the doxological purpose of God for the elect while ignoring other programs for the non-elect (Romans 9:10-23, Job 12:23, Isaiah 14:24-27). Second, this system essentially

² Charles Feinberg, *Millennialism* (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 2012), 30.

³ Paul Lee Tan, *The Interpretation of Prophecy* (Dallas: Paul Lee Tan Prophetic Ministries, 2015), 59-60.

nullifies the distinction between the Abrahamic Covenant and the Mosaic Covenant. If these two covenants are the same, why did Paul refute such in Galatians 3:18? In addition, this system purports that the church existed in the Old Testament and that Israel and the church are the same. If so, why did Jesus speak of the building of His Church in the future beyond the time that He spoke in Matthew 16:18? Third, it is important to note that the words which are translated *new* in the Hebrews 12:24 refer to what was not there *before*, not an ongoing covenant continuation as the Covenant of Grace proffers. Last, in order for the system to work, Covenant Theology must employ a double hermeneutic. Covenant Theology uses a second method of interpretation when dealing with certain biblical passages. This is true in its treatment of prophetic teachings concerning the future and particularly true concerning the nation of Israel and the future *Kingdom of God*. Covenant Theology frequently employs an allegorical or spiritualizing hermeneutic when dealing with Israel and the church. Essentially, the future blessings promised to Israel are now to be fulfilled with the church.⁴ Hence, the term *replacement* theology.

Dispensationalism, on the other hand, provides for a recognition of distinct, multiple, and progressing periods of administrative ages that reveal God's progressive plan and purpose. Dispensationalism can be identified by the use of a single literal-grammatical historical hermeneutic which draws a definite distinction between Israel and the church. This system affords the awareness of the centrality of God's rule over the entire course of history which encompasses more than merely the special redemptive plan of grace. Dr. William Luck, Sr., notes that the term "dispensation" is a biblical term – *oikonomia* –

⁴ Renald Showers, *There Really is a Difference* (Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Ministries, Inc. 1993), 20-24.

referring to a stewardship or administration of property (Luke 16:2-4; 1 Corinthians 9:17; Ephesians 1:10 and 3:2)⁵

Broadly speaking there are at least six economies, or dispensations, which exhibit God's sovereignty, plan, and purpose: Eternity before creation; creation of mankind to the Law of Moses; the age of the Law of Moses; the age of Grace (the church); the *Kingdom age*; and eternity after. Some scholars more finely divide this system into as many as twelve distinct dispensations. Our primary focus, however, will be on the *Kingdom age* and what it entails. For it is the Kingdom and its relation to the Messiah and His second coming that has undergone the greatest misrepresentation in its teaching, thereby, creating one of the greatest misunderstandings of any doctrine in all of Christendom.

Over the centuries three major views have emerged regarding the Kingdom and its relation to the Messiah: *Amillennialism*, *Postmillennialism*, and *Premillennialism*. The term *millennial* is from the Latin meaning 1000 which is the time element in years found in Revelation 20:1-7. This time frame designates the duration of certain events which include the establishment of the Kingdom by the Messiah and His subsequent 1000 year reign before all His enemies are placed under His feet as a "footstool" (Psalm 110:1, 1 Corinthians 15:26). These three views have been hotly debated over the years giving rise to much animus and misunderstanding. Many fine and voluminous works have been written regarding these three views, so for the sake of brevity, these three millennial views are only briefly defined:

⁵ Kenny Rhodes and Keith Sherlin, *Evangelical Bible Doctrine* (Bloomington: authorHouse, 2015), 378-379.

- Amillennialism: Refutes the 1000 year time designation found in Revelation 20:1-7 and maintains that there is no literal millennium, hence *a-millennial*. Any millennial concept begins with Messiah's first coming whereby the church is the Kingdom of Christ, primarily spiritual, with His saints reigning with Him now. Furthermore, the church is in a militant posture, in a fight against Satan and his minions, in an effort to Christianize the world before the Messiah's second coming.
- Postmillennialism: Honors the millennial concept but dismisses the 1000 year time frame as literal in nature. The Millennium can be any time frame between the Messiah's two advents. The postmillennial view is one of the "Golden Age of the Church" in which the gospel is successfully spread and accepted throughout the world by almost everyone. It is the church's completed gospel mission in combination with the knowledge and efforts of man that usher in the Messiah's second coming. There is little or no distinction between Israel and the church.
- Premillennialism: Adheres to a literal 1000 year reign of the Messiah on earth after a seven-year period of tribulation in which the enemies of God are destroyed (Revelation 19:16). The millennial kingdom is that which is described in the covenants to Israel, and was the kingdom that was "at hand" being offered to Israel during the first part of Christ's earthly ministry. The millennial kingdom was postponed when Israel rejected her Messiah. Israel will be restored and is distinct from the church.

It should be added that Covenant Theology generally adheres to the two *non*-premillennial views due to its dual hermeneutic which, as previously noted, allegorizes or spiritualizes

Scripture when dealing with Israel and the church, particularly, as it relates to Bible prophecy.

The Premillennial view uses a single literal-grammatical-hermeneutic and utilizes a fully developed biblical system that *harmonizes all of Scripture*. Dr. Charles Feinberg, in his work *Millennialism*, quotes D. B. MacCorkle in noting that Amillennialism is not really a system at all, rather it is a reactionary movement designed to attack certain positions of Premillennialism.⁶ Feinberg further comments that the covenantal amillennial viewpoint confuses the issues and leaves wholly untouched large portions of Scripture. As an example, he draws attention to a covenantal tenant that maintains that the dispensation of grace did not abrogate the Law as a rule of life in spite of the strong argument in Galatians to the contrary. Those addressed in Galatians were believers and were not trying to be saved by the Law, but seeking to live under it.⁷ Apparently, regarding the continued observance of the Law, Covenant Theology ignores Galatians completely (save Galatians 6:16).

Oblivious to the theological battles and the backwater status of much of Scripture, many Christians today are satisfied with only hearing the message of redemption (if they even receive that in many churches) not realizing that there is more in Scripture than just the salvation of man. The restoration of *all* things (Acts 3:21), the restoration of all creation (Romans 8: 21-22), the restoration of God's elect nation Israel (Jeremiah 30:3), and the fulfilling of the promises to His covenant people the Jews (Romans 11:25-29) are things seldom spoken from the pulpit. So, when the average Christian begins serious

⁶ Feinberg, 101-102.

⁷ Ibid. 219-226.

independent Bible study – Old Testament as well as New Testament – serious questions begin to surface. Much like someone agitating a backwater pool beside a fast flowing stream.

What are the covenant promises? Are these promises unconditional or can they be retracted and given to someone else? When Israel rejected her Messiah did God permanently reject Israel? Is Old Testament Israel now the New Testament church? Are we in the kingdom now or is the kingdom yet to come? These questions and more will be addressed and answered as this thesis progresses, but first one more theological element must be discussed before presenting the purpose and theme of this thesis.

In reading and interpreting Scripture, one must decide if Scripture is or is not the inerrant Word of God. If Scripture is the inerrant Word of God, then Scripture interprets Scripture and the Holy Spirit illuminates its meaning to man in general. For the sake of perspicuity, the literal-grammatical-historical hermeneutic alone is used because God wants all to understand His plan and purpose. 2 Timothy 4:16 states this quite clearly, “*All Scripture is given by the inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.*” If Scripture is not the inerrant Word of God, then what portions are worthy and what portions are not? What portions are to be taken literally and what portions are not? And who makes that decision? The Pope? Augustine? Martin Luther? William Hendriksen? The church? The local pastor? If one’s authority over Scripture is not God, then man becomes the authority and one’s interpretation of words and sentences is most likely being shuttled between two or more hermeneutical

methods. As such, truth will be elusive and flawed, and as Milton Terry observes, one will find himself drifting in a sea of uncertainty and conjecture.⁸

Therefore, in progressing through the topical elements of this thesis, the *Golden Rule of Interpretation* will be utilized:

“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, clearly indicate otherwise (Dr. David Cooper).”

In addition, the term “Jew(s)” and term “Israel” will refer broadly to God’s chosen people or His elect nation unless specificity requires otherwise. Scripture passages used by the writer are taken from the Ryrie NASB Study Bible and the NJKV Foundation Study Bible.

THESIS QUESTION: Did the early post-apostolic church hold a premillennial view of Christ’s return prior to establishing His kingdom? If so, what causes modified this view in such a way that the church today now holds a largely different millennial view? By using Scripture and the written record we will research and analyze the following:

- The call to Abraham in which God initiates unconditional covenants made to him and his descendants regarding a promise of land, a people more numerous than the sands of the sea, and a nation or kingdom comprising the land and these people.
- The Messiah’s early kingdom message was the promised kingdom (primarily Matthew, chapters 1-13). Was this promised kingdom postponed?
- The kingdom and any emerging millennial views held by the apostles.
- The kingdom and millennial views held by the post-apostolic or “primitive” church.

⁸ Robert Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2002), 141.

- The kingdom and millennial views held by the patristic church from the fourth century on to include analysis of the impact of a state church on the millennial view.
- The millennial view(s) held by the Reformers and various later era critics.
- The kingdom and millennial view(s) of the church today.
- Conclusion.

CHAPTER 2 – GOD’S COVENANT PROMISES TO ISRAEL

A covenant is an agreement between two parties by which one party agrees to grant something to another party who may or may be required to perform any action in order to be a recipient. If an action is required by the recipient then the covenant is *conditional* in nature. If no action is required by the recipient, then the covenant is *unconditional* in nature.

The Old Testament contains four *unconditional* covenants which promise both material and spiritual blessings to God’s people, the Jews, and the Jewish nation Israel. These four covenants are the Abrahamic Covenant, the Palestinian Covenant (land covenant), the Davidic Covenant, and the New Covenant. There is one additional covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, which is *conditional* in nature, that sets the rule of life for the people of Israel and the manner in which Jehovah God is to be worshiped.

The first and oldest of these covenants is the unconditional Abrahamic Covenant which is considered the basis for the other three. In His call to Abraham, Genesis 12:1-3, God sets forth seven promises to Abraham through this covenant: 1) I will make from you a great nation. 2) I will bless you. 3) I will make your name great. 4) You will be a blessing. 5) I will bless them that bless you, and I will curse them that curse you. 6) In you shall all the families of the earth be blessed. 7) I will give to your descendants this land.

One of the most unique and greatly overlooked characteristics of this covenant was in the manner it was established by God Himself. Genesis 15:9-18 is an account of the ancient blood covenant used by God to seal His promise to Abraham. In utilizing the blood

covenant, the participants pledge themselves - even unto death - as surety to guarantee the covenant's fulfillment. In the Genesis 15 scenario, several animals are killed and cut down the middle and the two halves are laid opposite each other. The parties of the covenant pass between the two halves of the animal uttering something like, "May God do to me and more if I break this covenant."⁹ However, with Abraham God changed the protocol slightly. In Genesis 15:7-21, Jehovah God had Abraham dissect the designated animals into halves placing each half apart. He then places Abraham into a deep sleep and passes as a flaming torch through the animal halves while He alone declares the terms of the covenant. Hence, the burden for the fulfillment of the covenant now falls entirely upon God. The covenant now becomes *unconditional*, and nothing Abraham or his seed does or does not do will change this status. Can God change the status of this covenant? No! It is a blood covenant sworn by Himself. Can God die as a result of failure in keeping this covenant? No! Because He is God. Can God ignore or transfer the provisions of this covenant to another entity as replacement of Abraham and his seed as some suggest? No! This covenant is made specifically to Abraham and to his seed (affirmed later through Isaac and Jacob) *period*.

The basic aspects of the Abrahamic Covenant are threefold: the land, the seed, and the blessing. The land aspect is developed in the Palestinian (land) Covenant; the seed or kingdom aspect is developed in the Davidic Covenant; and the blessing aspect is presented in the New Covenant.¹⁰

⁹ Paul Ziegler, "The Blood Covenant," accessed November 26, 2017, <http://www.systemath.com/uploads/6/9/5/2/6952345/the-blood-covenant.pdf>.

¹⁰ Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology* (Tustin: Ariel Ministries, 2001), 575-576.

This covenant is reaffirmed through Sarah's son Isaac in Genesis 26:24, and again through Jacob in Genesis 28:10-14. Covenantal reaffirmation also appears in many other passages throughout the Old Testament. A few of which are: Deuteronomy 34:4 "*...this is the land of which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying I will give it to your descendants.*" 2 Kings 13:23 "*But the Lord...had compassion upon them...because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob....*" And Psalm 105:8-10 "*He remembers His covenant forever....The covenant which He made with Abraham...to Isaac. And confirmed it to Jacob for a statute. To Israel as an everlasting covenant.*"

The land is perhaps the most essential material factor of God's covenant promises to Abraham and his descendants. Without the land no people can exist; and without the land and a people, no kingdom can exist. The land aspect, spoken of in the Abrahamic Covenant, is set forth in detail in the 29th and 30th chapters of Deuteronomy and is often referred to as the Palestinian Covenant. This covenant is an enlargement of the Abrahamic Covenant in that it reaffirms Israel's title deed to the land. The covenant further elaborates that should Israel become unfaithful and disobedient, the enjoyment of the land will be taken from her, as specified in the Mosaic Covenant; whereas, the ownership or right to the land remains *unconditional*.¹¹

The Davidic Covenant is the one that most closely identifies the prerequisites for a kingdom. Detailed in 2 Samuel 17:11-17, this covenant contains seven provisions: 1) David is promised an eternal dynasty. 2) One of David's sons was to be reign on the throne after David. 3) David's son Solomon was to build the Temple. 4) The kingdom throne of David and Solomon was to be established forever. 5) Solomon would be disciplined for

¹¹ Ibid. 582-583.

disobedience but not removed from reign as was Saul. 6) The Messiah will come from the seed of David. 7) The Messiah's throne, house, and kingdom will be established forever (1 Chronicles 17:12-14). A partial fulfillment of this covenant was realized when Solomon reigned over the nation of Israel in the first kingdom; when Solomon built the Temple; and the children of Israel enjoyed a temporary possession of the land albeit not the total portion of land that God promised Abraham in Genesis 15:18-21. In addition to those fulfillments surrounding the immediacy of the first kingdom, the Messiah - the seed of David - was born a millennium later thereby transferring the ruling authority from David to the Messiah as announced by the angel Gabriel in Luke 1:32-33 "*...call His name Jesus...and the Lord God shall give Him the throne of His father David.*"

The eternality of the Davidic Covenant has three elements. First, the *house* of David or David's line of descent would endure forever. This divine promise is echoed throughout Psalm 89 "I have made a covenant with my chosen. I have sworn to My servant David: 'Your seed I will establish forever'" (vs 3-4). Second, David's *kingdom* would be established forever never to pass away permanently though it might be vacant for a period of time. It is important to note that because of this guarantee, the Jews who lived centuries after David's kingdom ceased to function held on to the hope of a restored kingdom. Mark 11:10 is reflective of this hope, "*Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that comes in the name of the Lord.*" Third, David's throne would be established forever (II Samuel 7:16). Though David's ruling authority has not been exercised at all times since God made this promise, this divine pledge was a guarantee that a royal descendant of David would always be available to rule when circumstances would permit.¹²

¹² Showers, 90-91.

Dr. Renald Showers makes an interesting point that according to Psalm 110:1-2 the Messiah is to sit at the right hand of the Father in heaven *until* it is time for Him to rule. Thus, Messiah's rule as King will not begin until *after* His present session with the Father in heaven.¹³ This scriptural fact has been distorted and contorted to fit a variety of claims regarding the nature of the kingdom and whether the kingdom is now or yet to come. No conditions are attached to this covenant, therefore, like the previous two covenants the Davidic Covenant is *unconditional* in nature.

The fourth unconditional covenant is the New Covenant. New in the fact that it abrogates the Mosaic Covenant which will be briefly explained in a moment. The New Covenant is recorded in Jeremiah 31:31-34:

“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

The first thing to note is that the New Covenant is not addressed to the church. It is addressed to the house of Israel and the house of Judah, and not according to the covenant of their fathers – the Mosaic Covenant which they broke – but a new covenant that God will place in their minds and inscribe on their hearts. The New Covenant is spiritual in that it promises a regeneration of the heart and a new nature or favorable attitude toward God. Furthermore, this covenant pledged that God's spirit and words would never depart from

¹³ Ibid. 92.

them (Isaiah 59:21) and the nation would have a great reputation because of God's special blessing (Isaiah 61:8-9).¹⁴

This covenant, unlike the Mosaic Covenant, had no conditions attached; therefore, the fulfillment of the promises of this covenant was not dependent upon the obedience of Israel. To the contrary, it came about because of Israel's *disobedience*. In Ezekiel 36:21-22 God declares "*But I had concern for My Holy name, which the house of Israel profaned....Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord God: I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My Holy name's sake....'*"

The eternity of this covenant is found in the next three verses following the covenant's initial declaration. Jeremiah 31:35-37 "*Thus says the Lord, who gives the sun for light by day... the moon and stars for light by night....If these ordinances depart from me...then the seed of Israel shall also cease from being a nation...forever....*" From Israel's standpoint, the fulfillment of the New Covenant has yet to happen. This covenant will not be completely fulfilled until the time of Israel's complete material and spiritual restoration at Messiah's second coming.

Unlike the four unconditional covenants, the Mosaic Covenant was *conditional* in that God promised certain blessings to His people providing that they fulfill requisite conditions contained in the covenant. Many of these blessings were those material blessings set forth in the four unconditional covenants. The Mosaic Covenant or the Law was the rule of life which God instilled in His people through Moses. It affected the daily life of the people in numerous ways: It divided their life into seasons and created feasts to be celebrated. It provided rules of conduct toward each other. It set purity standards for

¹⁴ Ibid. 101.

food consumption and personal contact. And foremost, the Law established the structure and way God wanted to be worshiped.

Disobedience to these laws and standards would result in punishment; and if the offense was serious enough, death might be the penalty. Of no small consequence would be the loss of those material blessings, ascribed to in the unconditional covenants, for corporate disobedience as a nation. Loss of the land and its blessings. Loss of the kingdom and the rule of self-government. Loss of freedom by being taken captive or dispersed throughout the nations. Though many of the material blessings provided in the unconditional covenants were conditioned by obedience, God's eventual fulfillment of these *unconditional* covenant promises is guaranteed.

SUMMARY: As God began to move forward with His plan and purpose for man, He used the call to Abraham to initiate four unconditional covenants depicting promised material and spiritual blessings (and a conditional covenant for the rule of life) to bring a people unto Himself. As Israel and the Jews progressed through the history of the Old Testament, almost every book in this Holy Writ is replete with passages attesting to the eternality and the recipient of these covenants. God did not waver in His promises and He did not reassign these promises to another people. Moreover, it is well established that in some future time He will bring fulfillment to all He has promised. To deny this is to deny the Old Testament itself and to diminish an important declaration that Christ Himself made many times during His ministry "*It is written....*"

CHAPTER 3 – CHRIST’S KINGDOM MESSAGE

The early portion of Christ’s ministry is best recorded in the book of Matthew, chapters 1-13. Many Christians would be shocked to learn that the first gospel of Christ was the gospel of the *Kingdom* not the later gospel of the *Cross*. Many more Christians would be disturbed to hear that these early passages of Matthew are not “Christian” in nature, rather totally Jewish in their import and application. For many years the church has loosely interpreted the message of the kingdom to the Jews as being a message of the church to Christians without seriously considering the nature of the language spoken, the makeup of the audience, and the timing of the message. Without drawing any conclusions yet, let us start from the beginning.

