

# Postmillennialism

An Overview  
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*EXPLANATION: My church background as a youth was primarily Pretribulational Premillennial Dispensationalist. Then, by the grace of God, a series of events led me to discover the beauty of Reformed thought rooted in the Medieval Synthesis. Most of the remarks here are the result of this journey. It is not meant to be scholarly research, but rather a short exposition of the Postmillennial view in light of Scripture.<sup>1</sup>*

## Introduction

Few doctrinal issues are as controversial as eschatology, the doctrine of the end of times. Especially in the last century, eschatological doctrine has become a major point of debate among theologians. So often, this debate falls into a debate about how effective the work of God is. People rely upon human philosophy to grapple with whether the world is becoming better or eviler.

But what does the Bible say about whether the world is becoming more Christianized or not? We ought not rely on our own philosophical definitions of “good” or “evil,” or what gospel success might look like.

The gospel is a gospel of comfort. End times is a theology of comfort. Let us look at how Christ triumphs, and triumphs in love.

### DIFFICULTIES IN ESCHATOLOGICAL DOCTRINE.

The Church has not reached a conclusion on eschatological issues. Instead, the past two centuries have seen a massive propagation of new eschatological doctrines. This proposes a daunting task of sorting and correcting.

So often, the response to eschatological difficulties is not seeking resolution, but rather a pragmatic solution. Many are quick to dismiss it. Others allow their doctrines to be all-consuming. Yet both fall short of a proper purpose in studying eschatological doctrine.

“Eschatology doesn’t matter. We should focus on what we can do now.”

We should note *why* this view believes eschatology does not matter. This view argues that action is more important than a comprehensive belief. It argues that the present matters more than the future. This is not to say, however, that this view does not come from a Christian. Quite a lot, in fact, would argue this. In this view, evangelism now matters more than our eschatological doctrine, our worship style matters more than our understanding of Christ’s Kingdom, and living a Christian life matters more than understanding our future life.

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, describing myself as a “Postmillennialist” comes with a list of problems. Postmillennialism and Amillennialism have a variety of similarities, and my views have been described by some as Amillennialism. For a further explanation of this matter, see [“Appendix: Why use the term ‘Postmillennialist?’”](#) at the end of this discourse.

Yet the present matters because the future matters. We cannot evangelize unless the message of heaven's redemption is clear. We cannot properly order and define worship without first understanding Christ's Kingdom. We cannot live a Christian life unless it anticipates our future life. We are made in the image of God. Our understanding of who God is—since He is the source of our identity—must first proceed our duty. Eschatology acknowledges the overarching identity we have for eternity. *Now* matters because God reigns above *now*.

“We need to focus on God’s love and unity, not doctrinal issues that divide us.”

This view does not dismiss eschatology for a philosophical purpose but rather for a pragmatic one. Perhaps the way to solve denominational divisions (or even divisions within a denomination!) is to look past doctrinal issues that do not have weight on our actions as Christians.

Yet trouble arises when we attempt to decide which issues “really matter.” Christians are certainly called to unity. They are not, however, called to unity at the expense of truth. The Scriptures call all Christians to assemble as one in Christ for a common truth, not an overlooked one. Christians are called to unity for the purpose of truth. Unity is not the only end.

“All Scripture,” the apostle reminds us, “is profitable.”<sup>2</sup> The Scriptures do indeed discuss eschatological issues. To dismiss eschatology as an issue that does not “really matter” dismisses the critical call of Scripture to truth. God’s love and unity matters for the sake of truth. Studying eschatology—or any other doctrinal matter the Bible speaks on, for that matter—is part of this.

“Satan is bringing about the end. We must take action!”

Instead of bypassing eschatology, this view embraces eschatology greatly. However, it fundamentally misses the importance of eschatology. It takes a segment of eschatology and makes it the whole. In doing so, it wrongly orders powers.

Too often, eschatology becomes an apocalyptic worry. Yet the eschatological worry view voids the need to study eschatology. If Satan can be victorious, then our knowledge of God will become worthless. If the world’s fate is truly in our hands, then God’s greater picture becomes flimsy and changeable. However, our works cannot succeed without God’s grace. Eschatology matters not to motivate us in fear but rather to motivate us in love.

“We need to support the rebuilding of a third temple in Jerusalem.”

While not dismissing eschatology, this view does take a fraction of eschatology and misses the overarching purpose. Some views hold that a third temple will be rebuilt. This view is likely incorrect, but those who do embrace it will sometimes go further, arguing that the second coming of Christ is dependent upon its construction. The temple matters, whether metaphorical or literal, because of God’s larger covenantal relationship through the temple. This view, however, makes Christ’s triumph dependent upon man’s works and in turn makes God’s covenant dependent upon man’s works.

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<sup>2</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16. All passages hereafter are English Standard Version (ESV).  
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While most do not hold this view, we can all fall into the hermeneutical trap that leads to a view such as this. When readers of the Scripture focus on one passage at the expense of others, the overarching theme of God's redemptive covenant is lost. This view focuses on a subset of Scripture and dismisses much of the rest. The whole of Scripture must be viewed. Eschatology matters because it provides a bigger picture of Scripture: it provides the end Scripture looks forward to. Eschatology must not take the place of other doctrine, nor should other doctrine take the place of eschatology. The whole of Scripture must be studied.