Following the fall of the first kingdom and subsequent captivity to the Babylonians, the exiled children of Israel dreamed and prayed for a return to the land to reestablish their lost kingdom. In Jeremiah 29:13-14 God promises “*When you seek me in prayer and worship.... If you seek me with all your heart and soul... I will reverse your fortunes and will re-gather you from all the nations... where I have exiled you, says the Lord. ‘I will bring you back to the place from which I exiled you.’*” Reflective of this promise is the exile’s prayer of return found in Psalm 137:4-6 “*How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land? If I forget you O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill! If I do not remember you, let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth....*”

One can imagine the great joy and elation felt by the children of Israel when they heard the decree given by King Cyrus of Persia as set forth in Ezra 1:1-4. King Cyrus

declared the release of the exiles allowing them to return to their land, rebuild their temple, and basically reestablish themselves. Temple rebuilding began with enthusiasm but it was not long before conflicts and problems arose. Soon they became discouraged because of opposition from the people of the land; and they became disheartened because this new temple was not going to be as grand as the old one. Subsequently, they became self-absorbed in their own selfish concerns and home projects. In time a decree from Darius (Ezra 6) quelled the opposition to rebuilding the temple which was finally completed in 515 BC.

However, sin continued its manifestation through disregarding the prohibition against intermarriage with the indigenous people of the land (Ezra 9) as noted in the Law (Deuteronomy 7:3). Though restitution is made, this particular sin continues to plague the “returnees” (Nehemiah 10:30 and 13:23) and by the time of the prophet Malachi, 100 years later, the people are backslidden, mechanical in their observance of the Law, and not understanding why God was dissatisfied with them. Malachi’s message, some 400 plus years before Christ’s kingdom message, was a call to repentance against corrupt priests and spiritual infidelity; Malachi also prophesied that one would appear, in the form of Elijah, to prepare the way for the *Messenger of the covenant* (Malachi 3:1).

The intertestamental period began where Malachi ends. In these intervening years before Christ’s ministry, Israel experienced fractious times. Though back in the land they never experienced full kingdom autonomy again, free from suzerainty, as they had under David and Solomon 500 years before. Persian supremacy during the fifth century BC; Alexander the Great and Hellenism during the fourth century BC; Judea under the Ptolemies and the Seleucids until the middle of the second century BC at which time the

Maccabean revolt throw off the Seleucid yoke – Antiochus Epiphanes. The Hasmoneans (Maccabees), who ruled for another 100 years, brought Israel the closest to autonomous rule during this entire period but continuous intrigue, murder, and instability brought their reign to a close in 63 BC when Rome became their new “Protectorate.”

As noted, Israel’s religious fabric began to show signs of wear and tattering during this period. Alexander brought Hellenism with him and many Jews, particularly the more “cosmopolitan” elders and Sadducees, fell in love with things Greek especially Greek thought and philosophy. Jewish worship and customs began to show the effects of Greek culture. In addition, temple worship was considered to have been corrupted by the Hasmoneans due to the appointment of one of their ruling family members to the temple priesthood. An appointment which was a breach of the Law – the separation of the ruling class from the priestly class. As this deterioration of Jewish culture and religious principle progressed it began to divide the people so that by the end of the second century BC a large splinter group had formed. This group, comprised of religious traditionalists, were branded as *Perushim* - Hebrew for separatists or Pharisees. They begin to pull away from the Temple cult and pursue their own path.

What better time against this backdrop of political chaos, cultural denigration, and religious decay to offer the covenant kingdom spoken of so often by the prophets of the Old Testament? Two short verses, Isaiah 9:6-7, prophesy the coming king and His kingdom “*For unto us a Child is born. Unto us a Son is given. And the government shall be upon His shoulder....Of the increase of His government and peace, there shall be no end. Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom....*” This prophecy had partial fulfillment with the birth of Jesus Christ 400 years after Malachi’s writing. Thirty years

later Malachi's prophecy, of one appearing in the form of Elijah to prepare the way for the Messenger of the covenant, was fulfilled in Matthew 3:2 by John the Baptist announcing "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" The Messenger of the covenant, Jesus Christ, who would soon be baptized by this *Elijah* type, would bring much more meaning to the announcement "*The kingdom of heaven is at hand.*"

Christ's kingdom gospel can be broadly depicted in four phases: First, the initial kingdom message; Second, the kingdom's rule of life – Sermon on the Mount and the Lord's Prayer; Third, the rejection of the King; and Fourth, the postponement of the kingdom. First, John the Baptist was not ignorant of the kingdom he preached. Though not as knowledgeable regarding specific kingdom details as the King, John knew the covenant expectation of a king from the Davidic line who would sit on the throne of David in Jerusalem. No explanation was offered or needed as to the meaning of the *kingdom* in his message. The people – the Jews – knew what was implied by his words. Furthermore, the use of the definite article was qualifying and defining not merely *a* kingdom but *the* kingdom was at hand. Calling attention to its heavenly origin, it was the rule of heaven on earth administered by one chosen from heaven who was also from the seed of David.¹⁵

John's initial message was soon reiterated and refined by Christ Himself throughout this early portion of His earthly ministry. In Matthew 4:17, Christ began to preach "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" In verses 23-25, Jesus had preached the kingdom gospel and performed miracles from Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan. It was during this time (Matthew 7 on) that Christ referred to Himself as the *Son of Man* purposely identifying with the covenants and the prediction that Daniel 7:13

¹⁵ Feinberg, 131.

employs in “*One coming like the Son of Man.*”¹⁶ And in verse 14 “*Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom....*” Of great importance is the fact that Christ’s concept of the kingdom was the same as His contemporaries with their view determined by Old Testament prophecy. Also, Jesus did not spiritualize the idea of the kingdom and establish a kingdom while on earth (as much of the church contends). Christ never stated that the kingdom was a present reality.¹⁷

Second, shockingly to many Christians, the kingdom gospel is not a Christian message. The Sermon on the Mount and the Lord’s Prayer are not addressed to Christians but only to the Jews and the Jewish nation. Because Christians as such did not yet exist, potential obedience to the Beatitudes would not bring one into a “Christian relationship” with the King. The Beatitudes and the Lord’s Prayer were meant to be the rule of life within the Kingdom of Heaven when established on earth first by repentance then by acceptance of Christ as King.

A careful examination of the Sermon on the Mount will note the “legal” nature of each of the Beatitudes or laws promulgated for membership in the kingdom. They do not tell how to be *acceptable* to God only how to be *pleasing* to God in the kingdom. The King is merely offering the covenanted kingdom to those to whom it was promised. Dr. Feinberg points out that there is no *salvation* message in the sermon. Faith and grace are not factors in this message. The sermon is legal in its character and is like the Law of Moses raised to

¹⁶ George Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom, vol.1* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1952), 562.

¹⁷ Feinberg, 264.

the highest power. These are all righteous laws given by a righteous King seeking to establish His righteous reign over Israel.¹⁸

The Lord's Prayer with the petition "*Thy Kingdom come*" makes little sense if one is already in the kingdom. The sentiment of this petition is not an expression of something that now is, but something desired in the future. The disciples, to whom the prayer was given, had no idea the modern notions of a *church-kingdom*, therefore, the import of the prayer needed no explanation because they had the true idea of the kingdom when they prayed for the covenanted *Messianic Kingdom* to come.¹⁹

A small but interesting note made by George Peters, in his work *The Theocratic Kingdom*, is the presence of the word "*Thy*" used by the Son in His presentation of the prayer to His disciples. "*Thy*" is referring to what belongs to the Father for He is the Ruler and owner of the Kingdom. It is erroneous to consider the church as the kingdom because the church is the domain of the Holy Spirit.²⁰

Many in the church distort the Lord's Prayer into a message of grace and mercy; however, Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer keenly notes a contradiction, "*For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses*" (Matthew 6:14-15). Chafer notes that if Christ means what He says in this one petition, it is directly opposed to the principle of grace as set forth in Ephesians 4:32 which declares, "*And be ye kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as Christ forgave you, so*

¹⁸ Feinberg, 132-133.

¹⁹ Peters, I, 689.

²⁰ Ibid. 692-693.

also do ye.” Chafer further remarks that sad is the spectacle when Christians assume that the Sermon on the Mount and the Lord’s Prayer represent the high calling of the church and attempt to modify the character of grace so it may conform to a merit system. However, when it is recognized that this petition and prayer are not only embedded in the kingdom message but also a plea for the kingdom to come, most difficulties are removed.²¹

Third, to the Jews in general, the message of the covenant kingdom was never doubted or misunderstood; but to the Jewish leadership - Sadducees, Pharisees, and scribes - Christ’s kingdom, with Himself as King, was not popular for it called for repentance, a righteous heart, and a just rule of life. They were not embracing repentance, righteousness, or a just rule of life (they were righteous and just in their own minds) they were looking for a warrior to throw off the Roman Yoke. Above all, they surely were not wanting someone who they thought was competing for their power and authority in setting up His own kingdom, so they plotted against Him.

From the beginning, the Jewish leadership was rebuked, first by John the Baptist, then by Christ. “...*Brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore, bear fruits worthy of repentance*” exclaimed John (Matthew 3:7-8). Soon, after selecting some of His disciples and presenting His Sermon on the Mount, Christ disparages the Jewish leadership by declaring, “...*unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven*” (Matthew 5:20). The scribes and Pharisees were not long in criticizing Christ’s actions. In Matthew 9:2-3 Jesus heals a paralytic man and further tells him, “*Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you.*” To which the scribes whisper among themselves,

²¹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *System Theology*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1976), 109.

“*This man blasphemes!*” However, Jesus knowing the thoughts of their heart responds with, “*Why do you think evil in your heart? For which is easier to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Arise and walk!’*” (Matthew 9:4-5)?

Dr. Stanley Toussaint in commenting on the healing of the paralytic – and on the many miracles and healings performed by Jesus in Matthew 5 through 9 - says in answering the thoughts of the scribes, Jesus shows the nexus between sin and sickness. Had they correctly studied Old Testament scriptures they would have seen the association between sin and sickness (Psalm 103:3 and Isaiah 33:34). The forgiveness of sin is the basis for healing.²² This *non-martial* righteous glimpse into the kingdom was above their grasp. Though He authenticated Himself as their King with His style of kingdom many times through His miracles and healings, they continued to reject Him.

This rejection begins to reach a fever pitch in Matthew 9:32-34 when after casting out a demon from a dumb man, who later began speaking, the crowds marvel but the Pharisees say, “*He cast out demons by the ruler of the demons.*” Toussaint notes that the importance of this miracle is seen in the response of the people versus that of the Pharisees. The people marvel at the uniqueness of the King’s power as that of the power of the Son of David, however they fail to recognize Him as their Messiah and, consequently, fail to worship Him. The Pharisees, on the other hand, attribute His power to Satan. The Pharisees could not deny the reality of His works so they rely on a false explanation.²³

Matthew 12, depicts an increasing antagonism the between the King and the Pharisees that reaches the point of the *unpardonable sin*. In verses 1-8, Jesus and His

²² Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1980), 128-129.

²³ *Ibid.* 133-134.

disciples pluck and eat corn on the Sabbath. Having seen these actions, the Pharisees criticize them for breaking the Sabbath to which Jesus responds with a point of history in which David and some of his followers, out of hunger, entered the temple and ate shewbread which was not lawful for them to eat. Only the priests could lawfully eat it. However, Jesus makes the point, regarding Himself, that *something greater than the temple is here*. The King then states, *“I desire mercy and not sacrifice. You would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is the Lord even of the Sabbath”* (verses 7-8). Thus, showing that mercy is more pleasing to God than external conformity to the Law.

In verses 9-14, Jesus enters a synagogue in which a man with a withered hand was present. The Pharisees goaded Jesus by questioning whether it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath. The King responded using a fine point of the Law, *“Who among you has a sheep that falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it and pull it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep. So, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath”* (verses 11-12). Jesus heals the man’s withered hand. After this, the Pharisees conspire to destroy Him.

Rejection of the King reaches a crescendo in verses 22-32 in which Jesus casts out a demon from a man who is both blind and mute. Right before their very eyes, the Pharisees witness a miraculous exorcism performed by the King. This exorcism was unique in that there was one kind of demon against which the Jewish religious leaders were powerless. The kind of demon who causes the person to be mute, thereby inhibiting the person from speaking. Consequently, there was no way of establishing communication with this kind of a demon or finding its identity. So, within the framework of Judaism, it was impossible to exorcise this kind of demon. Jewish custom taught, however, that when the Messiah

comes, He would be able to perform this type of exorcism. In verse 22, in plain view, that is exactly the kind of demon Jesus exorcises. But rather than accept the obvious, these self-seeking sinful men attribute the King's miracle, through the Holy Spirit, as the work of Satan, thus, committing the *unpardonable* sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit.

Murmuring like shyster attorneys, who argue against the obvious and for the absurd, the Jewish leadership descends into a bog of logical absurdity which the King throws back into their face. If Satan is casting out Satan, then Satan's house is divided and will eventually fall, however, if the King is casting out Satan then it indicates that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand and the illustration that follows is about Satan, though strong, but not as strong as Jesus who takes away his possessions (demon possessed persons). Hence, the kingdom is at hand. The sin of the Jewish leadership is not so much their denial of the King and His kingdom as it is the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.²⁴ From this point on, Jesus changes His communication approach from direct speech to that of parables – a figure of speech in which a moral or spiritual truth is illustrated by an analogy drawn from everyday experience.

The final rejection of the King and His kingdom comes shortly thereafter during the trial of Jesus before Pilate when the crowd cries out, "*Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him! Pilate said to them, 'shall I crucify your king?' The chief priests answer, 'we have no king but Caesar'"* (John 19:15).

Fourth, the question now arises since the King was rejected by His people was the kingdom postponed? George Peters, uses Luke 17:22-25 to make a strong case that Jesus

²⁴ Arnold Fruchtenbaum, "The Sins against the Holy Spirit," facebook Bible prophecy, July 28, 2015, accessed November 28, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/bibleprophecywatchmen/>

postponed the kingdom for another time. When asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom was coming, Jesus, in verse 21 answers, “...*For behold the kingdom of God is in your midst*” (NASB – the KJV uses “*within you*” which creates an interpretation problem that will be discussed later). In other words, the necessary elements of the kingdom are present and only need to be recognized. However, in the next verse (22) as He turns to His disciples, He states, “*The days will come when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it.*” This statement, notes Peters, indicates an indefinite postponement of the kingdom. Peters argues that in verse 23, Jesus is warning against deceivers who will pretend to establish this kingdom which intimates that it will not come soon. From verse 24, Peters further argues that the kingdom itself is dependent upon His appearance *in His day* as the *Son of Man* – His Messianic title as ruler of the Kingdom from David’s throne. Finally, from verse 25, Peters notes the obvious fact that the King must “suffer” and be rejected – thus, no King no kingdom.²⁵

George Peters uses another passage of Scripture, John 18:36, to assert the postponement of the kingdom from another perspective. Jesus at His trial, in responding to Pilate’s question, “*Are You the King of the Jews?*” declares, “*My kingdom is not of this world...My kingdom is not of this realm.*” In refuting an early church claim that Jesus was referring to His kingdom in a purely spiritual way, Peters explains that all along it has been maintained that this kingdom is of divine origin and is not derived from any power or authority of this world. The kingdom is a divine outgrowth and is promised to Jesus Christ as the promised Son of David. Moreover, Jesus is positively asserting that His kingdom was not *then in existence* but would be some time in the future. Peters also notes the

²⁵ Peters, 2, 42.

obvious inscription above the King's head as He hung on the cross, "*This is the King of the Jews*" not "The King of the Church" for the church was not established until the day of Pentecost.²⁶

Acts 1:6-7 records a short dialogue between Jesus and His disciples after His resurrection. In verse 6, the disciples ask Jesus, "*Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?*" Dr. Feinberg notes that the nature of this question characterizes that the kingdom was *not then present*, hence, "Are You restoring." Also, by the use of the verb "restoring" the disciples were not asking about something (the kingdom) that was *just beginning* but about something that had a prior existence. Feinberg explains that the kingdom to be instituted was recognized as having a beginning in the kingdom of David from whose seed, Jesus Christ, was made according to the flesh.²⁷ Jesus answered His disciples in verse 7, "*It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority.*" The obvious conclusion from Christ's response to His disciples' question was that the kingdom, once *close at hand*, was now postponed to a future time known only by the Father. A time in the future when He will return *as the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with great power and glory* (Matthew 24:30); *and He will strike down the nations and rule them with a rod of iron* (Revelation 19:15).

SUMMARY: It is important to see the association between God the Father formulating His plan and purpose for His covenant people in Chapter 2 and Christ the Son implementing the Father's plan in chapter 3. Christ presented Himself to Israel as their King offering them the Davidic Kingdom as set forth in the covenants by the Father.

²⁶ Peters, 2, 32-35.

²⁷ Feinberg, 140.

However, Israel rejected her King and the type of kingdom He was offering, thereby allowing the gentiles a chance to partake of the salvation and blessings promised to Israel (Romans 11:11-12; Ephesians 3:11-13). The Church, through the Holy Spirit, is the vehicle for the salvation for all including the gentiles, but that is the gospel of the cross, *per se*, not of the kingdom. The kingdom was seen as being postponed in Acts 1:6, the Church was not born until fifty days later at the Day of Pentecost. The Church could not exist without the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the later descent of the Holy Spirit. The church is not the kingdom.

CHAPTER 4 – THE APOSTLES AND THE KINGDOM

The disciples being pious Jews would know and understand the unconditional covenant promises given to them by God in the Old Testament scriptures. Furthermore, the kingdom is taught by covenant and prophecy in the Old Testament and, when preached by Christ, is taken for granted in the New Testament as a subject gleaned from the Old Testament. The kingdom is preached without needed explanation.²⁸ Moreover, no one had to “correct” the King or His disciples for presenting an erroneous message, nor did the King have to chide His disciples for speaking erroneously about the kingdom while He was with them. Essentially, *all* knew and held to a *personal* coming of the Messiah, the *literal* restoration of the Davidic throne and kingdom, the personal reign of Messiah *on David’s throne*, and the exaltation of Jerusalem and the Jewish nation.²⁹

But after the obvious rejection of the King which reached a climax in the unpardonable sin (Matthew 12), He began to teach them in a different manner. He began to teach them in parables which He termed *mysteries* because they were not heretofore revealed in Scripture. To better grasp the disciple’s evolving understanding of these mysteries of the kingdom, one needs to begin with *that* time the King began to speak in parables.

In Matthew 13:10-11, Jesus responded to His disciple’s question of His teaching in parables with, “*To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven,*

²⁸ Peters, 2, 142-143.

²⁹ Peters, 1, 183.

but to them it has not been granted.” George Peters explains that the mysteries of the kingdom were not all given at once. They were gradually revealed, and while some of them were postponed, others were still withheld. Take away certain mysteries such as the necessity of Christ’s death, His resurrection, and the call to the gentiles what mysteries are left? If the disciples – soon to be apostles – were to be *stewards of the mysteries of God*, under the teaching of the King, it would be necessary for them to know *first of all* what basically comprised the kingdom.³⁰ Then, to bridge the educational gap from disciple to apostle – from requisite knowledge to advanced knowledge – the King instructed His disciples in the mysteries of the kingdom through parables which, as noted earlier, are figures of speech in which a truth is illustrated by an analogy drawn from everyday experience.

In his work, *Behold the King*, Dr. Toussaint outlines the parable-kingdom mystery relationship quite well. It is significant that the synoptic parables follow the clear indication of the rejection of the King by His fellow Jews; and to take the parables out of this context is to set oneself adrift in the tides of speculation. In Matthew 13, the King is instructing His disciples regarding an *unrevealed period of time prior* to the establishment of the now delayed kingdom. This new age would not be the promised kingdom, nor would it be a kingdom in a “mystery form.” Toussaint continues, by quoting Alva McClain, that in one sense the kingdom can be said to exist during this *interim* period because a portion of the people who shall inherit the kingdom live during this age. Colossians 1:13 notes

³⁰ Ibid. 157.

that the believers of this age become members of the Church which shall form the spiritual nucleus for the future kingdom.”³¹

Toussaint goes on to say that some theologians hold the view that the parables are for the Jews and Israel only. They assert that the doctrine of the church composed of Jew and gentile was not known until it was revealed to Paul with no hint in the gospels of any truth applying to the church. This view is erroneous. The church, while it was revealed to Paul, was not revealed to him only. Christ prophesied about the church in Matthew 16:18. Furthermore, in Matthew 8:11 – well before the time of parables – Christ told the centurion, “...many will come from east and west and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.” Therefore, the supposition that Matthew 13 is only for the Jews is incorrect. Some even go to the other extreme and contend that Christ was correcting the mistaken notion that the Jews had regarding the kingdom – that He did not come to establish an earthly kingdom but a *spiritual* one. Thereby, equating the kingdom of heaven with the church. This view is also incorrect. It has been established that the Jews understood the unconditional promise of the Davidic kingdom. However, the church had yet to be mentioned in Matthew, and it would be reasonable to claim that such a concept would be completely foreign to the Jews.³²

Peters assess the situation nicely by explaining that the mysteries of the kingdom do not refer to the *nature* of the kingdom, but to the *manner* of its establishment, and the *means* employed for its preparation and time of manifestation.³³

³¹ Toussaint, 170-172.

³² Ibid. 172-173.

³³ Peters, 1, 142.

Moving forward, fifty days after the ascension of the King, the Holy Spirit, as promised by Jesus, descended upon the disciples (Acts 2:2-4) and the Church was born. The disciples, now as apostles, soon began establishing the church - the apostolic church - the one recorded in Acts and the epistles. The early church whose last apostle, John, was given a fresh revelation of the King at the very end of the first century AD, is the church that carried the kingdom message directly from the King to the Jews, and later to the gentiles. This is the church of James, Peter, John, and soon Paul. This apostolic church was centered in Jerusalem and was comprised of mainly Jewish believers who were expecting an early return of the King with His promised kingdom.

In utilizing 2 Timothy 4:1-2 and 2 Thessalonians 2, George Peters makes the case that the apostles and the fledgling church expected an early return of the King with His kingdom. Paul had to calm the anxiety of the Thessalonian church who had heard falsely that the Day of the Lord had already begun, yet they understood from Paul that they would be exempt from persecution and judgement. Peters footnotes a scholar of the early church, Donaldson (*Church Doctrine and Literature*, volume 2, p. 261), as declaring with respect to the premillennial doctrine advocated by Justin Martyr, “The opinion just adduced is one in which the whole church shared. *All expected Christ to appear on earth*, to raise His saints, to grant them possession of the earth, and to bless them with uninterrupted happiness.” Peters also footnotes Schaff (*His Apostles Church*, p. 275) who speaks of “*The expectation of the speedy return of Christ in glory*, as probably one of Paul’s favorite themes; that he exhorts the Thessalonians to be *always ready* to meet the Lord who shall come unexpectedly....”³⁴

³⁴ Peters, 1, 470.

Peters continues by noting that the very language used by the apostles is *expressive of a shortness of time*. This expectancy of the Kings' return indicates that they had *no idea* of an existing Messianic Kingdom; that they looked for such a kingdom to *follow* His return; and they did not regard the church as the covenanted kingdom, but simply something *provisionary*.³⁵ Peters also quotes several other scholars, Hodge, Olshausen, Conybeare and Howson, and Oosterzee, et al, whose works also reflect a common opinion that the apostles believed in a speedy return of the King with His Kingdom. Moreover, many early Christians generally believed that Christ was to return again a second time, and many indulged the hope that they would live to witness His return (Hase, *History of the Christian Church*).³⁶

Briefly in retrospect, the more notable apostles, James, Peter, Paul, and John, held the view that the kingdom had been delayed and that there was no kingdom currently present in their lifetime. James, in Acts 15:14-16 notes, "*Men and brethren listen to me. Simon has declared how God at first visited the gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: 'After this I will return. And will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen down....'*" In no way is this a *kingdom now* depiction.

Peter devotes much of his second epistle to end time deception and "*...the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ...*" (2 Peter 1:16). He speaks of destructive doctrines and the deception and depravity of false teachers, and how they are doomed to punishment. In 2 Peter 3:10 he declares, "*But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night.*" He

³⁵ Ibid. 471.

³⁶ Ibid. 472.

then goes on to describe the passing of the heavens and the burning up of the earth with a fervent heat. These are all things of the future. We are now living in the last days filled with false teachers and deception, but the earth has yet to be burned up with a fervent heat. The King has not returned and the kingdom was not then, and is not now!

Paul, the most prolific writer in the New Testament, devotes three chapters in his epistle to the Romans regarding Israel's rejection of the King, her temporary blindness to the gospel of the cross, and her final physical and spiritual restoration. In Romans 11:28-29 Paul states, "*Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. For the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable.*" Paul also notes that Israel's deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob (Romans 11:26). This has yet to happen. The King has not returned and the physical and spiritual restoration of Israel in the form of the kingdom is still future.

The "blockbuster" futuristic view of the King and the kingdom comes in the form of the *Apocalypse* penned by the Apostle John more than six decades after the King's ascension. The very fact that the first three chapters of this "revelation" were directly dictated to the Apostle John by God Himself, and the recording of the rest of the book is overseen by the Son – a Lamb as though it had been slain – underscores its importance as a direct message from God to be understood and heeded. The church age is seen as now to John and on into the future. As John records *the things which will take place after this*, he sees a time of great calamity and suffering descending upon the earth as the final week of the 70 weeks of Daniel unfolds (Daniel 9:24-27). Finally, he sees the King coming with great power and righteousness to defeat His enemies and establish His kingdom. This is

the kingdom over which He shall reign for a 1000 years (Revelation 20:4). This is the first time that the covenanted kingdom has had a time frame attached to it.

The number 1000 in Latin is *mille*, and when combined with the extraction *ennium* (as in biennium or bi annual) the term *millennium* is created. This term is recorded by John six times in the first seven verses of chapter 20. As earlier noted, very few portions of Scripture have created more fuss and bluster than the interpretation and use of this time frame, or age designation, *the millennium*.

The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD is proof positive that the kingdom was not then in existence – the King was not present, the kingdom was destroyed, and the people were dispersed. Furthermore, the kingdom has yet to come, the King is not reigning from His throne in Jerusalem, and His enemies are not under His feet as a footstool (Psalm 110:1-2). Dr. Feinberg reflects this view when quoting a colleague who offers that the kingdom cannot be located between the first and the second advent of the King, because during this period Israel will be nationally cutoff. The *Millennium* will begin with a national resurrection of Israel as set forth in the prophecy of Ezekiel 37. Moreover, in the interim between the advents the gentile colossus will be standing; whereas, the kingdom age begins with the complete destruction of the colossus according to the prophecy of Daniel 2 showing that the kingdom is not the church.³⁷

Regarding the apostles, George Peters concludes that the early church consisting of the apostolic fathers, the elders, and all who were close to them knew of no established kingdom; but looked for it to come at the second advent of Jesus. This is evidenced by the

³⁷ Feinberg, 255.

intensely held millennial view of the “primitive” church. Furthermore, notes Peters, Jesus, the apostles, and the apostolic fathers were all *united* in asserting the postponement of the kingdom until this second coming.³⁸

SUMMARY: Like a thread weaving through fabric is the continuous message of the covenant promises which emanated from the Father, as recorded in the Old Testament; through the Son – the King; and then to the apostles who through the Holy Spirit established the early church. The message was fairly simple but quite clear and consistent. At the right time, a promised King would come, one from the seed of David who would establish the promised kingdom on earth and rule with righteousness. The King did come and the kingdom was *nigh* but His people rejected Him so the kingdom was postponed. Isaiah 9:6 speaks to His first coming, “*For unto us a Child is born. Unto us a Son is given....*” Isaiah 9:7 says, “*Of the increase of His government...there shall be end. Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom.*” This has not happened which further denotes a future second coming to establish His kingdom. A kingdom now expressed as the *Millennium*

³⁸ Peters, 1, 443.

CHAPTER 5 – THE MILLENNIAL VIEW OF THE POST-APOSTOLIC CHURCH

The juncture of this thesis has now been reached, wherein the primary question is to be addressed, “Did the post-apostolic church not only accept a millennial view of the kingdom but also hold the view that the King was coming back prior to His millennial reign, i.e. His return was *pre-millennial*?” It is quite logical to assume that the apostolic church fathers had instructed their successors what was taught to them by the King. It is commonly known that *Polycarp* sat at the feet of the Apostle John, and *Irenaeus* was a student of Polycarp.

George Peters reflects this continuum when paraphrasing the writing of *Papias* as quoted by J. W. Brooks (*Elementary Prophetic Interpretation*, p 37) that Papias, pledging himself to the truth as one of John’s hearers (per Irenaeus) was intimate with Polycarp. Papias expounds that in so vital matter as the gospel of the kingdom could the fathers nearest the apostles been mistaken? If so, what assurance do we have that may have also misapprehended all other points? Peters adds that one may consult Brooks for a listing of *millenarian* fathers which include *Barnabas, Clemens, Hermas, Ignatius, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian*, et al., ranging from 70 AD to 192 AD. It is further noted that the work of Barnabas is one that can be legitimately quoted as being the earliest Christian writings holding the millennial view.³⁹

³⁹ Ibid. 451.

Peters summarizes that all we have on record of that early church period conclusively proves that the kingdom doctrine was held, both in Jewish and gentile regions, during the first, second, and most of the third century. Also, this feature of the Jews from the prophets, through Jesus, and through the apostles was continuously perpetuated leading K. A. Auberlen to remark that Jesus, the prophets, and the apostles were “*Chiliasts*” (Greek for millennialists). The early church was almost entirely chiliastic and eagerly longed and prayed for the expected kingdom. Furthermore, it was believed, from the lost *Commentary of Theophilus*, that Christ’s coming in glory to establish His kingdom on earth was an essential object and anchor of their hope. This early church recognized the current world power as one in servitude to Satan, so they looked for no deliverance from it save His future coming.⁴⁰

Further evidence supporting a premillennial position held by the post-apostolic church comes from a very unlikely source, Daniel Whitby. Daniel Whitby (1638-1726) was a priest in the Church of England and is considered to be the father of modern postmillennialism. Though an opponent of the premillennial doctrine, he does give an impartial view held by the early church in his work *Treatise on Tradition* in which he reveals the following:

The doctrine of the Millennium, or the reign of the saints for a thousand years, is now rejected by all Roman Catholics, and by the greatest part of Protestants; and yet it passed among *the best Christians, for two hundred and fifty years, for a tradition apostolical*; and, as such, is delivered by *many Fathers of the second and third century, who speak of it as the tradition of our Lord and His apostles, and of all the ancients who lived before them...*⁴¹

⁴⁰ Ibid. 1, 449.

⁴¹ Ibid. 1, 482-483

From yet another anti-millennial source comes another premillennial observation. Bishop Taylor in his work *Liberty of Prophesying, section 2* states, “That the doctrine of the Millenaries was in *the best ages* esteemed no heresy, but *true Catholic doctrine*; though since then it hath had justice (?) done it, and hath suffered a just condemnation (?)”⁴²

Showing the universality of premillennialism, George Peters presents a composite of early church fathers who were advocates of the view in each of the first three centuries. In the first century seven of the original disciples and eight early church fathers, which included John the Presbyter, Aristio, Clement of Rome, Barnabas, Hermas, Ignatius, Polycarp, and Papias, held to a kingdom yet to come. Most held to a premillennial appearance of the Messiah to establish His millennial kingdom which was in keeping with the Jewish view of the Messianic reign and the Second Advent.⁴³

Premillennial advocates of the second century include some well-noted persons, Pothinus, Justin Martyr, Melito, Hegesippus, Tatian, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hippolytus, and Apollinaris. Aside from Clemens Alexandrinus, notes Peters, not a single opposition to the premillennial view is posted. What is to be concluded? The common faith of the church was premillennial, and that such a unity of belief could only have been introduced by the founders of the Christian Church - the apostles and the elders appointed by them.⁴⁴

Third-century premillennial advocates include Cyprian, Commodian, Nepos, Coracion, Methodius, and Lactantius. By and large, the millenarian view remained intact during this time. However, earlier, the previously mentioned anti-millenarian Clemens

⁴² Ibid. 483.

⁴³ Ibid. 494.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 495-496.

Alexandrinus, as a teacher then preceptor in the Catechetical School of Alexandria, exerted a powerful influence on a young student named Origen. Clemens became a Christian under his predecessor, Pantaenus, after having devoted himself to gnostic philosophy; and during the latter part of his life formed a cadre of disciples who largely molded a different view of the church. Caius and Dionysius were two other primary figures who chided the early “primitive” church for being ignorant and superstitious. These *enlightened* and *learned* four – Clemens, Caius, Origen, and Dionysius – arose to bring a new “light” to *the consciousness of the church*.⁴⁵

Consequential changes emerge in the fourth century which will be identified and discussed in the next chapter. Meanwhile, in as much chronological order as possible, the thoughts and views of several key early church fathers are now presented.

Barnabas: In the Epistle of Barnabas (about 100 AD), considered one of the earliest post-apostolic works written, several commentaries are found which reveal the author’s view regarding the premillennial precept. In chapter 1 of his epistle, Barnabas is seen ascribing to the prophets especially to John and the *Apocalypse*, “For the Lord hath made known to us by the prophets both the things which are past and present, giving us also the first fruits of the knowledge of things to come, which things we see accomplished...we ought with the greater richness of faith...draw near to Him with reverence.”⁴⁶

In chapter 4, *Antichrist is at hand: Let us avoid Jewish errors*. The term Antichrist is used only four times in Scripture in 1st and 2nd John, by the Apostle John. Yet the

⁴⁵ Ibid. 497

⁴⁶ Donaldson and Roberts, *Writings of the Apostolic Fathers: Mathetes, Polycarp, Barnabas and Papias* (San Bernardino: Veritatis Splendor Publications, 2014), 83.

following is closely reflective, from not only Daniel, but also from John's Apocalypse, chapter 13:

Ten kingdoms shall reign upon the earth, and a little king shall rise up after them, who shall subdue under one, three of the kings....And I beheld the fourth beast, wicked and powerful, and more savage than all the beasts of the earth, and how from it sprang up ten horns, and out of them a little budding horn, and how it subdued under one, three of the great horns.⁴⁷

Thus, another indicator of his Millenarian view.

In chapter 12, Barnabas quotes Psalm 110:1 "*The Lord said to my Lord, sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies Your footstool.*" Also quoted is Isaiah 45:1 "*The Lord said to my Lord whose right hand I have held that the nations shall be subdued before Him, and I shall loose the armor of Kings.*" Clearly a reflection of the kingdom yet to come after all the King's enemies have been conquered and the nations subjugated to His rule.⁴⁸

However, Barnabas' disposition toward the Jews is not as sterling as is his favor for the coming Millennium. Throughout his epistle he mildly castigates the Jews chiding them for their "Jewish" errors the greatest of which is their rejection of the King. Noted at the end of chapter 4 are Barnabas' words of caution not to fall asleep in our sins, "...the wicked prince...should thrust us away from the kingdom of the Lord...behold, that after so great signs and wonders were wrought in Israel, they were thus abandoned."⁴⁹

Most interesting is chapter 13: *Christians, and not the Jews, the heirs of the covenant* in which Barnabas gives a vignette about Rebecca and her two babes, Jacob and Esau, and how the younger was blessed over the older; and likewise, the blessing received

⁴⁷ Ibid. 88.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 115.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 90.

by the younger Ephraim over the older Manasseh given by the grandfather, Jacob, who overruled the desires of the father, Joseph. The point of the vignette being that the younger shall serve the older. The Jew shall serve the Christian. The church is now the heir of the *covenant* not the Jew.⁵⁰ Also interesting is the fact that this vignette woven around two Scripture stories is almost identical to that written by Augustine 300 years later in his work *The City of God*, Book 16, chapter 42. It appears that an anti-Semitic fissure was underway well before Origen, Chrysostom, and Augustine.

Papias: Of “slender capacity,” Papias was an associate of Polycarp – both in the friendship of John himself, and of “others who had seen the Lord.” He was considered eloquent and mighty in the Scriptures. Most of what we have about Papias is from the extracts made among the fragments from the works of Irenaeus and Eusebius. One of the few extractions found in these fragments has Papias saying that there will be a millennium after the resurrection from the dead, when the personal reign of Christ will be established on this earth.⁵¹

Regarding the inspiration of the book (Revelation), Papias, noted by later church fathers, is among others (Irenaeus, Methodius, and Hippolytus), who bore entirely satisfactory testimony to it.⁵²

Polycarp: As a former student of John, it is strongly assumed that he would be in agreement with most of the major tenets of the new faith as set forth by John with the premillennial second coming and the 1000 year reign being one of them. In his Epistle to

⁵⁰ Ibid. 118-119.

⁵¹ Ibid. 145.

⁵² Ibid. 147.

the Philippians (estimated to have been written toward the middle of the second century), Polycarp, in noting the duties of deacons, youths, and virgins, exhorts all to walk worthy of His commandant and glory and exhibit righteous behavior. “If we please Him in this present world,” he continues, “we shall receive also the future world, according as He has promised to us that He will raise us again from the dead, and that if we live worthy of Him, ‘we shall reign together with Him.’”⁵³ Reign with Him over what? The Millennial Kingdom.

In the opening paragraph of the *Introductory Note to the Epistle Concerning the Martyrdom of Polycarp*, the following is embedded, “As an encyclical of one of ‘the seven churches’ to another of the same Seven, and as bearing witness to their aggregation with others into the unity of ‘the Holy and Catholic Church.’”⁵⁴ This is a direct reference to the seven churches mentioned in the 2nd and 3rd chapters of Revelation. This, portion of Revelation vision may even have been verbally imparted to Polycarp from John himself before he passed.

Justin Martyr: Lived between 100 – 165 AD in the general area of Samaria between Judea and Galilee. His major works include *First Apology*, written to the Emperor Antoninus Pius and his adopted sons; *Second Apology*, addressed to the Roman senate; and *Dialogue with Trypho*. Of the three, Dialogue with Trypho the Jew is the most widely known and referenced. His work packages the whole of Christianity as it emerges from apostolic era. In a dialogue with a Jewish rabbi, Trypho, Justin Martyr presents the major tenets of this fledgling faith via a forensic debate setting. The debate covered a variety of

⁵³ Ibid. 46.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 55.

topics such as the disposition of the Jewish people and their future. Whether Jesus was the promised Messiah, and if so, whether the deity of Christ can be reconciled with Jewish monotheism. The dialogue also dealt with the status of the Mosaic Law and its sacrifices, which to the Christian was replaced by faith in the redemptive blood of Christ. “Being kosher,” notes Justin, “will not save you.” A topic useful to this thesis is Justin’s view on the second coming and the kingdom – a view he was not reluctant to share.