All four of these views share a prioritization of man's actions over God's sovereignty. All four of these views can be refuted by the principle of *sola gratia*. They all seek to take an aspect God has called us to—evangelism, unity, protection, and activism—but dismiss God's grace to reach these ends. They embrace duty while abdicating faithfulness, forgetting that the first and primary duty of the Christian is faithfulness.

Eschatology, quite simply, deals with the *end*. All actions we take have a purpose that they work towards, one made possible by God's grace. Eschatology, then, reveals to us God's grace. We must study eschatology because it shows God's overarching covenantal redemption. Without a proper understanding of God's triumph in conclusion to all matters, we lose our own identity. God does not just save us from trials *now*, He saves us from evil over all eternity.

#### **COVENANTAL THEOLOGY.**

Since eschatology displays God's overarching covenantal redemption of the Church, any endeavor to understand it must begin with how we understand God's covenant.

Thus, we ought to overview the Biblical framework used for interpreting passages regarding Biblical prophecy and salvation. Instead of trusting our intuition on the matter, we ought to look at how the Bible wishes us to discuss these topics. In the Covenantal Theology view, God establishes three covenants: the Covenant of Redemption, the Covenant of Works, and the Covenant of Grace.

The Scriptures demonstrate this. The Covenant of Redemption is God's choosing of the elect (Romans 8:29-30; 9:16; Ephesians 1:3-5; 2 Timothy 1:9; James 2:5, &c.). The Covenant of Works promises eternal life if man fulfills God's commandments, first given in Genesis 2:16-17. Because man failed in maintaining the Covenant of Works, God instituted the Covenant of Grace that by faith, man may be saved (Romans 3:27-31; Ephesians 2:8-9). The law is fulfilled by the atonement of Jesus Christ (Matthew 5:17; 1 Corinthians 15:22). Man is justified by faith in the Old Testament and the New Testament (Romans 4:3; 6-8; 22-24; 10:6-13; Galatians 3:9; 13-14). Further, the Church and Israel should not be viewed separately, but the same (Romans 9:6-8; Ephesians 2:11-22; Galatians 3:25-29; 6:15-16).

Covenantal Theology, to this end, presents an overarching picture of grace within the Bible. God's Church extends across all ages, and all matters of redemptive grace relate to it alone. Eschatology, by dealing with the finalization and purpose of God's grace, must be built upon this foundation.

#### **ORTHODOXY.**

We also must look at the importance of an orthodox faith. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus states,

[O]n this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

We view this “rock” Jesus speaks about as Peter’s faith, seeing that the context of the passage rests upon Peter’s profession of Christ as God, not Peter himself. Seeing that Jesus says evil will not prevail against Peter’s faith, true doctrines are orthodox ones, supported by the Bible, the church fathers, and believers after. A doctrine may be clarified and built upon, certainly. Further, the Bible should stand as the highest standard, as man is fallible. However, doctrines essential to the Church cannot disappear and reappear. Since Christ is the alpha and omega, what is new is not true. (Matthew 21:33; Luke 21:33; 1 Corinthians 11:1; 2 Timothy 2:2; 6:20-21; Titus 1:9; &c.)

The early Church did show diversity regarding eschatological views. We certainly cannot understand eschatology from this alone. However, the fundamental doctrines do provide us with a starting point that we can work with. The general principle here is that what is new is not true.

What matters significantly under this idea of continued orthodoxy is that Christ does not concede the Church. In short, the Church is strong enough that the “gates of hell” will not overcome it. Truth has the power to persuade, defeat falsehoods, preserve the Church, and thus transform.

### **WHAT ESCHATOLOGY ENTAILS.**

Eschatology in essence entails what occurs regarding the end. It comes from the Greek *ἔσχατος* (*eskatos*) which can translate to last, furthest, uttermost, extreme, or most remote, &c. In essence, Eschatology is regarding the “last things,” specifically regarding the end of the world and the second coming of Jesus Christ. This usually centers around the interpretation of Revelation 20. This includes the coming of Christ, his reign with the Saints for a thousand years, and the final judgment. How these relate to each other, and the nature of these occurrences is the matter of most eschatological debate. Thus, when looking at eschatology in such a fashion, we must answer three questions:

1. What is the relationship between the Second Coming and the Kingdom (Thousand Years) described?
2. What is the nature of the Second Coming?
3. What is the nature of the Kingdom?

It follows that these are the general area of disagreements regarding eschatology.

### **AN OVERVIEW OF DIFFERING OPINIONS.**

There are four general schools of thought of eschatological views, all with various modifications. Major disagreements are around the second coming, and how they relate to the Thousand Years in Revelation 20. Thus, the different views are considered “millennialism.”

*Premillennialism* asserts Christ’s second coming will occur before, or pre, the millennium.