Of the 142 chapters of the written verse of his dialogue with the Rabbi, six deal specifically with the Second Advent and the kingdom. In chapter XXXI, *If Christ’s Power Be Now So Great, How Much Greater At The Second Coming*, Justin argues if so great a power follows this age of His suffering, how great shall that be which shall follow His glorious [second] advent. He then describes the scene from Daniel 7:13 (also Revelation 1:7), “*And behold, One like the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven!*” He also gives a generalized account of the four beast kingdoms, as depicted in Daniel and Revelation, giving particular attention to the ferocity of the fourth beast from which ten horns appeared, and of the little horn which arises after them speaking blasphemy against the Most High. He concludes this short discourse by noting that after *a time, times, and half time* judgment comes to destroy the little horn and his dominion, and the great places of the kingdoms under the heavens were given to the holy people of the Most High to reign with Him in an everlasting kingdom.⁵⁵

Chapter LII, *Jacob Predicted Two Advents of Christ*, depicts the patriarch Jacob as prophesying two advents of Christ. In the first, He would suffer after which no prophet or king would appear to the nation Israel; and that those who believed in the suffering Christ

⁵⁵ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* (San Bernardino: Beloved Publishing, 2017), 34-35.

would look for His future appearance. He ends this particular dialogue with a prosaic view of Christ's first coming on the foal of an ass as a suffering *Askelonite*, then the view transcends into one of desolation with the land laid to waste and forsaken like a lodge in a vineyard, and finally the scene ends with 'And He shall be the desire of nations.' All meant symbolically to show His two advents.⁵⁶

In chapter LXXX, *The Opinion of Justin with Regard To The Reign Of A Thousand Years*, Justin, in reply to Trypho's doubts about a possible future rebuilding of Jerusalem, acknowledges his choice to not follow men's doctrines but those of God delivered by Him. He continues by chastising the Sadducees and other groups who believe in no resurrection and further declares that he and other right minded Christians are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead and a thousand years [Revelation 20] in Jerusalem which will be rebuilt, adorned, and enlarged as declared by the prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah.⁵⁷

Chapter LXXXI is the last chapter which speaks broadly about the King and His kingdom. *He Endeavors To Prove This Opinion From Isaiah And The Apocalypse* is the chapter header with the first phrase declaring, "For Isaiah spake thus concerning this space of a thousand years: 'For there shall be the new heaven and the new earth, and the former shall not be remembered, or come into their heart....'"⁵⁸ The 1000 year time designation is only recorded in the 20th chapter of Revelation, but the character of the kingdom is outlined in many Old Testament prophetic books, Isaiah being one of the best. Isaiah 65 gives a good description of what life may be like in the true kingdom. The young man shall be a hundred years, but the sinner who dies at a hundred years old shall be accursed. The wolves

⁵⁶ Ibid. 59-60.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 96-97.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 97.

and the lambs shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like an ox. *“They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, says the Lord”* (Isaiah 65:25).

However, once again, an early church father expresses an anti-Jewish sentiment regarding the future of the Jews. Justin’s chapter XXVI header, *No Salvation To The Jews Except Through Christ*, is a true - during this age of grace. Israel’s rejection of her Messiah brought dire consequences to the Jews and to the nation resulting in a temporary blindness which was revealed by Paul in Romans 11:25a. But Justin’s response ignores Paul’s conclusion noted in the second half of verse 25 and verse 26, *“...blindness in part...until the fullness of the gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written, ‘The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness away from Jacob.’”*

Irenaeus: Lived between 125 - 202 was born in Smyrna and later became bishop of Lugdunum which is now the city of Lyon located in southeastern France. As mentioned earlier, he studied under Polycarp and is primarily noted for his robust work *Against Heresies* written around 180 AD. This work is comprised of five books each having numerous short thematic chapters. *Against Heresies* is both a refutation of Gnosticism and an apologetic for the Christian faith. Depending upon the nature and perspective of the heretical element he is refuting, one finds Irenaeus moving about the entire breadth of Scripture and repeating key passages, or paraphrasing them, two or three times to suit a particular argument.

Germane to the theme of this writing, he references portions of the Apocalypse in conjunction with the prophet Daniel and often presents a medley of passages from both books in presenting a homogenized view. Oddly, he never uses the term millennium but

the view of Christ's return and the glorious kingdom to come is present throughout. Of great interest is his use of the term *dispensation* no less than 67 times throughout this work – the dispensation of the Law; the dispensation of the Church; the new dispensation of liberty, the covenant, through the new advent of His Son (Book III, chapter X), and the dispensations of God (Book IV, chapter XXII). This may surprise many Christians who today have been wrongly taught that dispensationalism is a recent product of J. N. Darby and C. I. Scofield.

In Book III, chapter XVI, Irenaeus references the Davidic Covenant when noting that God would raise up from the fruit of David's body an eternal King. A promise He made to Abraham a long time previously. Irenaeus quotes Matthew 1:1, "*The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.*" He then continues with the prophecy and other salient aspects of Christ's first coming.⁵⁹

In Book IV, chapter XX, Irenaeus uses another medley of biblical passages which he again paraphrases into a homily. This homily is an effort to depict some of God's physical attributes and ways of revealing Himself. "That one God formed all things by means of His Word and the Holy Spirit...He is not unknown...His works do declare Him...in many modes He may be seen and known."⁶⁰ Toward the end of this chapter, Irenaeus uses the Old Testament scene of Moses and the burning bush in relating that Moses was told by God that he could not look upon the face of God and live. In another scene, Daniel's fiery furnace account, we see another facet of God's physicality being revealed - the appearance of a fourth presence as one "*like the Son of God*" (Daniel 3: 25).

⁵⁹ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* (San Bernardino: Beloved Publishing, 2017), 257-258.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 348.

Then God is represented “*as stone cut of a mountain without hands*” (Daniel 2:45). Irenaeus then draws attention to the Apocalypse by describing yet another appearance of God among the seven golden candlesticks “*One like the Son of Man*” (Revelation 1:13).

Though chapter XX primary theme deals with the many ways God physically reveals Himself, Irenaeus has no problem with using scenes throughout the book of Revelation to augment his argument. Essentially, he is quite comfortable with John’s work as he weaves it into his narrative.

In Book V, chapter I, Irenaeus argues that Abraham and the other prophets beheld Him in a prophetic manner foretelling what would come to pass. He remarks:

“...for He was not that which He seemed to be...that Abraham and the other prophets held Him after a prophetic manner...If such a being has now appeared in outward semblance different from what He was in reality, there has been a certain prophetic vision made to men; and *another advent* [emphasis added] of His must be looked forward to, in which He has now been seen in prophetic manner.”⁶¹

In Book V, chapter XXIV, Irenaeus describes the Antichrist – a term only used by John four times – as coming to power imposing himself as God. He reiterates the prophecy spoken of by Daniel, mentioned by the King in Matthew 24, and described in great detail in Revelation 13, that of the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place. Obviously, this is a future event to Irenaeus because the penning of his work is over a hundred years after the destruction of the Temple. He continues by paraphrasing Revelation 13:5-7 which depicts the Antichrist speaking blasphemies against God and against His Name, and waging war against the saints and prevailing against them. He further adds that the Ancient of Days (a reference to Revelation 1:14 and parallel passage

⁶¹ Ibid. 428.

Daniel 7:9) will come (the Second Advent) and give judgment to the saints and at that time then the saints shall obtain the *kingdom*.⁶² Thus, particularly in Book V, Irenaeus speaks to a future *coming* and a future *kingdom*.

Irenaeus, in concluding this fine work, speaks to a restoration of the Jews. Free from a jaundiced view of the Jews, noted by other early fathers, he expounds the prophecy of national Jewish restoration as declared in Isaiah 26; and in Ezekiel 37:12-14, “*Behold. I will open your tombs and bring you forth out of your graves...and I will put breath in you...and I will place you in your own land and you shall know that I am the Lord.*” From Jeremiah 23 he quotes, “*Behold, the days come, says the Lord that they shall no more say, The Lord lives who led the children...from every region where they had been driven; He will restore them to their own land which He gave their fathers.*”⁶³ Most assuredly, throughout his work, Irenaeus is describing a future second coming of the King and a resurrection of the saints and a restoration of the Jew, both of whom will partake of a future kingdom. This has not happened now. It has only recently begun to happen starting on May 14th, 1948 – the rebirth of the nation of Israel after almost 1900 years of total dispersion.

Tertullian: Born in Carthage, around 155, is said to be the first Christian father to write in Latin. Little is known about his early life aside from licentious living. In mid-life, he converted to Christianity after being profoundly affected by the testimonies of Christians who were martyred in the Roman arena. Later as an ordained presbyter in the church at Carthage, he began to write about issues facing the church of his day. In response

⁶² Ibid. 481-483.

⁶³ Ibid. 503-504.

to a heresy about the Godhead, Tertullian wrote *Against Praxus*, which for the first time used the word *trinity* to describe the Godhead. Concerning the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, Tertullian explains that three are one substance, not one person. Like many early church fathers he argued against the gnostic influence which permeated throughout Roman culture and was finding its way into the church.

He is best remembered for his work *The Apology* in which he defends the church against persecutions of the state and defines religious liberty as an unalienable right of man.⁶⁴ In this relatively short work (83 pages - modern edition), Tertullian does address a *nobler dispensation* in which God, in the last days of the world, would choose for Himself more faithful worshipers upon whom He would bestow His grace. These would come from every nation, people, and country.⁶⁵ This strongly suggests His coming to gather the faithful to establish His kingdom – a nobler dispensation – something that was *not then* and surely is *not now*.

Tertullian well understood the theological position of the Jews as he remarks that the Jews were well aware their Messiah was coming as foretold by the prophets. They expected the advent to occur soon, but the point of contention between the Christians and the Jews was that the Christians believed that Christ had already come in the lowliness of human form as a sacrifice for sin and that a second coming was to happen near the *close* of the world. The Jews, on the other hand, misunderstood the first coming and looked upon our view of a second coming as, in their view, the first one yet to come. This is the one on which they set their hopes.⁶⁶ Though portrayed briefly in this short work, it is clear that

⁶⁴ Tertullian, *The Apology* (San Bernardino: Beloved Publishing, 2017), 62.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 37.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 39.

Tertullian looked favorably upon a future second coming of the King to gather His faithful people into a kingdom He would then establish.

Other lesser studied early fathers like Nepos, Clement of Rome, and Ignatius are referred to as being premillennialists as well. George Peters notes that three later writers, Seiss, Shimeall, and Taylor have quoted sufficiently from these early fathers to show that they were *Chiliastic*. Clement's allusion to *preaching the coming of Christ*, of Christ's coming *suddenly* and *quickly*, and expecting the Kingdom of God to come at any time because we do not know *the day of His appearing*. Of Ignatius it was noted that he speaks about *the last times*, and of *expecting Him who is above all time*.⁶⁷

Judge Jones, under the name of Philo-Basilicus (*Literature*, vol. 3, *Essays*, p. 73), remarks that all the Fathers whose writings have come down to us, previous to Origen, and some who were contemporary, and some who were subsequent to him, believed this (Chiliastic) doctrine; and their belief cannot be disproved. In short, the doctrine of the millennium was generally believed in the three first and purist ages; and this belief was one principle cause of the fortitude of the primitive Christians⁶⁸

In addition, Peters quotes Dr. Bennet (*Works*, vol. 2. P. 184), "The Millennial Kingdom of Christ was *the general doctrine* of the Primitive Church *from* the time of the apostles to the Council of Nice, inclusively."⁶⁹

Summary: The best summary to conclude this chapter depicting the early church view of the coming King and His *millennial* kingdom is best given by the previously noted

⁶⁷ Peters, I, 482.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

“anti-millennialist” Daniel Whitby. In his *Treatise on Tradition*, Whitby impartially observes that for the first 250 years the chiliastic or millennial view was held by the apostles and the primitive church fathers. Moreover, the fathers of the second and third centuries speak of the *tradition* of our Lord and His apostles, and of all the ancients that lived before them. They tell us the *very words* used in its delivery, *which Scriptures* were then so interpreted, and that *it was held by all Christians who were considered orthodox*.⁷⁰

Finally, it needs to be said that these early millennial believing church fathers were well dispersed throughout the Empire and not just clustered in one or two locations. Geographically, they were also representative of Christianity as a whole. Not so with the rise of the anti-millennial view which, as will be shown, was a product of Alexandria and its gnostic influence.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 483.

CHAPTER 6 – THE MILLENNIAL VIEW OF THE PATRISTIC CHURCH

It has been shown that for the first two and one-half centuries the early church was predominately premillennial in their view of the King who would return to establish His kingdom. The King comes back *first*, then establishes His millennial reign. Hence His coming is *pre* millennial. Most early Christians accepted the prophetic perspective, as recorded by John in the Apocalypse, which included having a kingdom with a 1000 year duration. In essence, the King would come again as the Son of Man in great power and glory (Matthew 24:30) to conquer the earth dwellers who are arrayed in battle against Him (Revelation 19:15). After this final tribulation battle, Satan would immediately be bound for a 1000 years and then the King would then establish His 1000 year kingdom (Revelation 20:1-7).

This view, however, was not without its distractors; and early on, not without a false perception of the Jews. Three basic factors can be said to have contributed to a change from the premillennial view of the early post-apostolic or primitive church to the non-millennial view of the later patristic church:

1. Perception: A false perception began to appear in the early church that God was done with the Jews and Israel.
2. A second hermeneutic: The influence of Greek philosophy and Gnosticism brought about the use of a second hermeneutic, the allegory, as a way to interpret Scripture, particularly, prophecy.

3. Becoming the state church: The transition – almost overnight - from an apologetic church of “persecution and prayer” to a patristic church of “position and power.”

The false perception that God was done with Israel and the Jews brought about a castigation of the Jews which began to permeate among the early Christians, thus creating a fissure in the fledgling church. The first persecutors of the early Christians were the Jews themselves, particularly, the Jewish leadership. As Saul, the Apostle Paul before his conversion, was “Persecutor in Chief” as we see in Acts 7:54-60 through 8:1-3, the stoning of Stephen. After his conversion, Paul wrote one of the most pro Jewish doctrines of the early church – Romans 9, 10, and 11. However, the persecution of the early church by the Jewish leadership continued until the Romans, under Titus, sacked Jerusalem and destroyed the temple in 70 AD. Though most of the New Testament church was comprised of Jews, as time progressed greater numbers of gentiles were added so that by the end of the first century the church became predominantly gentile. And human nature being what it is, various degrees of animus against the Jews was bound to exist in this fledgling church, not only due to persecution by the Jews, but also because of the Jews rejection of their Messiah which allowed God’s grace and blessings to be offered to the gentiles (Romans 11:11 and Ephesians 3:6).

Paul warns gentiles not to be conceited and take a dim view of the Jews in his *grafting in the wild branches* discourse in Romans 11:20-21, “*Do not be haughty but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either.*” Paul further declares in verse 25, “*...lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the gentiles has come in.*” In verse 28 Paul

writes, “Concerning the gospel they [Jews] are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers.”

These few verses are an apologetic against anti-Semitism. However, some of the early church leaders, as previously noted, and most of the patristic church fathers well received the first half of verse 28 but seemingly ignored the second half of the verse; thus creating a canyon out of a fissure. John Chrysostom, who railed not only against the Jews, but also against the *Judaizers* – those Christians who adopted, or continued practicing Judaism – was most vehement in his invective. Chrysostom prepared eight homilies against fraternizing with the Jews and their customs, and equated Arianism with Judaism. One of his homilies consisted of a collage of passages from Jeremiah which depicted the synagogue as “harlots brow;” “a den of wild animals;” and “when God forsakes a place it becomes a dwelling place for demons.” This kind of harangue, though hyperbolic in nature, stands tall in the archives of the church.⁷¹

Chief of these patristic fathers was Augustine who, in his colossal work *The City of God* (Book XVII, chapter 7) remarks, “The Lord hath rent the kingdom from Israel out of thine hand;’ that the words ‘out of thine hand’ may be understood to mean ‘from Israel’...’till I put all thine enemies under thy feet.’ And among them is Israel, from whom as His persecutor, Christ took away the kingdom.”⁷² Though less vitriolic than Chrysostom’s diatribe, Augustine’s jaded view of the Jews, through his influential works, became a standard for the church henceforth; particularly, under the flourishing papal system of the Medieval church.

⁷¹ Robert Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2004), 124.

⁷² Saint Augustine, *City of God*, ed. Marcus Dods (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2014), 528.

The practice of using a second hermeneutic arose in the early first century AD when Philo used the *allegory* to harmonize Judaism with contemporary Greek philosophy. The term allegory comes from the ancient Greek for “to speak so as to imply something other.”⁷³ The allegory always has some hidden meaning below the surface. Philo, whose birthplace and home was Alexandria, was considered a Hellenistic Jew who believed that a strict literal interpretation of Hebrew Scripture would cloud man’s perception of a God too complex to be understood in literal terms. Philo can be credited for laying groundwork for further allegorical interpretations of Scripture through some of his deliberations such as denying the advent of a personal Messiah under the influence of ‘the idealistic element and Grecian culture.’ But he still held that the golden age of the prophets would be brought about by some extraordinary appearance from heaven. This shows how early, under *Alexandrian* philosophy, the view of the covenanted kingdom was abandoned by naysayers and distractors, and substituted with a more “acceptable” interpretation.⁷⁴

According to Eusebius, a “Hellenistic Christian” named Pantaenus was one of the earliest teachers of the Alexandrian Catechetical School (the *Didascalia*). Scant are the records but some believe he may have been the first head of the school around 180 AD.⁷⁵ His successor, Clemens Alexandrinus (Clement of Alexandria), exerted a powerful influence as a teacher at the beginning of the third century. Like Philo, he was greatly influenced by Greek philosophy; and as an early naysayer, he opposed the primitive church view of a kingdom preceded by a second advent. One of his star pupils was Origen.

⁷³ Literary Devices, “Allegory,” accessed October 29, 2017, <http://www.literarydevices.com/allegory/>

⁷⁴ Peters, 3, 187.

⁷⁵ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. C. F. Cruse (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 166.

Origen: Origen, 185 – 254, was a child prodigy who became voracious writer. Of his many works, the *Hexapla* and *De Principiis* are probably his most famous. The *Hexapla*, is a massive six-fold side by side translation of the Old Testament having six parallel columns: two in Hebrew, and the other four in Greek.

Origen's primary work, *De Principiis* (On First Principles), was the first systematic exposition of Christian theology ever written. He is the first Bible scholar to analyze the Scriptures on three levels: the literal, the moral, and the allegorical. Origen preferred the allegorical not only because it allowed for more spiritual interpretations, but many passages he found impossible to read literally: ‘Now what man of intelligence will believe that the first and the second and the third day ... existed without the sun and moon and stars?’ Origen's method of interpretation became the standard into the Middle-Ages. In this work he created a Christian “philosophy” which used Greek technique to harmonize “unexplainable” biblical truths.⁷⁶ This method of interpretation would be used extensively by Augustine a hundred years later.

In Origen's *De Principiis*, one finds that Origen ruminates a fair amount over the spiritual versus the material. In Book II, chapter VII, *The Holy Spirit*, He acknowledges that in the last days all nations shall serve Him; and by the grace of the Holy Spirit, only a few persons will fully perceive those things written in the Law and by the prophets. They will look beyond the mere corporeal meaning and discover something greater, something spiritual in the Law and in the prophets.⁷⁷ Origen appears to uplift any spiritual

⁷⁶ Christianity Today, “Origen,” accessed October 29, 2017. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/scholarsandscientists/origen.html>

⁷⁷ Origen, *De Principiis* (San Bernardino: Beloved Publishing, 2017), 88.

connotations of the Law and the prophets while subtly underplaying anything corporeal or material. Gnostic? The Law and the prophets speak to *both* the spiritual and material.

In Book II, chapter XI, *On Counter Promises*, Origen makes reference to the King declaring that He shall not drink of this cup until He drinks it with His disciples in His Father's kingdom. This promise was made at a corporeal event (The last supper) to physical people partaking food and drink. Likewise, the fulfillment of His promise will also be corporeal in nature in a real kingdom. Origen, however, subtly infers that such a view – *what now is, should exist again* - held by those believing in Christ understand the Scriptures in a Jewish sense, but draw nothing from them worthy of divine promise. Was there some hidden spiritual aspect in the King's promise that the disciples and the early Christians of that era missed? Origen continues in this spiritualizing mode by further augmenting his inferred view with the notion that the saints will indeed eat, but it will be the bread of life which will nourish the soul with truth and wisdom and enlighten the mind and cause them to drink from the cup of divine wisdom. He then adds Proverbs 9:1-2, "*Wisdom has...mixed her wine....She has prepared her table.*" as a final nuance to his spiritual perspective of the King's promise to His disciples.⁷⁸

The problem with this viewpoint is that Wisdom, as addressed in Proverbs 9, *is a metaphor*; and the bread that nourishes the soul with truth, wisdom, and enlightenment causing one to drink from the cup is indicative of Greek thought which exalts wisdom, understanding, and enlightenment over the corporeal. Origen offers a highly spiritualized version of the King's kingdom promise to His disciples as a superior alternative to the inferior literal Jewish view of a simple promise to keep a date.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 112.

In Book III, chapter VI. *On the End of the World*, Origen again reveres the spiritual over the temporal or material by noting the comeliness, splendor, and brilliancy of a spiritual body. Further in the chapter he again describes that the whole bodily nature will consist of one species, and the sole quality of the body shall shine in the indescribable glory which is to be regarded as the future possession of the spiritual body.⁷⁹ He offers no identification whether this body may be a resurrected body or a translated body as noted by the Apostle Paul in I Corinthians 15.

Regarding the kingdom, in Book I, chapter VI, Origen states, “Until we all come in the unity of faith to a perfect man to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...he [Paul] exhorts us, who even in the present life are placed in the *Church, in which is the kingdom to come*” [emphasis added].⁸⁰ And in Book III, Chapter VI, Origen introduces a form of a kingdom which does not include the reign of Christ only His agents and servants who will make preparations and introduce better institutions to which no addition can be made. Then the “Lord Christ, who is King of all, will Himself assume the kingdom (the eternal state?); after instruction in the holy virtues”⁸¹ It appears that Origen still acknowledged a kingdom yet to come but his illusion of it appears to be the church. Origen’s penchant for harmonizing Scripture with Greek thought creates a highly spiritualized interpretation while at the same time casting a shadow on a more literal interpretation which is considered base and too Jewish.

With Origen, an early nexus was reached which combined a jaundiced view of the Jews with an allegorical interpretation of much of Scripture through the lens of Greek

⁷⁹ Ibid. 199-202.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 43.

⁸¹ Ibid. 203.

philosophy. Basically, this mixing of aforementioned factors 1) and 2) sets the foundation on which the most notable patristic church father, Augustine, will base his greatly influential work *The City of God*.

This homogenous perspective of Origen's was a product of the *Didascalia* which was the Alexandrian school mentioned earlier. This school was believed to have been established in the mid first century and was flourishing at the time Constantine adopted Christianity in 313, in a mode of tolerance, and later in 380 when Theodosius declared Christianity the sole religion of the empire. Most assuredly, now that the church had transitioned from one of persecution to one of position and power, the apologetic approach would be superseded by one that would be more authoritative following the Alexandrian mold. When read closely, the widely accepted Nicene Creed is reflective of this mold.

In 325, Constantine convened a council of bishops and church leaders at Nicea in an attempt to solidify church doctrine, especially regarding the issues of the Trinity and the deity and humanity of Jesus Christ. Through much deliberation, the council adopted what is known today as the *Nicene Creed*. In 381, at the Council of Constantinople, the decree was expanded slightly to more fully embrace the concept of the Trinity, but was still referred to as the Nicene Creed.

The creed is a confession of belief of the essentials of the First Advent – its prophecy, Christ's deity and humanity, Christ's work of atonement, the view of the Trinity, and Christ's resurrection and coming again to judge the living and the dead. The term kingdom is only mentioned once in the phrase, "and His kingdom shall have no end."⁸² There is no mention of the kingdom as distinct entity having a specific beginning or end,

⁸² The Episcopal Church, *Book of Common Prayer* (Seabury Press, 1979), 358-359.

or specific duration such as 1000 years. There is no intimation that this is the covenant kingdom, promised to the Jews, of which Christ will establish at His second coming and reign as King for 1000 years. The term kingdom used in this creed quite probably means the *eternal state*. Hence, the Alexandrian school appears to command the doctrine of the church a hundred years before Augustine's *City of God*.

Of Origen and this change of perspective of the kingdom by the new state church, George Peters quotes Johan Mosheim (*Ecclesial History*, 3rd Century, section 12), "...in this century the Millenarian doctrine fell into disrepute, *through the influence especially of Origen...who opposed it because it contravened some of his opinions.*" And in Mosheim's *Commentary of the First Three Centuries* (volume 2, section 38) he observes, "Among the Jewish opinions to which this age *philosophy* proved detrimental, *the most important* was that of the reign of Christ a thousand years with His saints restored to their bodies.... *And down to the time of Origen*, all teachers who were so disposed openly professed and taught it...But *Origen assailed it fiercely for, for it was repugnant to his philosophy...*" Again Mosheim notes, "...the literal interpretation was finally crushed. He thus contrasts the interpretation adopted by two systems. He (Origen) wished to have the literal and obvious sense of the words disregarded, and *an arcane sense*, lying concealed in the envelope of words to be sought for."⁸³

Peters' observation makes for a fine concluding "touch" in our discussion of Origen and the change of perspective now held by the state church regarding the premillennial view:

⁸³ Peters, 1, 500.

“In its dualistic theories...its evolutions of the Divine, it *struck a heavy blow* to the promised kingship of *the Son of Man* as David’s Son; it *changed* the royal title of ‘The Messiah,’ ‘the Christ’ into a mere name equivalent to that of Jesus; it *disregarded* as foolish, or received as containing a *hidden* meaning, the prophecies relating to this future Kingdom; and with its peculiar tenets of making man rise to God Himself...it *rejected altogether* the notion of such a Kingdom contained in the letter of the Holy Writ, and believed in by contemporary Christians.”⁸⁴

George Peters moves on to discuss the church under Constantine as one of remodeling it to conform to the government of the state making it, through imperial favor, the popular channel of religion. Thus, the church became an easy road to prestige, rank, power, and riches for the aspiring church clergy; and under this *intoxication*, instead of looking for the Messianic Kingdom to come, they now taught that the prophecies regarding the kingdom were being fulfilled. Those of the church hierarchy now asserted that the kingdom itself was already established under Constantinian splendor.⁸⁵

A change took place in the minds of these men, when forsaking the plain teaching of Scripture and the early faith, they permitted themselves to be blinded by the outward popularity of the state-union and the imperial friendship conferred upon the church. Under the state church, Christians, who were just recently emancipated from oppression and persecution, began to lose their expectations of a speedy second coming, and the spiritual conception of His kingdom; and began to look upon the *temporal supremacy* of Christianity as a fulfillment of the promised reign of Christ on earth. Thus, the Roman Empire become “Christian” and was no longer regarded as an object of prophetic condemnation, but became the scene of *millennial* development.⁸⁶ Before Constantine, the early apologetic church always held that the Antichrist was associated with Rome.

⁸⁴ Ibid. 501.

⁸⁵ Ibid. 505

⁸⁶ Ibid. 505.

Peters refers to Karl Auberlen in noting that millennialism disappeared in proportion to Catholicism's advance. Later the papacy took to itself, *as a robbery*, that glory which being an object of hope can only be reached by obedience and the humility of the cross. When the church became a harlot, she ceased to be a bride who goes out to meet her bridegroom, thus the premillennial perspective disappeared.⁸⁷

Sadly, Peters describes the impact that this had on the Jewish community. Nothing contributed so greatly to the destruction of the bond of faith between gentile and the Jew as did this removal – through gnostic and Alexandrian influence – of the distinctive Jewish idea of the Messiahship and the resultant kingdom. Peters further notes that the gentile Christians, in their animosity to Judaism, carried out their legality and ritualism to such an extreme that everything that had a flavor of Judaism was cast aside, including the long entertained Jewish notion of the Kingdom.⁸⁸ The new state church now prepared for a long continued period of privilege, position, pomp, and prosperity and conveniently forgot about the future glory of a millennial kingdom.

Augustine: From 354 to 430, is perhaps considered the greatest of all the church fathers. Born in the old province of Numidia, North Africa, his early life was spent in licentious behavior before his conversion at the age of 30. Many of his rowdy and licentious activities are recounted in his early work *The Confessions*. After his conversion, Augustine eventually decided to become a catechumen in the Catholic Church of Milan after hearing the sermons of Bishop Ambrose. Ambrose showed him how to appreciate

⁸⁷ Ibid. 499.

⁸⁸ Ibid. 504.

the Bible in spiritual terms through Greek philosophical concepts from which Augustine recognized how his carnal activity had impeded his *spiritual* self.

As a brilliant man and a prolific writer, Augustine was appointed Bishop of Hippo, in 391, where remained his entire life. There he wrote his two most famous works *The Confessions* and *The City of God*. Augustine was an ardent defender of the faith and like many of the early church fathers who preceded him he continued to battle against the prevailing heresies of the day. These heresies often hailed from within the church as deviations from accepted church doctrine. Much of what we believe today regarding Christ's deity, Christ's testimony, and the aspects of sin and salvation we owe to Augustine.⁸⁹

If Origen laid the foundation for the allegorical perspective, Augustine built the resultant structure upon it. In his explanation of the necessity for allegory, Augustine argues that the Bible was a work for philosophers and not laymen to understand. He then brilliantly weaves *Neoplatonism* into much of Scripture which results in a highly spiritualized view of his crumbling Roman world in light of prophecy and biblical truth.

His primary work, *The City of God*, was written during the last years of his life as Rome continued in decline. Augustine worked doggedly through a lofty argument which outlined a new concept of human society, one of establishing the City of God over the decaying pagan ridden City of Man. This colossal work consisting of 22 books depicts, as its primary theme, the heavenly city of Jerusalem as the true home and source of citizenship for all Christians; whereas, the City of Man is depicted as the Roman Empire doomed to

⁸⁹ John Hannah, *Church History, Vol. 2* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2004), 25.

decay. And wherein, Christians are just sojourners living in this decaying Roman world as pilgrims longing to return home. One can easily get lost in the milieu of arguments presented by Augustine in rebuttal to the pagan claim that Christianity, through Christian emperors, was to blame for the decline of the Roman Empire.

Briefly, In Book 14, chapter 28, Augustine describes the nature of the two cities. One is "...*earthly* by the love of self, even to the contempt of God: the *heavenly* by the love of God, even to the contempt of self."⁹⁰

In Book 15, chapter 20, gives pause for thought and question "...the heavenly city, which sojourns on earth..." The context of the passage in which this phrase is embedded appears to denote that God made some vessels of wrath to dishonor and other vessels of mercy to honor. Punishment is due to the vessels of wrath but punishment is not due to those vessels who are in grace; however, those vessels of grace are of the *heavenly* city which sojourns on the earth that they may learn not to put confidence in the liberty of its own free will but to call on the name of the Lord God.⁹¹ This heavenly city appears to be the church. Is this the *Kingdom of Heaven* that has come down to earth or is this just another way of describing the Body of Christ – the church?

In book 16, chapter 2, Augustine outright states, "...Christ and His church, which is the city of God, proclaimed from the very beginning of human history...."⁹² Was not the church a mystery until so noted by Christ to Peter in Matthew 16?

⁹⁰ Augustine, 430.

⁹¹ Ibid. 460.

⁹² Ibid. 472.

In Book 17, chapter 7, there appears to be a juxtapositional shift of the kingdom from Israel – though Augustine does not say it outright – to the church or to the city of God. He intimates this by first noting that the “Lord hath rent Israel out of thine hand this day.” Then, “till I put all thine enemies under they feet” among which is Israel from whom Christ took away the kingdom because as His persecutor Israel acted carnally according to the flesh. Finally, “Christ Jesus our Lord is about to reign, not carnally, but spiritually.”⁹³ At this juncture, the *kingdom* has all the appearances of being the church.

And in Book 20, chapter 8, Augustine appears to completely dismiss the bulk of Old Testament prophecy pertaining to Israel and the Jews, and brushes them aside by substituting the church as the promised Davidic kingdom. Augustine takes the parable of the strong man and applies it to the binding of Satan during the 1000 year kingdom age; thereby, allowing the church to grow “militantly” and unabated until its enemies yield, “until we come to that most peaceful kingdom in which we shall reign without an enemy.” Next, he uses the last 3 ½ years (the Great Tribulation) as set forth in Daniel’s 70th week as the little season in which Satan is released to bring about the Gog – Magog war from the four corners of the earth after which Satan is cast into the lake of fire. Of course there is no mention of the Gog – Magog of Ezekiel 38 and 39 because in doing so he would have to acknowledge Israel, and God’s victory over Israel’s enemies. This would be an inconvenient truth because Augustine has previously noted that Israel is amongst Christ’s enemies to be put *under foot* (Psalm 110:1).

Augustine does make one obvious interpretative blunder. In using the last 3 ½ years of Daniel’s 70th week - or the time of the Great Tribulation - as Satan’s short time to be

⁹³ Ibid. 528.

loosed among the nations, he errs by saying, “But when the short time comes he shall be loosed...and those with whom he makes war shall have the power to withstand all his violence and stratagems.”⁹⁴ Actually Scripture, in speaking to this particular time, is quite specific in declaring the opposite. Revelation 13:7 states, “*It was given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them....*”

Essentially, Augustine recognizes no battle of *Armageddon* (Revelation 19), wherein the Messiah returns to earth with His saints to destroy the Anti-Christ and his armies, or the establishment of a millennial kingdom (Revelation 20). Instead, it is the church of the day fighting militantly onward through a millennial age of Christian conversion which at its conclusion brings back the Messiah. Hence, Augustine believes in no second coming of the King to establish a kingdom and reign as set forth in the Davidic Covenant. Rather, through his allegorical technique, he mixes together several unrelated prophecies and ignores a vast number of others in order to establish that the “City of God” has descended from heaven to become Christ’s *kingdom of the church* on earth. To the delight of the church, Augustine’s adroit use of the allegory to transform Old Testament prophecy regarding Israel’s covenant promises of a land, a king, and a kingdom falls right in line with Origen and current church thought. Augustine’s allegorical perspective remains much in vogue today, 1600 years later.

Summary: A poor perception of the Jews is met with Origen’s allegorical interpretation of Scripture which begins to deny a future kingdom to the Jews, and instead makes the church the kingdom which is to come (*De Principiis*, Book I, chapter VI). The view of a kingdom is still futuristic but it is no longer as prophesied. When Constantine

⁹⁴ Ibid. 652-655.

allows Christianity to have equal footing in the empire in 313; and later when Christianity becomes the state religion, the church shortly thereafter, through Augustine's efforts, promotes the belief that it is now the kingdom that has "arrived from heaven." Hence, the futuristic premillennial view of the post apostolic church of prayer and persecution, which maintained that the King will come as the Son of God in great power and glory to establish His kingdom as set forth in the Davidic Covenant, was derailed. In its place, the patristic church of position and power fostered a replacement view that the *Kingdom of Heaven* had arrived on earth and was now the church.

Of this transition, George Peters also concurs. After the Gnostic ideas of the Alexandrian school obtained ascendancy, the preaching of the kingdom, so widely different from the early church fathers, was no longer reflective of Christ and the apostles because it was opposed to the kingdom presented in covenant and prophecy. The "Gospel of the Kingdom" as given by Barnabas, Irenaeus, and Justin was widely different from that presented by Augustine, Jerome, and Eusebius. The former corresponded with Old Testament writing, whereas, the latter could only be engrafted upon the Old Testament by the most *extravagant spiritualizing and perversion* of the Holy Writ.⁹⁵

Finally, Dr. Renald Showers, in quoting from Harnack's *Millennium*, XVI, p. 317, further confirms the substantial change from the premillennial view held by the *primitive* church to the church kingdom view now being fostered by *the new state church*. By Augustine's time the persecution of the church by Rome had ceased; and as the Roman Empire continued to crumble, the church stood fast ready to rule in its place. It appeared that gentile world dominion was being crushed and the church was becoming victorious

⁹⁵ Peters, 1, 509.

over it. Under these circumstances Augustine concluded that premillennialism was obsolete and no longer applied to this changing situation. In its place he developed the concept that the church is now the foretold Kingdom of the Messiah; and in his work *City of God*, he became the first to teach that the organized Catholic Church is the Messianic Kingdom, and that the millennium began with the *first* coming of Christ.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Showers, 132-133.

CHAPTER 7 – THE MILLENNIAL VIEW OF LATER

SCHOLARS AND CRITICS

Fast forwarding a 1000 years from Augustine and the inception of the church kingdom as a staple of church doctrine we come to the Reformation era and a host of “enlightenment” critics. This thesis will not endeavor to delve deeply into the many aspects of the Reformation. Instead it will draw attention to a few reform leaders and later, enlightenment critics, whose commentary may shed light on the view of the millennium during this two to three hundred year period. The church view of the millennium during this time of Reformation was not one that evoked a lot of excitement and attention. The Reformation’s main thrust was to clean up the corruption and greed of the church clergy, and to extricate the pure doctrine of redemption that had been laid to ruin over a 1000 years of unbridled power and abuse.

In his book, *A Woman Rides the Beast*, Dave Hunt capsulizes the situation: “That system...gathered momentum through the centuries by the lust and greed of popes whose natural propensity for evil (innate in us all) found occasion through the unusual opportunities afforded by their office.”⁹⁷

Reformation’s Martin Luther is well known for his stance against church corruption and doctrinal abuse, but he is something of an enigma when it comes to prophetic Scripture. He has been noted to have claimed that he has grounded his preaching upon the literal word, and if God really intended to make known His will to man, He must convey His truth

⁹⁷ Dave Hunt, *A Woman Rides the Beast* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 1994), 161.

to us in accordance with well-known rules of language. He continues with, "...instead of seeking a sense which the words themselves do not contain, we are primarily to obtain the sense that the words obviously embrace, making due allowance for the existence of figures of speech when indicated by the context, scope, or construction of the passage"⁹⁸ (Hermeneutics 101?).