*Postmillennialism* asserts Christ’s second coming will occur after, or post, the millennium.

Amillennialism asserts that the millennium is a metaphorical description of Christ's relationship with the church, without a literal reign on earth, followed by Christ's second coming.<sup>3</sup>

Two different understandings of Premillennialism should be addressed. *Pretribulation* Premillennialism (or Dispensationalist Premillennialism) asserts Christ will come prior to the tribulation when he will "rapture" the Church out for the seven years, and then return with the Church for the messianic millennial reign after. *Posttribulation* Premillennialism, on the other hand, asserts that the Saints will endure the tribulation, Christ's coming occurring after. Even among these schools, there are various views and disagreements.<sup>4</sup>

## Part 1: The Comings' and Kingdom's Relationship

### AN EXPOSITION OF REVELATION 20: THE FIRST AND SECOND COMINGS IN RELATION TO THE KINGDOM.

All orthodox Christians will agree that Jesus Christ is the promised messiah (Matthew 1:18-25, &c.) who, first, came as God in the flesh (John 1:14, &c.). Further, all orthodox Christians will agree that Jesus Christ will come a second time to judge the living and the dead, establishing the eternal life promised to the elect (Matthew 24:30, John 14:3, Colossians 3:4, Philippians 3:20, Titus 2:13, Hebrews 9:28, 2 Peter 3:10, Revelation 1:7).

How these two comings relate to the Thousand Years in Revelation 20 is, however, a great matter of debate. Orthodox Christians agree that Christ's first coming is past and his second coming is future. However, there are a few ways that people look at the passage in Revelation regarding future versus past.

The first view is the preterist view which holds that some<sup>5</sup> of the events in Revelation were occurring *when John was writing it*. The historicist view holds that the events in Revelation *were future* when John was writing it; however, *some of these events have occurred in the past*.<sup>6</sup> Lastly, the futurist view holds that the events in Revelation were *written as future events and have not occurred yet*. There are various modifications to all these views.

We can attempt to understand Revelation through our own philosophies about what makes a proper interpretation of the book. However, the genre of Revelation is not meant to be taken literally in every respect, being a vision of supernatural events that are not fully comprehended by the human mind. John writes in the past tense, but he received a vision, quite possibly future. We should be wary of using our own philosophy regarding interpretation to this passage. Our

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<sup>3</sup> Of course, these descriptions are not as cleanly cut as we would like. This difficulty is particularly evident between Postmillennialism and Amillennialism. See "[Appendix: Why use the term 'Postmillennialist'?](#)" at the end of this discourse for more details on this matter.

<sup>4</sup> These views are summarized more thoroughly in Millard J Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013, 1105-1123. Erickson comes to a Premillennialist perspective, although helpfully explores all the viewpoints.

<sup>5</sup> *Full* preterist hold all the events in Revelation had occurred when John was writing it, including the new heaven and new earth. Thus, we can understand a separation between *partial* and *full* preterism.

<sup>6</sup> Perhaps the most prominent view of this type historically was the view that the Pope was the Antichrist, the Reformation the tribulation, and America's settlement the beginning of the Kingdom. For those who were in America, the Reformation was past for them, but future when John was writing.

philosophy ought to be one found in Christ, not the philosophies of man.<sup>7</sup> How Scripture says to interpret Scripture is a difficult and complex matter. Instead of using our own philosophies to interpret Scripture, we can use Scripture to interpret Scripture. Other passages besides Revelation 20 describe the events presented. Looking at these can give us a clue about the time frame of Revelation 20.

Let us consider the passage presented in Revelation. The bolded items are events we should take note of.

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit<sup>8</sup> and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and **bound him for a thousand years**, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that **he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.** Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. **They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.** The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

And **when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison** and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. (Revelation 20:1-8)

As a quick exposition, a few concepts to note, organizing the bolded text:

1. Satan's binding marks the beginning of the thousand years.
2. The purpose of the binding is that he "might not deceive the nations."
3. The saints come to life and reign over the earth for the thousand years.
4. Satan will be loosed for a "little while" after the thousand years.
5. Although not presented in this particular passage, we should also note the issue of tribulation, such as in Revelation 13:1-10.

When do these events occur? What is the relationship among them and the second coming of Christ? Where do we find this in the Scriptures? We will consider what the Scripture says about these events.

### **THE BIDDING OF SATAN.**

Revelation 20 declares that the angel "bound [Satan] for a thousand years." Thus, the binding of Satan is what occurs during the millennium, and what marks the beginning. The second mark that

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<sup>7</sup> Colossians 2:7-10.

<sup>8</sup> Greek for *abyss*.

Revelation 20 mentions for the beginning of the thousand years is the reigning of the Saints, which we will discuss later.

One such passage is in Matthew where Jesus is accused of being of demons for casting out demons. Jesus refutes this by saying that he must be against the demons. How this is accomplished is quite significant:

But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house. Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. (Matthew 12:28-30)

Jesus says, first, that if he does cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon them. Jesus says that he cannot "plunder" the "strong man's house" without first binding him. The strong man is the devil, since Christ is referring to his actions of casting out demons. Christ is plundering the "strong man's house" by his ministry, death, and resurrection. But that all occurs through the devil's binding.