Luther, in his *Comments on Galatians*, is also noted as repeatedly asserting that the existing force of the Abrahamic Covenant, rightly makes the promises of this covenant extend into the future. In his commentary, he advocates that the perpetuity of the covenant was not abolished by the Law but later confirmed when the writing of the testament facilitated the gospel being preached among all the nations. However, in his description of *the inheritance* of the covenant, he makes no mention of those things promised to the covenant people. Instead he notes such items as remission of sins, righteousness, salvation, and everlasting life⁹⁹ – not very Davidic.

This enigmatic view is highlighted by George Peters when he notes that the Reformers and those after them were not directly premillennial in their view. They – Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, and Knox - entertained, in some sense, the Augustinian view that the millennial period of 1000 years included *this* dispensation or gospel period, and was now nearing its close. Hence, they believed in a speedy advent but no future millennial kingdom *before the coming of Jesus* with the church remaining in a mixed state to the end. Furthermore, observes Peters, they still held to a dualistic interpretation of many of the issues involving the advent and a millennial kingdom. They were anti-millennial in the

⁹⁸ Peters, 1, 47.

⁹⁹ Ibid. 325.

sense of not believing in a proper millennium yet to come, but also in not believing in a millennium that had already past. Essentially, they were quite Augustinian in their view that no millennium is expected nor has one existed – a non-millennial or amillennial perspective.¹⁰⁰

Lewis Sperry Chafer also comments that the Reformers were Augustinian in their idea of a millennium; and further quotes from other sources that the attitude of the Reformers is reflected in the Augsburg Confession, Article Seventeen: “Condemn those who spread abroad Jewish opinions, that, before the resurrection of the dead, the godly shall occupy the kingdom of the world, the wicked being everywhere suppressed.” Chafer further adds that an investigation of prophetic truth was not undertaken until later and was therefore largely absent from the theological writings of the Reformers.¹⁰¹ Subsequently, the mainstream view of the return of the King and the character of His kingdom will still retain a strong Augustinian flavor for some time to come.

Luther’s comments regarding the book of Revelation may shed some light on his fractured view of prophecy, the King’s return, and the kingdom. In what is termed Luther’s *Antilegomena* (disputed books), he opines that he does not find the book of Revelation to be apostolic or prophetic. He asserts first and foremost that the apostles do not deal with visions, but prophesy in clear and plain words, as do Peter, Paul, and Christ in the gospel; and there is no prophet in the Old Testament, to say nothing of the New Testament, who deals so exclusively with visions and images. He notes that ‘I can in no way detect that the Holy Spirit produced it.’ He questions the blessing to those who read and keep the words

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 527-528.

¹⁰¹ Chafer, 4, 279.

of the book, and continues, except for Jerome, many of the fathers also rejected this book a long time ago. Finally, he declares that everyone should think of the book as his own spirit leads him. But he, in spirit, cannot accommodate himself to it, for Christ is neither taught nor known in it.¹⁰² Really? In chapter 1, One who appears like the Son of Man – Jesus Christ; In chapter 5, who is worthy to take the scroll – the Lamb as though it had been slain - Jesus Christ; chapter 6, the wrath of the Lamb – Jesus Christ; chapter 19, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords – Jesus Christ; and chapter 21, the Lamb in His temple – Jesus Christ.

Perhaps an abbreviated recent Lutheran Missions definition of *The Kingdom of God* will further illuminate Luther's kingdom conundrum:

The kingdom of God (or of heaven) is the gracious rule in the heart of Christ the King. Generally, we speak of three kingdoms: 1) kingdom of power ... God... 2) kingdom of grace – this being the church on earth... with Christ ruling the human heart, 3) kingdom of glory... heaven where all the dead in Christ await the final day.... We speak of the Holy Christian Church...on earth and those in heaven. On earth the church militant is still fighting the good fight of faith, while in heaven the church triumphant is enjoying the bliss and glory..... It is still one church with one head, Jesus. So too the kingdom is really one with one King. It could be better understood as a kingdom that is a continuum....¹⁰³

Though refined and polished over 500 years, the Lutheran view of Luther's kingdom still appears to be quite Augustinian. Very much spiritualized, no Davidic Covenant reference, no Jewish import, and appears to be all about the church. Not much has changed over the centuries.

¹⁰² Bible Research, "Luther's Antilegomena," accessed December 18, 2017, <http://www.bible-researcher.com/antilegomena.html>

¹⁰³ Lutheran Missions, "The Kingdom of God," accessed December 22, 2017, lutheranmissions.org/the-kingdom-of-god/

In perhaps the second most influential Reformer, John Calvin, we find another with a fractured view of certain portions of Scripture. George Peters observes that Calvin is not consistent with his interpretative views. For instance, in his work *Institutes of Christian Religion*, chapter 10, he is noted in saying the Old Testament as literal, because it is formulated *without the efficacy of the Spirit*, but in another portion he admits that the work of the Spirit was experienced and men were moved and spake by Him. However, he never reconciles how the Old Testament, once literal, now becomes spiritual; and when called to task regarding this his response is, “We are not subject to the letter which killeth, but to the Spirit which giveth life. The Bible contains allegories and myths which the Holy Spirit explains to us.”¹⁰⁴

In a closing overview of a portion of his work (Proposition 102. *Neither the visible nor the invisible church is the covenanted Kingdom*), Peters summarizes the prevailing kingdom view of the Reformers – Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, et al. - as one of *predicted blindness* and lack of faith in Christ’s coming, and in His kingdom, which will be characteristic of the *world and the church* before the second coming [emphasis added]. The prevailing church-kingdom view which is so deeply entrenched in the church is a departure from the earlier primitive church belief which was so widely held. The Augustinian view of the church is the one largely adopted due to the influence of *The City of God*.¹⁰⁵

150 years later an English Theologian, Daniel Whitby (1638-1725), developed a new twist to the second coming-kingdom view by contending that the kingdom or

¹⁰⁴ Peters, 1, 54.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 666-667.

millennium was yet future, but would be established by the church and its agencies. Essentially, he asserted that the second coming of the King is to follow a man-made millennium which has the church converting most of mankind in preparation for the Messiah who will then return when the conversion is complete.¹⁰⁶ This postmillennial view is often described as the “Golden age of the church.”

Though defunct for a long time, this view has found new life in the modern charismatic movement which looks to a “latter day rain” of world-wide revival just before the Messiah returns. In the closing paragraphs of his book *Floods Upon the Dry Ground*, pastor and author Charles Schmitt reveals his belief that as we draw near the twenty-first century, millions of spirit-filled believers will constitute a veritable “army of God” as the most powerful force ever seen for the evangelization of the whole world. He further concludes that the fullness of a final floodtide of God’s promised Holy Spirit will bring about the greatest harvest of souls ever recorded in human history. This revival is to bring a fuller restoration of the people of God to an expectant “virgin simplicity” as the Bride of Christ hails the return of her heavenly Bridegroom to take up His everlasting universal reign. He finally injects, “Indeed, it is our cherished hope that we ourselves shall witness in our very own life-times that ‘the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of the Lord and His Christ...’”¹⁰⁷ No mention of a great apostasy, or rapture of the church, or a time of tribulation, or the Antichrist, or Davidic Covenant, or God’s chosen people the Jews. The only difference between this view and the Augustinian view is that this view envisions a church period of “wine and roses” before the second coming, whereas, the

¹⁰⁶ Chafer, 4, 280-281.

¹⁰⁷ Charles Schmitt, *Floods upon the Dry Ground* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, Inc. 1998), 241-242.

amillennial view envisions the church in a “slug fest” with Satan and his minions before the second coming.

Throughout his monumental three-volume work *The Theocratic Kingdom*, George Peters often refers to the analogy of a kernel, with a *husk* and a *germ*, made by various critics of the premillennial view when framing the perspective of the kingdom and the King’s second coming. The husk being the premillennial view held by the apostles and the early church, and the germ is the “enlightened” spiritual view which was “uncovered” by the later patristic church influenced by Origen, Augustine, et al.

Peters notes that church historian and theologian, August Neander, used the term husk to describe the erroneous misguided kingdom view held by the Jews. He further adds if the literal meaning of the Word is not to be understood – if a hidden sense lay beneath the Word waiting for an Origen or others to reveal it - how could the Jews have derived comfort and edification from it; and how could they have entertained an enlightened faith and hope? If we reject the literal and substitute another mode of interpretation, we have created a dilemma.¹⁰⁸ Thus, the Jews have been misapprehending Scripture for centuries since the time of the prophets to the “enlightened” age of Origen and Augustine.

Neander, again, is noted as using the term husk to denote the apostolic kingdom view in that the apostles could not rid themselves of the ‘materialistic husk’ of a literal interpretation of the Word. The portion of the Word in question is 2 Corinthians 3:6, “[God] *who also made us able ministers of the new covenant, not the letter but the Spirit; for the letter kills but the Spirit gives life.*”¹⁰⁹ In this Corinthian verse, “The letter kills,”

¹⁰⁸ Peters, 1, 50.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. 53.

Paul is actually referring to the letter of the Mosaic Law not a literal interpretation of Scripture. The husk analogy is an attempt by Neander and a host of other like-minded “learned” men to continue their allegiance to the more “progressive” spiritualized view of the second coming and the kingdom as held by the more “enlightened” men of the later church. These men cast aspersions on primitive church view as being too banal, too carnal, and too Jewish.

Neander is quoted from his work, *Life of Jesus*, p. 250 on, “...that the true idea of the kingdom of God was contained in a ‘materialistic husk,’ which Neander designates...as a rough rind of the sacred bulb...this ‘husk’ was in the second or third century removed and then ‘the real kingdom of God was made clear,’ and the believers in that ‘rough rind’ by the change ‘became heretics.’”¹¹⁰

To this, Peters responds by proclaiming that we need no sacred germ created by the “consciousness of the church” with mystical high minded words. This “germ system” virtually makes the Bible “all things to all men” in a way that opens the door to a mournfully endless procession of diverse, adverse, opposite, inimical opinions, and doctrines which appear in hermeneutics, theology, and the church. He further expounds that the most dangerous attacks of unbelief against the Bible are based purely upon one’s grammatical interpretation of it.¹¹¹

In his work, George Peters identifies a host of post-Enlightenment scholars who reflect a similar mindset as August Neander regarding the second coming, the kingdom, and the enlightened process they embrace to nurture their view. A few of the more noted

¹¹⁰ Ibid. 60-61.

¹¹¹ Ibid. 61.

scholars are Charles Hodges, Johan Lange, Hermann Olshausen, William Shed, Emanuel Swedenborg, Jan Jacob Van Oosterzee, and many more. However, also during this early nineteenth century period a reemergence of the “husk,” like the phoenix rising from the ashes, was seen through the works of John Darby and his Plymouth Brethren.

Amillennialists snarl at the mention of J. N. Darby who is accused of numerous “heresies” not the least of which are dispensationalism, pretribulationism, and the reemergence of the premillennial view. In reality, the only thing that Darby is guilty of is digging deeper through the centuries of accretion deposited by the Catholic Church which had buried the fidelity of a great part of Scripture. The Reformers only scraped away enough accretion to reveal those biblical truths regarding Christ’s first coming and His gift of salvation to fallen man. But Darby, and many who followed after him, dug deeper into Scripture and began to find hidden under more layers of Romish church accretion the covenant promises to a chosen people, a real “carnal” kingdom reigning in Jerusalem, a defined second coming – premillennial in its arrival; and a way to systemize and harmonize all of this between both testaments – *dispensationalism*.

Summary: The Reformers struck a blow against the abuses of the Roman church but did little to sway the church’s entrenched amillennial view of the kingdom, and the hermeneutical method it used to promote its view. Likewise, a majority of Enlightenment era scholars retained the Reformers kingdom perception, and further characterized it as a “germ” of biblical truth being freed from its worthless “husk” - the view of the primitive church. The primitive church view being too Jewish and too carnal to be accepted. Daniel Whitby introduced his tenets of postmillennialism with the notion of a world-wide conversion to Christianity by the church. Until recently, this view has all but disappeared.

Other “scholars” and critics upheld the work of the Reformers, but like the Reformers, did nothing to vet Augustine’s gnostic view of the kingdom and the King’s second coming. However, out of the “ashes” of the discarded husk a more systemized harmonized view of Scripture arises giving new life to the much maligned premillennial view.

CHAPTER 8 – THE MILLENNIAL VIEW OF THE CHURCH TODAY

Modernity: Welcome to the modern era! An era that began with the industrial age. An age of the assembly lines, mass production, and automation. An age of capitalism and corporations whose surpluses needed warehouses for storage and dissemination; and chains of corporate outlets to sell the goods to the public.

It is also an age wherein mankind, in the last 200 years, has moved from centuries of traversing distances taking days or weeks, with the horse and buggy moving at 10 to 15 miles per hour, to a means of locomotion that traverses the same distance in mere minutes. The steam engine reduced travel time to a few days to a week; the automobile reduced travel times even more; and the airplane further reduced these travel times to mere hours of a day. Even more unimaginable is a fantasy flight in “Aspen 20”, an SR-71 “Blackbird” reconnaissance jet, with Brian Shul and Walter Watkins traveling at Mach 3.2 – 2400 mph.¹¹² Such a flight from New York would land in St. Louis in about thirty minutes.

It is an age of science and technology in which communication and information, once flowing no faster than the horse and buggy, 200 years ago, is now instantaneous. The flow of information, finance, ideas, and the minding of everybody else’s business is expedited by the telephone, the internet, and the ubiquitous cell phone. Through the use of satellites, the cell phone can be used to instantly contact someone halfway around the world.

¹¹² Bryan Shul, *Sled Driver* (Chino, CA: Mach 1, Inc. 1991), 65-67.

The visual media Google Earth allows one to take a virtual reality trip to anywhere on the planet with collateral street photography that puts one at anyone's front door or backyard. There is no place to hide. It is virtually impossible to go "off grid." This, combined with instantaneous communication and information access, in more ways than one, allows all to be exposed for anyone or everyone to see and hear and make disposition as they see fit.

This is the age reason, rationalism, and relativism. Reason, by which data and knowledge, from an exploding information age, are applied to life; and rationalizing that this knowledge and reason is a better substitute in replacing many time-honored customs, moral, or religious principles. Relativism, in that old values, standards, and mores are no longer grounded absolutes; but are now flexible and may vary with any individual or group perspective. Thus, ethics and religious principles are now discretionary depending who is applying them to what set of circumstances.

In this age of shifting values and microscopic scrutiny, much of the church is once again in an apologetic mode trying to maintain relevance in this fast-paced arena of world affairs. Unlike earlier slower times when Christianity and the church exerted more influence and control, today's educated sophisticate has no use for the musings of a homeless Jewish teacher with his ragtag band of uneducated sandal-clad fishermen spewing forth myths and fables. So, much of the church has changed its message and spread itself thin to cover the many bases of today's burning issues. In doing so, fractures, always there but hidden, are now quite noticeable.

The fractured church: Surely a kingdom established by the King in fulfillment of the prophecies could not possibly have the conflicting elements and inconsistent doctrines

that the church of today exhibits. George Peters describes a fractured church as far back as 130 years ago well before today's age of hyper-scrutiny. Antagonisms in belief, religious rivalry and warring, persecution, false doctrine, and a hostile spirit to the Messiah's kingdom have all been fractious elements within the church for hundreds of years. Peters further remarks that these fissures are not of Christ's kingdom but of a preparatory stage subject to the fallen characteristic of all believers. He also adds that each denomination subscribes to their own doctrinal exclusiveness and condemns other denominations while "sitting" in Christ's seat and claiming Christ's prerogatives of judging. Thus, excluding all others of a diverse faith from the kingdom of heaven.¹¹³

Peters later notes that church history is filled with bitter contests arising from differences in doctrine and application of faith. Every denomination or division can call to mind its martyrs who fell in defense of its particular tenet of church theology. Peters then asks if such a sad diversity is consistent with the character of Christ's covenanted kingdom. The idea of a stable, well ordered, acknowledged, and duly enforced rule is connected by all the prophets with the Messianic kingdom ("He shall rule them with a rod of iron" – Psalm 2:9 and Revelation 2:27 and 19:15). *But if the church is the kingdom, which party can rightfully claim it [emphasis added]?*¹¹⁴

More to the point regarding the kingdom issue, Peters laments that it is a sad truth if we admit that the visible church in any of its forms is the Kingdom of Christ on earth, then to the exclusion of further investigation and judgment, the church is elevated into the position of dispenser and arbiter of Scripture. Thus, man becomes the authority of God's Word not the Holy Spirit. Peters drives this point home with historical fact: The edicts of

¹¹³ Peters, 634-635.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 639.

the first Christian emperors became a model of church authority. The fulminations of certain councils are cherished as lawful examples of authorized dominion having the canons and work of fallible men elevated to tests of allegiance resulting in crimination, excommunication, and anathema.¹¹⁵

Is Peters strongly intimating that the church has and may still consider itself the *doxological centrality* of Scripture? Consider the Roman Church with its *infallible* Vicar of Christ, the Pope; its *infallible* edicts and decrees over those who consider themselves part of the flock; that salvation is mostly obtained through the church and its sacraments, rituals, and *Mariology* not through Christ's atoning work; and that Scripture can only be fully interpreted and understood by the church hierarchy through the filter of church tradition and dogma. All of this shows that the Roman Church views itself as the kingdom of Christ on earth – thank you Augustine, Q.E.D.

Can the same be asked about the Protestant Church, at least to a degree? Though without an *infallible* Pope, Many mainline Protestant churches are fettered by denominational statements of belief and religious protocol. Many have a membership consisting of a lay congregation of “average” church goers and a distinct hierarchy of church leaders who are deacons, elders, and pastors who often act pharisaical toward their congregation regarding biblical interpretation, doctrine, and the church-kingdom view. Regarding the latter, over 2/3rd of Protestant seminaries teach the amillennial view of a church-kingdom – thanks again Augustine, Q.E.D? This writer will leave that interrogative open for the reader to decide. However, it should be noted that far too many church goers cop a lazy attitude about their own Bible study and rely on the pastor or elders to tell them

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 652.

what to believe; thus, failing to be good Bereans and search the Scriptures for themselves (Acts 17:11).

Regarding these apparent doxological tendencies, Lewis Sperry Chafer comments that only the binding power of tradition and the human trait of clinging to a religious idea can account for these tendencies which are brought about by a method of interpretation which is free to spiritualize or overlook revelations in doctrine that have led the way for centuries for many to deny the authority of Scripture. Chafer further notes, “It is the problem of breaking with an idealism of Romish order, handed down from generation to generation, and not the willingness to transmit only that which the *apostles and early Fathers declared*” [emphasis added].¹¹⁶ It can be said that in many areas of Christian theology the “Reformation apple” did not fall that far from the “Roman Catholic tree.”

The kingdom in the heart: Often when one is in conversation with fellow Christians regarding the nature or existence of the kingdom, whether now or future, and the discussion becomes intense, the general “default” response is “The kingdom is in the heart!” The discussion might be referencing the millennial kingdom of the Apocalypse; or the Davidic kingdom of the covenants; or Matthew’s kingdom of God or kingdom of heaven; or Christ’s kingdom; or the kingdom of the church, etc. Invariably, the respondents are unaware of the true significance of the *kingdom* being discussed and are just parroting what they have heard from their local church or pastor. When pressed with a dictionary definition of a physical kingdom – land, people, governance, and ruler or king – the respondents will endeavor to “spiritualize” the whole discussion by blurting out “The kingdom is in your heart!”

¹¹⁶ Chafer, 4, 267.