The devil and his rulers were evil. They were put open to shame. Christ's government succeeded in the binding of the devil. This was accomplished on the cross.

Satan has fallen from heaven:

The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." (Luke 10:17-20)

Satan is cast out as a ruler by Christ's death:

Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. (John 12:30-33)

The evil rulers are disarmed and put to shame:

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. (Colossians 2:13-15)

(Note in this passage, that, in the earlier context, verses 11 and 12, Christ gives *us* life through a "circumcision made without hands," through baptism. This will be particularly important later.)

The reason Christ came was to destroy the works of the devil:

Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. (1 John 3:8)

Christ has conquered! Through this, he has saved us. Consider another:

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. (Hebrews 2:14-15)

He “destroyed the power of death, that is, the devil.” Those of slavery were delivered. This was accomplished by Christ’s incarnation, his partaking of the “same things.” Consider earlier in the same passage:

You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet.” Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. (Hebrews 2:7-8)

“[H]e left nothing outside his control” because he was “crowned...with glory” after being “lower than the angles.” The conquering power of Christ succeeded at the cross in his suffering and glorious resurrection. Indeed, when Christ was on the cross, he did not say that sin was not, or yet to be, conquered. He said, “it is finished.”

From this promise comes the gospel, which is promised to all nations, bringing the promise that sin has been defeated to the entirety of the world. All this is to fulfill the promises to all who God calls. And thus we see the coming of the Kingdom.

### **THE KINGDOM HAS COME.**

When looking back at Revelation 20, the passage indicates that the millennial reign<sup>9</sup> has come. Satan is bound, as we saw earlier, indicating that the present time is the millennial reign. Scripture indicates this has occurred as well.

We must first understand the government of Christ was prophesied:

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. (Isaiah 9:6-7)

This government occurs from the birth of the child. Premillennialists will defer the reign of Christ’s kingdom to after a period of the Church, but Isaiah indicates this coming with the birth of a child who will inherit the throne of David. Christ was made incarnate during his first coming; thus, it

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<sup>9</sup> The 1,000 years is commonly referred to as the millennial. This is also where different eschatological views receive their names: the views of *millennialism*.



seems proper, in accordance with the prophesy of Isaiah, to say his kingdom during this first coming as well.

We should also take note of the “increase of his government,” indicating a spread. What it spreads is “peace,” “justice,” and “righteousness,” all of which are brought about by the gospel. The “increase” further indicates a growth in the kingdom from one of small stature to one that covers the world. If God’s zeal is for the world, which the Bible indicates it is, and the “zeal” of God will accomplish the kingdom, it will cover the earth.

We are given the indication by Jesus that the kingdom is like bread being leavened: it starts small and grows. We will look more at the nature and scope of the kingdom later in this discourse.<sup>10</sup>

Some theologians will argue against a Postmillennial view by looking at the “throne of David” in Isaiah’s passage. Christ is prophesied to inherit the “throne of David.” David ruled from earth and Christ is currently not reigning from earth, indicating this is not fulfilled. However, while the royal lineage comes to Christ by his incarnate birth, he still reigns from heaven. The glory of heaven rules the earth.

Christ does not need to reign from earth to be king of earth. He reigns from heaven:

So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus answered, “Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?” Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?” Jesus answered, **“My kingdom is not of this world.** If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.” Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, **“You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth.** Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” (John 18:33-37)

Christ is the king. However, he does not reign from earth. He reigns from a more glorious, more eternal, more perfect throne in heaven.

The gospel is in the world to bring truth to the world; thus, this kingdom of heaven comes to earth:

Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.[”] (Matthew 6:9-10)

We are familiar with this as the Lord’s prayer. In it, we pray that Christ’s kingdom will come about “as it is in heaven.” It will come to earth. Thus, the kingdom of saints reigning comes to earth when the kingdom comes. Is this kingdom occurring now? Yes, Christ has the power in all of earth:

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe

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<sup>10</sup> This is dealt with primarily in Part 3: The nature of the Kingdom.

all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

All the power in heaven and earth has been given to Christ. This is then delegated to us in a command to make disciples. Here we see the second mark of the millennium, the reigning of the Saints. They are quite clearly reigning, seeing that Christ has been given all power, and he commands the Saints to go to “all nations.” Christ’s kingdom has come. It has come to earth from heaven. Christ reigns from heaven. The purpose of this kingdom is for the gospel.

Is this consistent with Revelation 20? We see in Matthew 28 that the gospel is for “all nations”; we see in Revelation 20 that the devil is bound so that he “might not deceive the nations.” Christ binds the devil for the nations that they might receive the truth of the gospel.

We have not considered the nature and scope of the kingdom in this section. However, we have considered when this occurs. In short, when looking at how Scripture interprets Revelation 20, a preterist Postmillennial view seems most proper.

### **THE SAINTS ARE REIGNING.**

What about the “came to life” part of Revelation 20? It seems that the Saints are not currently able to live forever in this earth. However, the Bible presents our death occurring in Eden. God told Adam and Eve that the day they ate of the fruit, they would die. While not physically alive forever, the Saints do receive the promise of eternal life.

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:1-7)

This is a rather long passage, but I note a few concepts. We *were* dead, and we *were* subject to the devil, but God set us free. Perhaps most significantly, he “raised us up” and “seated us with him in the heavenly place in Christ Jesus.” This is all past tense.<sup>11</sup> We were made rulers with Christ when we were regenerated.

In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that

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<sup>11</sup> Namely third-person singular aorist active indicative, for the Greek nerds.

stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.  
(Colossians 2:11-14)

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. (Romans 6:3-5)

We are raised to new life! The death enslaving the old man is dying. We are being sanctified. While we will still die in the flesh, we have been made spiritually alive, and spiritually rulers.

### **WHAT ABOUT 1,000 YEARS?**

Now that we have looked at the marks of the millennium, we should stop for a minute and consider an objection that often comes up regarding eschatology, namely how we should interpret the 1,000 years. It seems that we will take this metaphorically, as if we do not, Christ would be quite late in his return. However, is it *proper* to interpret this metaphorically, or should we take it literally?<sup>12</sup>

Revelation is quite an allegorical piece of Biblical literature. Revelation 20 is no different. Satan is described as a dragon and a serpent yet is a spiritual being. He is bound with a chain: how can this bind a spiritual being? He is bound in a “bottomless pit,” which, interpreted literally, is a tube. The passage as a whole is not the most literal passage. It is a metaphorical description of Satan’s binding and the Saint’s and Christ’s reigning.

Let us look deeper, however. In other places in Scripture, is 1,000 literal or a metaphor for significance? Let us look:

For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. (Psalm 50:10)

What about the cows on hill number 1,001? They all belong to God.

Let us look deeper, to the wording “thousand years”:

For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night. (Psalm 90:4)

Even though he should live a thousand years twice over, yet enjoy no good—do not all go to the one place? (Ecclesiastes 6:6)

Certainly, Scripture uses some words metaphorically and others not so. We ought not fall into a trap of saying that the Psalter’s use of “a thousand” as a metaphor interprets all other references to “a thousand.” Yet we also must recognize that Scripture *is* at times metaphorical and, within the Scriptural tradition, “a thousand” *can*, although not always *will*, be used metaphorically for length.

Since we must not apply such words so broadly, what if we limit ourselves even more to events relating to eschatology, not including Revelation 20?

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<sup>12</sup> Premillennialists, who argue the kingdom has not come yet, often argue that the 1,000 years is literal.

But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that **with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.** The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, **not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.** But **the day of the Lord will come** like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. (2 Peter 3:7-10)

Peter is quite clear here. “A thousand years” with the Lord is “as one day.” This time of a thousand years is eternal, yet brief. God has this time that people will come to repentance, showing once again that the thousand-year kingdom is for the gospel. The Lord will come quickly, but he will fulfill his promises.

Some premillennialists will argue that, since the current age is over a thousand years since Christ’s death and resurrection, a literal interpretation, which they would then say is proper, refutes Postmillennialism. Two responses:

First, when we have the ability, and a strong case, to interpret Revelation 20’s “thousand” metaphorically, we ought not settle on a literal interpretation when it stands contrary to Scripture’s clear teachings on the timing of Satan’s binding and Christ’s Kingdom coming.

Second, as we will see later, we do not know, and no one knows “but the Father only” the time when Christ will come. If the second coming is after the millennium, as Scripture indicates it is, we have a plausible reason to interpret the thousand years metaphorically. A literal thousand years would indicate an exact time, yet Scripture tells us we do not know the time.<sup>13</sup>

The thousand years is to mean a very long time, one where God fulfills his promises, but not so long as to neglect his promises. This is a difficult matter, but within the thousand years we see the glorious hope of the gospel. It is not literal, but it is glorious.

#### **EVALUATING THE TRIBULATION.**

A futurist or Premillennialist looking at Revelation may also attempt to explain the passage in a similar fashion, tying it to historical events. Most notably, they look to the descriptions of tribulation throughout the Bible as an indicator that the kingdom has not yet come. However, when looking at these, we see that the tribulation before the kingdom has already occurred.

Let us look back to the Revelation 20 passage. We see the tribulation caused by the beast in Revelation 13:1-10. Then, the beast, or the devil, is bound. Has this tribulation in chapter 13 occurred, or is it yet to come? We should also note that Revelation indicates another rebellion from

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<sup>13</sup> Ironically, most Dispensationalists, who argue the thousand years *must* be taken literally, find themselves struggling to explain why they do *not* take the Bible literally when Christ says “This is my body” after breaking bread, or when Peter says “Baptism now saves you” in 1 Peter 3:21.