This blurtation, as explained in chapter 2 of this work, comes in part from the church's usurpation of Christ's kingdom gospel as being a Christian gospel belonging to the church. However, a majority of Christians who have this view take their cue from Luke 17:21 which says, "*nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.*" Sidestepping the highly technical semantic discussions regarding the use of the Greek word *entos*, and its nuances, as either "within you;" or "among you;" or "in your midst;" wherein, our Lord was relating to the Pharisees that there was more to His kingdom message than just a material observable kingdom; but an inner spiritual aspect of repentance and righteousness as well. So, if one follows the gospel narrative, particularly in Matthew, one sees the continuous dispute between the King and the Jewish leadership over His Messiahship. Therefore, the "within you" or "in your heart" spiritual aspect was not a description of what was in their hearts at that time. It was the *spiritual potential* that would be afforded them in conjunction with the physical observable kingdom if they would accept Him as their Messiah.

Regarding the Luke 17:21 passage, George Peters prefers the "among you" translation of *entos* because "within you" is inconsistent and does not suit the persons addressed (the Pharisees), for they were as yet strangers to the Kingdom of God. He further notes that many commentaries fixate on the spiritual aspect of the kingdom as a kingdom seen by the eye of faith, and somehow the *invisible* inward kingdom transforms itself into a *visible* outward kingdom. This transformation to a higher spiritual conception, "God's reign in the heart," is a favorite passage of many Christians today who, with their pastors, latch on to the spiritual while forsaking the material.¹¹⁷ Classic Augustinianism.

¹¹⁷ Peters, 2, 39-40.

Those who often see the church in everything and proclaim the “kingdom is in the heart” like to also substitute the “church is in the heart” in place of the “kingdom” since, of course, the church is the kingdom. By tautology, if the kingdom is in the heart, and if the kingdom is the church, then the church is in the heart, right? If the point of reference is Luke 17:21, like many Christians contend, then this tautology is anachronistic at best and a logical absurdity at worst.

The first eighteen chapters of Luke are roughly parallel to the first thirteen chapters of Matthew in which the King was in His kingdom gospel presentation mode; therefore, any kingdom discussions between Him and the Pharisees regarding the kingdom being nigh, or the kingdom being within you were of a purely covenantal nature. It was not until later in Matthew (chapter 16) that any mention of a church, which had no mention of any kingdom, was made after His rejection by the Jewish leadership. To infer that the notion of the *church*, as being *in the heart*, was in play in Luke 17:21 is totally anachronistic. Furthermore, if by tautology *the church is within you*, Luke 17:21 again, how is it that the Pharisees in rejecting the Christ suddenly have the “Christ cult” – the church – within them in their hearts at the same time? This is logically absurd.

As a final note to this issue, George Peters comments that a close examination has revealed that no Scripture can be found whereby the church is directly called a kingdom. He further adds, “[I]t was taken for granted that a kingdom being preached as once nigh, must have come. And, as a literal kingdom, such as covenant and prophecy describe, did not come, it supposed that the church then must be it.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Peters, 1, 592.

Hypostatic Union: Over the centuries, beginning with Origen and the Alexandrian school, there has been a maintained emphasis on the spiritual and the *spiritualizing* of Scripture to promote a variety of views not found in a normal literal interpretation. We see the covenant kingdom spiritualized into the kingdom of the church. We see the church-kingdom spiritualized as being “within you” in your heart. It appears when an element of truth, peeks through the fog of a spiritualized perception, allegorical religious speak endeavors to bury it again. Take, for example, the throne of David. To say, as do the *spiritualizers*, that Christ is *now* ruling His kingdom from David’s throne located in heaven is totaling ignoring the literal import of the Davidic Covenant. When the point is made that this covenant conveys that the Seed of David will rule a restored earthly material kingdom from a restored Davidic throne, the response is often one that spiritualizes David’s throne by making David a type or symbol of the Creator, thus making David’s throne equal to the Father’s throne. David’s throne was never in heaven and never extended over another world. Moreover, to symbolize it like the Father’s throne makes David’s throne having existed forever.¹¹⁹ Another logical absurdity.

Dr. Feinberg hones in on the fallout from this spiritualized perception, “If the kingdom age is being realized now, how is the Bible to be understood in any of its statements of fact? If God promises Israel a literal kingdom and then gives the world a spiritualized kingdom in this present age, what becomes of the promises of God?”¹²⁰ This brings us to the issue of *hypostatic union*.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. 343.

¹²⁰ Feinberg, 187.

The hypostatic union can be defined as God the Son, as the Second Person of the Trinity, coming to earth to become human through the virgin birth. Thus, Jesus is fully God and fully human. He is the Son of God, but also simultaneously, the Son of Man. This dual nature is called the *hypostatic union*. This doctrine is difficult to comprehend and belies rational thought. John 1:14, *“The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”* And Romans 1:3, *“Concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh.”* We cannot divide events in His life into human *or* divine. He lived and suffered as a human being, yet all the time He was God. We cannot say that He performed miracles as God but suffered and died on the cross as a human. Christ was both human and divine at the same time.

Of this union, Dr. Chafer notes that Christ is the “Theanthropic Person” who began with the incarnation and is destined to be such forever. He further explains that these two natures are united, as evidenced abundantly in Scripture, in one Person, and not two; furthermore, in this union, the divine is no way degraded by its amalgamation with that which is human. And likewise, that which is human is in no way exalted or aggrandized above that which is unfallen humanity.¹²¹ The mystery of the incarnation itself is one of faith, not of understanding. You either believe it or you do not.

Now to the point. Just as Arianism, which believed that Jesus was the son of God but because He was a created being He was therefore not equal with God, is a heresy. It is heretical because, among other things, it denies the equal balance of the hypostatic union.

¹²¹ Chafer, 1, 382-385.

Then likewise, Augustinian Gnosticism, which over spiritualizes the person of Christ and the church at the expense of the covenant promise to the Jews of a literal material earthly kingdom – which the church claims as its *spiritual self*-reigning in the heart – is also a heresy because it too denies the equal balance of the hypostatic union.

“Son of Man:” Throughout Scripture, our Lord Jesus Christ is ascribed to by many names, but two, in particular, describe His dual nature. “The Son of God,” His spiritual nature as the second Person of the Trinity, and the “Son of Man,” His human nature also as the second Person of the Trinity. This writer, until well into his 60’s, never really understood the difference between the two terms; primarily, because of a lack of Bible study regarding the King’s human nature and the fact that the four denominational churches that were frequented very seldom gave a correct view of “the Son of Man” - if any view was at all presented.

The expression “Son of Man” occurs 84 times in the gospels and is used almost exclusively by Him in describing the event of His second coming. Christ uses this term of Himself repeatedly to describe His *coming in power and glory* to establish His kingdom (Matthew 16:27; 24:30; 25:31; Mark 8:38; 13:26; Luke 9:26; 21:27; John 5:27). The covenant promises are demanding of this and our faith in the covenant is strengthened by this *significant phraseology* of the King. God ruling through a theocracy is a fundamental idea to the Jews. Hence, the high priests omitted the term “Son of God” and substituted the term “Son of Man” to convey the idea of God ruling in and through humanity. This is contrary to the current popular church view that Christ now rules by virtue of His divinity and attributes as God; therefore, we are *to expect no other reign*. It is not the Divine Sonship that constitutes the *Christ* – though an essential element – and it is not the Davidic

Sonship that constitutes Him as the Messiah – though essential. It is the *two inseparably united* that make Him “*the Christ*”¹²² – hence, the hypostatic union.

In closing, the following analogy may hopefully illustrate the hypostatic union and its need for balance. Consider the twin communities of Dallas and Ft. Worth. For purposes of illustration, let Dallas be the New Testament, about the church, and more “spiritual” in nature. Let Ft. Worth be the Old Testament, about the covenant people and Israel, and more “material” in nature. Under the doctrine of the hypostatic union, both communities would share equal status and intermingle as one entity. Each would have its own unique purpose but both would interact in a complementary fashion. But when one community – say Dallas - sees itself as more superior, more enlightened, more in tuned to the “truth,” then an imbalance occurs with the “enlightened” community looking down at the other community – Ft. Worth - as being archaic, too carnal, and too simplistic.

How does Dallas go about denigrating Ft. Worth? Figuratively, by shutting down any infrastructure, routes of ingress and egress, and any communication and reference to Ft. Worth. Through the use of the allegory, Dallas usurps the plan and purpose of Ft. Worth, by spiritualizing much of the value and essence of Ft. Worth, and making it its own; and ignoring what is left. A good example is claiming that the kingdom gospel, in the early chapters of Matthew, is actually about the church, thereby creating an “off-ramp” which prevents the flow of traffic from leaving Dallas by recirculating it continually in the Dallas community. Thus, like the *Truman Show*, starring Jim Carey and Ed Harris, Truman is continuously being diverted around his community without ever being able to leave it to see the total truth which is just outside of his domain. Ft. Worth is still there. One can go

¹²² Peters, 1, 568-569.

to the mutually shared boundary of both communities and see for himself. You can reach out and touch it. You can travel on its streets and boulevards; however, Dallasonians have been told for centuries that Ft. Worth only exists in the few ways that they have been led to believe. Sound absurd? Figuratively speaking, many in the church take the Bible and tear it in half and toss the Old Testament half, save a few “cherry picked” passages, into the dustbin. With it go all the real promises about a real King coming back to establish a real kingdom for a real people.

Summary: Today’s modern era has brought an explosion of knowledge, science, communication, and transportation. The world has shrunk from “around the world in 80 days,” in the late nineteenth century, to around the world today in hours by such means as the SR-71 and low orbiting satellites. Man’s role in this modern culture has changed from one of subsistence survival to one of plenty and self-indulgence, and as a result the church, in general, has lost much of its influence and its use as a support. It is in an “apologetic” mode to make itself relevant. The evangelical gospel now competes with the social gospel, the prosperity and wellbeing gospel, and the experiential gospel. Modern man is much more the supplicant to the “New Age” appeal of secular humanism than he is to the salvation message of God from any church. And the mainstream perception of the church is still one of itself as the kingdom *now* with Christ ruling from David’s throne in heaven with His second coming after the church “militant” subdues Satan and his minions, thus clearing the path for His return. As unscriptural as it is, this amillennial view of the kingdom and the second coming of the King is pretty much the same view as touted by Augustine in his *City of God* 1600 years ago.

But alas, in the midst of muddle, confusion, and “double talk” the non-millennial view began to unravel as the Bible became available to the masses, and not just to the church hierarchy. Learned men began to question this patented church view many years after the Reformers gave it a pass. At the beginning of the eighteenth century one such learned man, Sir Isaac Newton, perhaps the greatest scientist that ever lived, is quoted to have said, “About the time of the end, a body of men will be raised up who will turn their attention to the Prophecies, and insist upon a literal interpretation in the midst of much clamor and opposition.”¹²³

150 years later there have been a number of great scholars who have embraced *Sola Scriptura* as the means of biblical interpretation, thereby eliminating the gnostic import of the Romish church and many of the Reform churches that still cling to Romish views. 65 years before Israel was reborn as a nation, George N. H. Peters wrote his colossal work *The Theocratic Kingdom* in a fashion that would make Sir Isaac Newton proud. 65 years later, Lewis Sperry Chafer completed his monumental work *Systematic Theology*. 40 years after that, Arnold Fruchtenbaum authored his “theological bombshell” *Israelology: The Missing Link to Systematic Theology* and dared to ask the question, “What is the prerequisite for the second coming?” To the uninformed, his answer to this question is stunning! In this 100 plus year interval, there have been outstanding works written by Clarence Larkin, D. L. Moody, C. I. Scofield, Charles Feinberg, Lewis Chafer, Charles Ryrie, Mal Couch, John Walvoord, Robert Thomas just to name a few.

¹²³ goodreads, “Isaac Newton Quotes – Our Ordinance”, accessed December 27, 2017, http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/135106.Isaac_Newton

The earlier of these “Berean” scholars – Larkin, Moody, Scofield, and Chafer - were considered “upstarts” who dared question the “truth” of amillennialism or the traditions of covenant theology pandered in bastions of elitist religious academics such as Princeton or Westminster. Home to Oswald T. Allis, J. Gresham Machen,¹²⁴ and William Hendriksen.

Though not the majority view, the premillennial view of the Son of Man; the seed of David; coming again to establish the covenanted earthly kingdom for His covenanted people the Jews; as prophesied in the Old Testament; to reign 1000 years has made a comeback. It is the simple *primitive* message of the prophets, the King, the apostles, and the early church. It stands as truth because it considers all Scripture, allows Scripture to interpret Scripture, and harmonizes all of Scripture into a progressive revelation of God’s plan and purpose for man.

¹²⁴ Rhodes and Sherlin, 398.

CHAPTER 9 – CONCLUSION AND FINAL THOUGHTS

The thesis statement, as noted in the Introduction, is in the form of the question, “Did the early post-apostolic church hold a premillennial view of the Messiah’s return prior to establishing His millennial kingdom?” Incorporated within this primary question are several ancillary questions having answers that help clarify, and serve as evidentiary to the primary question. The research used to answer the thesis question was obtained through the media of books, periodicals, and the internet. An extensive bibliography is presented at the end of this work.

“Did the post apostolic church hold a premillennial view of the Messiah’s return prior to establishing His millennial kingdom?” The answer is a definite Yes!

- In Chapter 1, we saw that most of the millennial view, as tied to Bible prophecy, lies in the murky backwaters away from mainstream Christian consideration.
- In chapter 2, the covenant promises to the Jews and Israel were discussed as to their content, benefactor, and eternity.
- Chapter 3 disclosed the King’s kingdom gospel, Davidic in nature, with His readiness to implement it provided the covenant people accepted its conditions and Him as their King.
- In chapter 4, the apostles took the King’s kingdom message, now future in its import, and transmitted it to the early post apostolic - or the primitive church.
- In chapter 5, the actual recorded commentary of many prominent post-apostolic church fathers was presented showing an overwhelming support for the premillennial view which existed until the mid-fourth century.

- In chapter 6, a definite change in the millennial view by the patristic church came about primarily due to the three reasons discussed.
- Chapter 7 found the Reformers expunging the abuses of the Catholic Church by bringing purity to the essentials of the King's first coming, but ignoring the essentials – prophecy – of His second coming by continuing to embrace the allegorical suppositions of Augustine and the Roman Catholic Church. Many later scholars and critics did likewise.
- Chapter 8 finds most of the church today still mired in the centuries old Augustinian perception of the millennium and the King's second coming. However, in the last 150 plus years, a return to a single meaning only *Sola Scriptura* has made a comeback for *the whole of Scripture*, thus making the Holy Spirit *again* the authority over Scripture not the faulty wisdom of man.

Final thoughts: Israel is the elephant in the room. Since her sudden reappearance, in May 1948, after almost 1900 years, one would think that Christians around the world would be scouring the Old Testament to find further prophecies involving Israel and the Jews. Eyebrows should be raised and questions asked such as, “Is God done with the Jews?” “Were there promises made to the Jews?” Good “Berean” Christians would find in Scripture “*Or shall a nation be born at once? For as soon as Zion was in labor, she gave birth to her children*” (Isaiah 66:8). And Isa 11:11, “*And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people who are left.*” Also Ezekiel 37:12, “*Therefore prophesy and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: ‘Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up*

from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel.’” Verse 14 states, “I will put My spirit within you and you will come to life, and I will place you in your own land.”

Many of the Old Testament prophetic books begin with the theme of God doling out punishment to His rebellious people by allowing their enemies to plunder their land, and then dispersing them to wallow in the clutches of these enemy nations. Then, later in the prophetic narrative, the theme changes when God has pity on them, for His name sake, at which time He brings them back into the land and restores them unto Himself. Such a book is Amos. The majority of Amos deals with the depravity of Israel and her impending punishment. Then in the last half of the last chapter, God shows mercy to His people, *“In that day I will raise up the fallen booth of David”* (Amos 9:11). Verse 14, *“Also I will restore the captivity of my people Israel, and they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them.”* Verse 15, *“I will plant them on their land and they will not again be rooted out from their land.”*

But the world stands in unbelief calling the rebirth of Israel a thing that should not be. An occupier of Arab land, a fleeting aberration. Fleeting indeed, outnumbered fifty to one, Israel has fought four major wars against her Arab neighbors and by “God’s assistance” has been the decisive victor in each war. Nevertheless, the world’s “conscience” the United Nations, from 1947 to 1991, issued over 300 anti-Israel General Assembly resolutions against Israel. In 2012, alone, there were 22 General Assembly resolutions specifically against Israel, while only four were issued for the rest of the world combined. From 2006 through 2013, Israel was subjected to 45 condemnation resolutions. No other nation in the world came close. The real power of the United Nations lies in the Security Council, and Israel is the only member state that has not – and cannot – serve on

the Security Council. From 1948 to 2010, there were 77 resolutions directly aimed at Israel. No other nation on earth even comes close to this record.¹²⁵ Even more absurd is the December 1st, 2017 UN General Assembly resolution to disavow that Israel has ties to Jerusalem. The vote was overwhelming with 151 voting in favor. [And Robert E. Lee never fought in the US Civil War!]

Unfortunately, much of the church shares this unbelief, even though some Christian scholars and believers have connected the dots of relevant Old Testament prophecy and have found the church wanting. One such work that fosters this unbelief in Israel's future and in Bible prophecy, in general, is written by noted amillennialist Dr. William Hendriksen. In his work, *More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation*, Hendriksen takes the often difficult to understand Apocalypse and turns it into a pious sounding religious prose. He proffers an interpretative approach called *progressive parallelism* in which the book is chopped into seven sections of three or four chapters each and laid parallel to each other. Each segment depicts over again the time of Christ's first coming to the time of His second coming, but each repetition reveals a certain amount of eschatological progress.¹²⁶

Such exegetics muddle the text and obscure the message to the *lay* reader which then relegates the exegesis and understanding to a hierarchy of church *Pharisees* or seminarians, who are taught in *endogamous* fashion (some achieve graduate degrees and

¹²⁵ Jerusalem Post, "Is the United Nations Anti-Semitic?" accessed January 2, 2018, www.jpost.com/Opinion/

¹²⁶ Matt Waymeyer, *Amillennialism and the Age to Come* (Unknown: Kress Biblical Resources, 2016), 273-274.

PhDs), who alone understand the gobbledygook they have created. Perspicuity is lost and the commentary and view become a mumble jumble of symbolism and religious prose that has no Godly meaning. The book is about revealing not about more mystery through allegorizing the symbols and the text. Chapter 1, verse 3 reads, “*Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy.*” How can one receive a blessing from chopped up religious mush?

One could write a major work refuting the allegorical postulations put forth by Hendriksen in *More Than Conquerors*. Matthew Waymeyer does so in part in his work *Amillennialism and the Age to Come*. Briefly, however, several errors when recognized deflate the main theme of Hendriksen’s work and thus, his view of the King, the kingdom, and his perception of prophecy in general.

Early in his work, before he lays out the framework for his *progressive parallelism*, Hendriksen makes a bold assertion that the rider on the white horse in the opening of the first seal in Revelation 6:2 is Christ embarking on His “world militant career.” He claims that this identification is made by Irenaeus in his work *Against Heresies* as cited by S. L. Morris. He also footnotes that scholars J. P. Lange, R. C. Lenski, W. Milligan, and A. Plummer support the Morris citation.¹²⁷ It sounds plausible – Christ on a white horse wearing a crown to do battle against His enemies – but at this early juncture who is “minding the store?” If at the opening of the first seal, the King – in this case of Revelation 6, the Lamb - is leaving His temporary heavenly abode to lead the church into “combat” against Satan and his minions, who is opening the rest of the seals?