Of course, I ought not simply say that *all* Dispensationalists are Baptists. However, I have yet to meet a Dispensationalist Pedobaptist. If Dispensationalism is taken to its logical end, where Israel is ethnic and the Church is spiritual, and the two are two separate entities, then understanding Colossians 2:11-12 as a defense of Pedobaptism will inevitably break down.

the devil. The end of verse 3 indicates that, “After [the thousand years] he must be released for a little while.” This then occurs later in the passage:

And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea.  
(Revelation 20:7-8)

What this then implies is that there is a time of tribulation, the thousand years, and then another short time of tribulation, after which Christ returns for a second time, completely conquering the devil and his allies. The preterist view that we have so far subscribed to would thus indicate a time of tribulation around Christ, a metaphorical thousand years—from the Great Commission to now and the future—and then a short time of tribulation, where Christ returns. This is indicated by Scripture.

Matthew 24 is the chief passage dealing with the troublesome end of the world. Let us break this down, verse by verse.

Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. But he answered them, “You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.” (Matthew 24:1-2)

Christ prophesized the destruction of the temple. This occurred with the siege of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., during the apostolic period. This is not a perfect proof of a preterist view, but it does show that Matthew 24 fits within the preterist view.<sup>14</sup>

But does the second coming come *right after* this tribulation?

Verses 3-12 describe the tribulation that will occur. This is not said to be greatly in the future. However, we are given the indication that this is not a complete ending. After describing trouble in verses 3-12, Jesus goes on to say that the gospel will then spread:

But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (Matthew 24:13-14)

In a way, if we break this down by “and” being an indicator of lists:

1. The one who endures to the end will be saved.
2. And the gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations.
3. And then the end will come.

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<sup>14</sup> Alternately, the Dispensationalist Premillennialist view asserts that, since the temple was destroyed, but the tribulation has not occurred yet, the temple must be rebuilt. Thus, they believe that the founding of an Israeli state (we should note a Parliamentary Republic, not a Kingdom as the Biblical Israel) was the beginning of the restoration of Israel, a fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. Israel must be a political state for Jesus to return, this view asserts.

Further, they believe, the temple must be destroyed during the tribulation (which is yet to come). Thus, they believe that the temple will be rebuilt and then will then be destroyed (for a *third* time) in the tribulation.

Verses 15-27 then describe a time of trouble following the spread of the gospel. This corresponds with the devil being loosed for a little while in Revelation 20:7-8.

After this, Christ comes in his glory in verses 29-31 of the Matthew passage, evil is defeated completely, and the elect are given their promised eternal life.

In short, both Matthew 24 and Revelation 20 correspond with a preterist interpretation. A time of tribulation and evil exists; the devil seeks power. Then Christ comes, he conquers sin and binds the devil by his death and resurrection. Then the gospel spreads around the world in the millennial kingdom. The devil is loosed for a while of trouble, but Christ conquers him completely and establishes the new heaven and new earth. Other times of tribulation fit into this as well, as passages either describe a time of persecution for preaching the gospel, or a time of trouble yet to come after the gospel has spread.

### **THE NEW HEAVEN AND NEW EARTH.**

This part should include one more piece of discussion that is not given to us in Revelation 20, but rather Revelation 21. We saw previously that Christ will come after the kingdom. Yet we do not see a *complete* fulfillment of glory until after Christ's second coming with the new heaven and new earth.

We find the new heaven and new earth in Revelation 21:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." (Revelation 21:1-5)

In short, right now, Christ reigns from heaven and we are ambassadors on earth. Yet He will come again to fulfill His promises to the faithful. Once this occurs, death will die:

But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. (1 Corinthians 15:23-26)

The first aspect we see here is that Christ comes first, the kingdom comes, where he reigns to destroy enemies. Then the kingdom ends with the destruction of death. Once death dies, the final new heaven and new earth with the resurrection of the dead and a complete restoration of righteousness will occur.

## **Part 2: The Nature of Christ's Coming**

### **EVALUATING THE OCCURRENCE.**

This is the second general concept when looking at eschatology, although it is much more universally agreed upon by orthodox Christians. This does deal with issues of people throughout history who have claimed to be a prophet or the returned Christ but did not meet the criteria Christ laid out. We must understand the second coming is for a definite purpose and occurs in a definite way.

Christ's first coming was to defeat sin. Then, the gospel spread, and is spreading. The second coming is to give together the elect's promised glorified eternal life:

Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him. (Hebrews 9:25-28)

Christ's second coming will gather the elect:

And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. (Matthew 24:31)

Everyone will see it:

Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. (Matthew 24:30)

Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen. (Revelation 1:7)

It will expose the world in fulness:

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. (2 Peter 3:10)

Christ tells us to not believe when people claim to be the Christ (Matthew 24:23-28). When Christ comes, the elect, and the world, will know. We ought not be deceived by people who claim divine status or relationship when they do not accomplish what will be accomplished when Christ returns.

Moving on, more common among Bible-believing Christians are two beliefs that should be examined: the belief in an "imminent" return of Christ, and the belief in the secret return of Christ to "rapture"<sup>15</sup> the church out for the seven years of tribulation.

#### **EXAMINING THE IDEA OF AN IMMINENT RETURN.**

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<sup>15</sup> The "rapture" is most notable position of the Pretribulational Premillennialist, or Dispensationalist, view.

The imminent return is found in the passages discussing the unknown time of arrival for Christ. Orthodoxy and Scripture support the idea that Christ will come at any time, unexpectedly.

However, the view of an “imminent” return within Dispensationalism limits itself more. This imminent return view asserts that no event needs to take place before Christ returns.

Some of the passages used:

Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. (Matthew 24:42-44).

You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. (Luke 12:40)

We must note that there is a vast difference between “coming at an hour you do not expect” and “no event needs to take place prior to Christ’s return.” This is an illogical conclusion, that, like many other improper doctrines, rests in presupposed philosophical positions. The message Christ gives is “be ready.” We are called to spread the gospel. We ought to work on that note, knowing that Christ can, and will return. Christ clearly lays this out in the parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13).

This does not mean we should not expect no event to occur. Saying that no event needs to occur prior to Christ’s return is illogical because every event that has the possibility of occurring must occur, seeing that the Father already has a date for the Son’s return planned:

But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son,<sup>16</sup> but the Father only. (Matthew 24:36)

Many events are described as coming before the second coming, such as, discussed previously, the gospel and the metaphorical millennial reign. These passages are not saying that Christ will return prior to these, nor is it saying that no event can take place; they are saying that, because we are not given a definite time, we ought to be ready.<sup>17</sup>

#### **EXAMINING THE IDEA OF THE RAPTURE.**

Today, the idea of a secret “rapture” where Christ secretly zaps<sup>18</sup> all true believers out of the world, leaving the rest of the world to suffer the seven-year tribulation, after which Christ and his believers will appear for a 1,000-year messianic Israeli kingdom, has become a popular idea permeating American Christianity. It is the most notable feature of a Dispensationalist eschatological view.

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<sup>16</sup> Some manuscripts omit “nor the Son.”

<sup>17</sup> The fact that the 1,000-year kingdom came with the King is perhaps another indication that 1,000 should be taken metaphorically. Some did expect Christ to return around A.D. 1,000. However, Christ says we do not know when this reign will end. We are given the promise that the gospel will spread during this time out of God’s great love.

<sup>18</sup> Is there a better word here? Perhaps “yeets” to appeal to the young people.



The idea of the “pretribulation rapture” is at odds with the passages used to support it. It is at odds with nearly every passage talking about Christ’s second coming. In fact, it is at odds with the gospel itself in entirety.

Why would a rapture be needed? The Bible very clearly indicates that it is not to save the believer, as Christ’s love, not a rapture, protects from troubles and evils in the world:

Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. **Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?** As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. **For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**  
(Romans 8:33-39)

If we believe what Paul says here, we will believe that the rapture is not necessary for salvation. Paul even mentions “tribulation” not separating us. We can thus conclude that the rapture is not needed for the salvation of the elect.

But let us consider another option: Is the rapture needed so the elect will not receive unjust punishment? Let us see what the Scriptures say:

And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. (Matthew 24:12-13)

I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)

In fact, the people who endure the tribulation will be saved. If a rapture is to avoid punishment, God would pull people out of the world the moment they receive salvation during the tribulation. This is not God’s plan. We will receive trials in this world.

The idea of the rapture lies in a much more hidden notion. The Dispensationalist view holds that Israel and the Church are two separate, distinct entities. The only reason the gospel was given to the Gentiles and the Church, according to this view, was because the Jews rejected Christ. In short, it asserts that the salvation of mankind outside of ethnic Judaism was an afterthought, and thus the promise of the gospel of the Old Testament prophets does not pertain to the Church. Scriptures clearly reject this view, as shown in the first section of this discourse, “Covenantal Theology.”

According to the Dispensationalist view, Christ must rapture the true believers of the church out of the world to save Israel. After the rapture, he can deal with Israel. Knowing that the salvation of Israel has occurred, and is occurring now, and will occur, because the church is Israel, made one through election and the cross, we know that the concept of the rapture stands at odds with the gospel. Still, we will consider the passages used to support the notion of the rapture.

The wording Dispensationalists rely on is in bold:

For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. **And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.** Therefore encourage one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:14-18)

At first glance, this may seem to support the idea of the rapture. Let us break this down thoroughly, however, and examine it in context:

1. Paul first argues that because we believe Jesus died and rose again, those who have died in the flesh yet are among God's elect will also be raised.
2. Because God will raise the dead, living Christians will be gathered with Christ along with Christians who died in the past.
3. Christ will come with a "cry of command," the "voice of an archangel," and the "sound of the trumpet of God."
4. Because we will all be raised to meet Christ, we ought to comfort one another.

First, we see the view of the rapture failing here because the rapture is described as a "secret rapture." Of course, Christ does not come in secret. He comes with a cry, a command, the voice of an archangel, and the sound of the trumpet. This is not a secret. The entire world will know, even those in unbelief (Revelation 1:7).