¹²⁷ William Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 26.

From pages 93 through 97, Hendriksen continues, in more detail, to stress the theme of Christ leading the church into “conquest” by continuing to maintain that Christ is the “Conqueror” upon the white horse in verse 6:2. On pages 105 the theme continues, and on page 113, Hendriksen notes again, with emphasis, that *the church is in the tribulation*. His theme becomes absurd when on page 142 he starts to use Old Testament prophetic passages as a means of protecting the church by having Christ bearing the church on eagle’s wings to a safe haven where a place is prepared for them to be nourished by the “manna” of the Word. Here the church resides away from the face of the serpent and away from Satan’s deadly attack.¹²⁸ *But not from the wrath of the Lamb!*

Hendriksen’s attempt to present the rider on the white horse as Christ in leading and protecting the church through the tribulation fails on three accounts. First - ignoring his “double talk,” spiritualization, and use of *polyvalent language* (to be discussed momentarily) - Hendriksen has the Lamb leaving John’s scene in heaven to lead the church into the tribulation. Who does He give the scroll to? Revelation 6:16 has the Lamb in heaven through the opening of the sixth seal. Which is it? Dr. Tony Garland notes in his Revelation commentary, “It violates all logic for the same person to be opening the seal and sending himself forth.”¹²⁹ Hendriksen acknowledges this but spiritualizes that the Lamb does both - obfuscation. Looking back to chapter 5, verses 2-5, no one on earth, above the earth, or below the earth is found worthy to open the scroll and break the seals; so the Lamb remains in heaven to complete the opening of the scroll. The seventh seal incorporates the trumpet and bowl judgements which end in chapter 16, verse 21 well into the tribulation.

¹²⁸ Ibid. 142.

¹²⁹ Tony Garland, *A Testimony of Jesus Christ, vol.1* (Camano Island, WA: Spirit of Truth.org, 2004), 325.

The late Dr. Robert Thomas, one of the foremost authorities in biblical Greek language and biblical exegesis, has an extended commentary regarding the meaning of the first seal and the personage of the rider. To paraphrase Thomas, the identity of the rider may not be defined necessarily as an individual, but the personification of a movement which arises at “the beginning of birth pangs” (Matthew 24, Mark 13 vis a vis Revelation 6). The crown on his head was not earned but given to him by permission of a higher authority, hence he is not ultimate divinity. Furthermore, explains Thomas, *kai exelthen nikon kai hina nikese* “and he went forth conquering that he may conquer,” the nature of his victories are far different from those described earlier in the book, i.e. Christ has already won the spiritual victory by what He accomplished on the cross. In addition, the triumphs of the rider of the first seal are temporal. To equate the rider’s victory with that of Messiah through His death and resurrection fails to comprehend the moral character of these four riders which together form the beginning of birth pangs. The Messiah cannot be put in the same plane as the other three riders that follow.¹³⁰

Finally, Thomas notes that the pronounced differences between the first seal rider and the rider in Revelation 19. The latter is called “faithful and true” but the former is not so characterized in that his goal is unjust conquest. The rider in Revelation 19:11-16, the real King of kings, is none other than the Lamb who opened the first seal negating the possibility of His also being the rider revealed by that seal.¹³¹

Second, and quite damaging to Hendriksen’s theme of Christ being the rider on the white horse in the first seal, is that *Irenaeus never said anything regarding that rider or*

¹³⁰ Robert Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: an Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 420-424.

¹³¹ *Ibid.* 421.

any seals! Apparently, Hendriksen never read *Against Heresies*, as no church father's work is listed in his book's bibliography. Hendriksen's sole source on the matter is S. L. Morris whom he never vetted. He has just written what someone else wrote or told him. In Book IV, chapter XX, *Against Heresies* Irenaeus, in presenting his typical "homily salad," takes passages from chapters 1 and 5 and then adds verbatim Revelation 19:11-16, thus, skipping everything in between including chapter 6 and the six seals in an apparent endeavor to portray "I am the first and the last" - not leading the church into the tribulation.¹³²

Third, and quite damaging to Hendriksen's theology, the church is the domain of the Holy Spirit sent by the Son. The Holy Spirit indwells in the believer (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). The indwelling Holy Spirit also installs the new believer as a member of Christ's universal Church. This is the baptism of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13). Therefore, in this writer's opinion, if the church is in the tribulation, or in any part of it, then the Second Person of the Trinity – the Lamb, the Son - is waging war against the Third Person of the Trinity – the Holy Spirit! If this be the case, then Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior may be the biggest hypocrite to have walked the face of the earth! Read Matthew 12:22-32, a house divided. In this case, it is the Trinity that is divided not the house of Satan.

Reality check: In the broader order of things theological, Henderiksen's book as a work on Bible prophecy also misses the mark. No one could seriously blame Bible scholars for their scant mention of Israel and the Jews over the centuries, but a learned man with a ThD or PhD should be able to search the truth of the entire Bible when it is placed before him in his native tongue. To ignore all the truth because of prejudice, presupposition, or

¹³² Irenaeus, 356-357.

an endogamous learning culture is no excuse. Scholastic laziness and poor hermeneutics can be overcome by a “Berean attitude” and asking the Holy Spirit to illuminate His Word.

As a reality check, we will compare William Hendriksen’s Ezekiel 38 and 39 Gog and Magog commentary, which spans only several pages in his currently discussed work *More Than Conquerors*, published in 1940, with Louis Bauman’s work entitled, *Russian Events in the Light of Bible Prophecy*, published in 1942. Bauman’s work is a longer more in-depth commentary covering the same Ezekiel 38 and 39 Gog and Magog conflict. Both commentaries were published several years before Israel became a nation again in May, 1948. Bauman, like George Peters and Sir Isaac Newton, sees Israel in play even after almost 1900 years of obscurity. Hendriksen sees no restoration of Israel.

Bauman’s commentary maintains a strict literal grammatical view of Scripture as shown by his thorough research of the ancient people groups involved in the two Ezekiel chapters, and identifies them by their modern names.¹³³ He also rightly identifies Israel as the one being invaded. Hendriksen allegorizes most of the literal Ezekiel text and ignores the rest of it all together. Hendriksen’s takes the prophetic Gog and Magog conflict of Ezekiel 38 and 39, claiming it to be partially fulfilled, and mixes it with Daniel 8:9-12, thereby identifying its partial fulfillment to be Antiochus Epiphanes invasion of Israel in 168 BC . He then tries to match this mix of prophecy with the Gog and Magog conflict of Revelation 20:8 as a symbol or foreshadowing of the final battle in which Satan leads the forces of evil against the Church. Just because there is a similarity of the names, Gog and Magog, and both conflicts involve Israel to a degree, Hendriksen tries to explain away the

¹³³ Louis Bauman, *Russian Events in Light of Bible Prophecy* (New York: Fleming H Revell Company, 1942), 22-38.

prophecy of Israel in Ezekiel 38 and 39 by having it fulfilled 2200 years ago¹³⁴ All of this distortion so that a restoration of Israel and the prophecy of a literal millennial kingdom as set forth in the Old Testament can be spiritualized or explained away.

Which one of these two 75 year old commentaries more closely fits today's Middle East reality? Today, Israel is a country again; and despite having won four major wars against an enemy fifty times her size, her enemies are back again saber rattling once more. Today - a day in January, 2018 - Russia, as Gog, along with her partner Persia (Iran) are in Syria battling ISIS and other Syrian rebel factions to keep Syrian president Assad in power. Libya, Cush (Ethiopia), Put (various Islamic hordes), and Israel are all key players in an unfolding world drama that looks very much like the scene from Ezekiel's prophecy of old. Togarmah (primarily Turkey) has now, within the last year, joined with Russia and Iran forming a triumvirate which together with these other nations, is building a coalition against the Jewish state. Today, Gaza and the Golan are the powder kegs that could explode at any moment thereby igniting the Ezekiel conflict.

Even a modern-day "spoil" (Ezekiel 38:12-13) can be identified as Israel's huge Leviathan gas field just off her coast in the Mediterranean Sea. Add to this the recent discovery of a huge oil sand deposit in the disputed area of the Golan Heights.¹³⁵ The world clamors for these kinds of resources. This evolving scenario is a far better fit to a *literal* view of Ezekiel 38 and 39, as presented by Bauman, than it is to the distorted *allegorical* view by Hendriksen - a view which makes no sense and is little more than

¹³⁴ Hendriksen, 193-195.

¹³⁵ R. C. Morro, *Bible Prophecy Tracker*, accessed December 29, 2017, <http://www.prophecytracker.org/2015/10/huge-oil-discovery-on-golan-heights/>

religious prose embracing centuries of old church perception and prejudice. Bauman trusts the Word of God which allows Scripture to be the authority, whereas, Hendriksen trusts man's faulty scholarship and faulty interpretation by which man becomes the authority over Scripture.

What is absent is often as revealing as what is placed before you in plain view. Absent from the Hendriksen dialogue is any mention of the covenant promises made to Israel. There is no mention of the Davidic Covenant with its promise of a land, a kingdom, and a King. There is scant mention of the Jews, and when mentioned, there is no restoration ascribed to them. The title "Son of Man" is mentioned only ten times, and only because the title appears in those scriptural passages from which the author is making unrelated comment. The Son of Man is never used to reference the coming Messiah of the Jews and the King of a restored Israel. Why is this? The answer is obvious. Hendriksen believes that God is done with the Jews despite overwhelming evidence that He is not. Hendriksen states, "In the church Israel lives on."¹³⁶ Of this amillennial view, Arnold Fruchtenbaum remarks, "They have no place whatsoever...for Israel today, and they see no theological significance to Jewish history in general or the State of Israel in particular."¹³⁷ He also adds, "The amillennial position is often distinguished for its blindness to facts which would upset its own argument."¹³⁸

As further evidence of amillennialism's quixotic perspective, Fruchtenbaum remarks that the tenacity with which the interpretation of Galatians 6:16, "the Israel of

¹³⁶ Hendriksen, 53.

¹³⁷ Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology*, 232.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.* 521.

God,” is dogmatically applied to the church shows that it has a treasured place in amillennial exegesis - in spite of extensive evidence to the contrary. In relating that the term refers to ethnic Israel as it has in every other of its more than 65 uses in the New Testament – 15 by Paul alone – has an almost emotional William Hendriksen writing, “I refuse to accept that explanation....”¹³⁹ To this type of response, Dr. Chafer replies, “Men seldom change their preconceived views whether good or bad. Their early training and theological discipline serve as a mold which the individual will seldom be extracted.”¹⁴⁰ Too many sermons to rethink? Too many seminary courses to reassess? Too many Bible studies to re-evaluate? Too many egos having to confess error?

Language: God has blessed mankind with a capability that sets him far above all other created beings – language - the ability to communicate, comprehend, and understand. Foremost of all is the ability to interact with the Almighty through His Word. Except in the very beginning, God has established His communication to mankind through His instruction book the Bible. The problem that arises is one of interpretation. If God’s Word is true, how then does mankind receive it? As an analogy, if a civil engineer were to write a set of specifications and blueprints for constructing a bridge over a river by using prose, allegories about bridges built in the second century BC, and utilizing the “wings of eagles” as a mode of transport by virtue of the moral import to extend our reach over and beyond the “river of evil” that lies below, he would be fired! The literal approach is far and away the common way to interpret language. When one reads a poem, an essay, a book, or set of instructions we assume the literal sense of the document.

¹³⁹ Ibid. 692.

¹⁴⁰ Chafer, 3, 314.

In another analogy more closely related to our discussion, Dr. Fruchtenbaum, in commenting about Hendriksen's conclusion that "Old Testament prophecies [regarding Israel] are fulfilled in the Spirit filled church..." gives an account of a father making a promise to one child and then keeps that promise to another child. The father will never convince the first child or anyone else that this action was moral or ethical. The father will never be able to justify himself until the promise is kept with the first child to whom the promise was made, regardless of his intentions to the second child. Essentially, regardless of how much of the promise is being kept with the church, God must still fulfill His promise to Israel.¹⁴¹

In language, interpretation is everything. We often butcher the meaning of the text by the way we interpret it, primarily by reading things into the text or by leaving things out. As a way of embellishing their mythical stories and writings, the Greeks introduced the allegory so that hidden meanings could be gleaned from the literal text. The problem becomes who is the final authority over these extracted meanings? Particularly, when the text in its literal form is supposed to be a revelation from the Holy Spirit. Why do we need to resort to literary or spiritualized interpretations to garner the full meaning of the text?

Language means what it means to the original audience in the original context it was originally written. Language does not need to become mystical, allegorical, or impregnated with hidden spiritual meaning just because that portion of Scripture is difficult to understand, does not meet one's presupposed view, or is prophecy waiting to be fulfilled. Symbols, metaphors, similes, hyperboles, and other communicative devices in Scripture

¹⁴¹ Fruchtenbaum, 185.

can be adequately handled through a normal, plain, historical-grammatical hermeneutic that seeks to find the single sense of each text.¹⁴² Yet the liberties taken in interpreting certain portions of the Bible are legend. As a broad example, most of Christendom accepts the miraculous fulfillment of the 353 individual prophecies as described by their simple literal grammatical meaning in the Old Testament regarding our Lord's first coming, but has great difficulty in accepting most of the over 1800 prophecies of His second coming without using a myriad of allegorical attempts to spiritualize that the church is the intended object of most of these prophecies. And then explains the rest of the prophecies away or just ignores them.¹⁴³ If the first coming was literal, as noted, why should the second coming not be literal as well?

A more scholarly term for this allegorical “doublespeak,” first initiated by the Alexandrian school of allegorizing, is the *theory of polyvalence meanings* coined by Dr. Walter C. Kaiser. Dr. Kaiser explains that the *multiple meaning* advocates hypocritically or ignorantly expect us to read their papers in a *literal* manner so as to accept their view that the *single sense* of Scripture is incorrect. These *multiple meaning* advocates who argue against the *single sense* position use words with only a *single meaning* assigned to them to make their case. *They are defeated by their own effort to use words to describe their position.* Those interpreters who wish to fight the theory that *meaning is single fold* demand that all who read their papers and books do so with the understanding that *their meaning is single fold* and must be understood *literally* [emphasis added].¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Rhodes and Sherlin, 310.

¹⁴³Precept Austen, “The Second Coming of Christ,” accessed January 2, 2018, www.accordingtothescriptures/

¹⁴⁴ Rhodes and Sherlin, 313.

Kingdom: Regarding application, 4/5 of the Bible deals with Israel and the Jews while the remaining has to do with the church.¹⁴⁵ If by hermeneutical “sleight of hand,” we toss Israel under the footstool of the Messiah (Psalm 110:1) as an “enemy” of God (*City of God*, Book 17, chapter 7), then we trash most of the Bible and may inadvertently find ourselves back in the Garden facing the question, “*Did God really say...*” (Genesis 3:1). If a literal view of 4/5 of the Bible is suspect, perhaps John 3:16 is suspect also – *what did Jesus really mean?*

In Strong’s Concordance of the Bible, the word *kingdom* is recorded in the New Testament 156 times (reference number 932).¹⁴⁶ 81 times the word *kingdom* references the restored Davidic kingdom that the King is either presenting to the Jews, and/or the entry requirements into it. 16 times the *kingdom* appears in parables. 6 times it refers to a house divided. 3 times as the Antichrist’s *kingdom*. 2 times in the synoptic gospels as a mystery *kingdom* as a lead into the parables. 6 times as a worldly *kingdom*. The remaining 42 references portray a trait, peculiarity, or description of the *kingdom* that the King or an apostle wishes to disclose. Not once is the church directly linked to any of these kingdom pronouncements.

However, as shown earlier in this thesis, through the use of parables the King introduces to the disciples an *unrevealed period of time* which is to be an interim age before His second coming to establish the covenant kingdom. This new age will not be the promised kingdom, nor will it be a kingdom in a “mystery form.” This interim period, now known as the church, is the period between the first and second coming of Christ and not

¹⁴⁵ Chafer, 4, 47.

¹⁴⁶ James Strong, *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996), 748-749.

the millennial kingdom which will follow the second coming. The problem arises when, during this interim period, the church sees itself as the promised Davidic kingdom, thereby usurping from God's covenant people their promised kingdom.

Today, one looks around and finds the greater part of Christendom in slumber as prophecy unfolds before their very eyes. Israel and the Jews are seldom mentioned from the pulpit or in Bible study, and Augustinian amillennialism is the primary reason why. In viewing the world at large, we see the years of jaded perception of Israel and the Jews manifested in the court of world opinion. Israel basically stands alone. No other nation receives the obsessive attention and condemnation by the rest of the world and yet seemingly thrives. No other people have been persecuted and abused like the Jews and yet they are coming home again after centuries of dispersion and cowering among the nations. The fact that there is a country of Israel again is a thorn in the side of the predominant amillennial view.

In conversation, when a person having this view is confronted with the scriptural facts of Bible prophecy, one often receives an irritated response like "Well, it's not a salvation issue!" Well, it kind of is and here is the reason why. One of the Apostle Paul's primary discussion points in Romans 11 is centered on the rhetorical question, now that gentiles share in the mercies of God due to Israel's rejection of her Messiah, will God still keep His promises to Israel? Paul adamantly says yes! He explains in verses 25 and 26 that Israel's blindness is only temporary until the number of gentiles comes in, then all of Israel will be saved. In verse 28, Paul adds that concerning the gospel they are enemies, *but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers.* If god does not, or

cannot keep His promises to Israel and the Jews, what guarantee do we have that He is going to keep His promises to us and the Church?

The subtle message of a church-kingdom, no matter how pious or “churchy” it may sound, distracts from the truth that the kingdom belongs to the Jews in a prophecy to be fulfilled through the covenants, particularly, the Davidic Covenant through the Son of David, the Messiah. Nowhere in Scripture is the church promised land or a physical kingdom. We do, however, partake in the millennial kingdom (Revelation 1:6; 5:9-10; 19:14; and 20:4) as priests and kings who rule with the Messiah.

Prophetic truth will remain mostly in backwater areas away from mainstream church doctrine until everyday Christians become good Bereans and stir these backwater pools by searching the Scriptures for themselves – and not just listening to what someone else tells them. This agitation may force some of this truth back into the mainstream flow by which church leaders may be persuaded to preach and teach the *full counsel of God*.

POSTSCRIPT

Bible prophecy can be a tool used to witness and bring people to the Messiah. Dr. Daniel Juster, while lecturing at Messianic Life Institute, made a stunning observation of the *predicament* many of our churches have put themselves in today because of their *replacement* position regarding Israel.

“Israel is a distinct nation that is a proof sign of the existence and reality of God by their preservation. And, that in the end times the nation of Israel is used as a sign in the fulfillment of prophecy so that Christians can witness to the nations out of the fulfillment of prophecy that happens to Israel. Therefore, the replacement people who don’t see Israel are cutting off the limb on which they sit while trying to witness in the last days...when you see the fulfillment of prophecy with regard to Israel – this is a sign so that you can open up your Bible and win people to the Lord based upon the truth of Scripture. This is part of the gift and call of God to Israel.”¹⁴⁷

In John 14:29, Christ said, “*I have told you before it happens, so when it does happen you will believe.*” Revelation 19:10 states, “*For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*”

¹⁴⁷Daniel Juster, “Replacement Theology, lecture 2.” *Messianic Life Institute* (MP3 download), 1997.

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