Second, Paul offers no indication that this is to save us from a time of tribulation. Dispensationalists will say that this coming proceeds the tribulation because we are to "encourage" one another with this, meaning that it proceeds tribulation. If tribulation was coming, this would not be a matter of encouragement. We know, however, that the new heaven and the new earth will be a matter to encourage one another over. Further, Paul is not calling for encouragement that we will be apart from tribulation. The discouragement is regarding Christians dying. Paul is calling for comfort in that they will rise again.

Third, we should note that the wording used for "meet" in "meet the Lord in the air" does not mean to pull the church away, but rather to arrive at the church. In Greek this word is *ἀπάντησις* (*apantesis*), meaning a meeting or an act of meeting. The first of the other two<sup>19</sup> places this word is used is Matthew 25:6 in the parable of the ten virgins:

But at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him [*εἰς*<sup>20</sup> *ἀπάντησιν*—*eis apantesin*].' (Matthew 25:6)

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<sup>19</sup> The use of the word in Matthew 27:32 is disputed and suspect.

<sup>20</sup> *εἰς* as a preposition can be translated as "to," "into," or "for." It can also mean *many* other things. Greek is fun.

It is, in fact, the foolish virgins who leave. The meeting occurs after the bridegroom comes to meet the wise virgins.<sup>21</sup> The use of the word ἀπάντησις (*apantesis*) here is a meeting, not a snatching away as the rapture indicates.<sup>22</sup>

The second passage that uses this word indicates similarly, in Acts 28:15, where Paul is approaching Rome. A group of believers went to meet [εἰς ἀπάντησιν—*eis apantesin*] them. Once again, the meeting on the part of the people doing the action of meeting is in the location where they are. It is not a snatching away, but rather a meeting in a present location.

Another similar passage that is used, with similar wording, is in 1 Corinthians:

I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. **Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.** For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” (1 Corinthians 15:50-54)

Dispensationalists rely on the bolded part above.<sup>23</sup> Once again, this passage does not put the events in context. The context of the passage is discussing the “perishable put[ing] on the imperishable,” the death of mortality, the resurrection of the dead, and the new heaven and earth. In short, Paul is discussing our change from mortal, unsanctified beings to fully sanctified, immortal beings. The passage does not discuss our departure from this world of death, but rather Christ’s triumph over this world of death.

To support the idea of separation, Dispensationalists point to Matthew 24. Items dealing with separation are bolded:

“But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. **For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.** Then two men will be in the field; **one will be taken and one left.** Two women will be grinding at the mill; **one will be taken and one left.** Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the **thief was coming**, he would have stayed awake

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<sup>21</sup> We should note that the virgins who did not have oil were told “I do not know you,” instead of given a “second chance” during the tribulation, as the Pretribulation view holds. When the bridegroom came, judgment was done.

<sup>22</sup> Lingual analysis from Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1121.

<sup>23</sup> Verses 51-52.

and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. (Matthew 24:36-44)

Once again, Christ is referring to being ready for his coming. We are tasked with the gospel. This passage dealing with the coming is discussing being ready in preaching the gospel to the world, a view distinctly supported by the Postmillennialist position. Let us break down what Jesus is saying here.

1. No one knows when Christ (“the Son of man”) will come.
2. In Noah’s day, people lived freely, but then the flood came suddenly.
3. Likewise, people will live freely, but then Christ will come suddenly.
4. The flood took them away. When Christ comes, people will be together, but one will be taken away.
5. Since you do not know when Christ will come, and it will take away the wicked, be ready.

In this case of separation (Christ gives three examples), one is taken and one is left. We have the best indication on what this means given the parable regarding Noah. It was, in fact, not the righteous taken away, but rather the unrighteous. The unrighteous were taken away by water. Water destroyed the unrighteous and left the good. Peter supports this idea on two accounts:

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, **when God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water.** Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him. (1 Peter 3:18-22)

In the days of Noah, God waited while Noah was building the ark. Then, judgment came. Noah remained in the ark, saved by the ark, as evil was destroyed by water. Noah was not pulled away, but the unrighteous. In a similar fashion, when Christ comes, the unjust will be judged and cast away.

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; (2 Peter 2:4-5)

Peter is clear: God “preserved” Noah. The flood came upon the ungodly and cast them away. Peter continues in the same passage:

...then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials,<sup>24</sup> and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority. (2 Peter 2:9-10)

The righteous are kept “under punishment.” This indicates that Christ is punishing them. He is not waiting for a time of tribulation to punish them. He is punishing them now. The day of judgment will seal this punishment eternally.

One more passage:

Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth. (Revelation 3:10)

We should note here that the wording in “I will keep you” is *τηρέω* (*teréo*), which can be, in dangerous situations, translated as “guard.” John could have used *αἴρω* (*airo*), which can be translated as “to lift up,” or “to remove.” In short, we see the perseverance of the saints (cf. Romans 8:33-39) in this passage, not the rapture.<sup>25</sup>

Two more notes about the rapture:

First, the idea of the rapture does not follow the standards of Biblical logic we ought to follow. When we interpret Scripture, we ought to make sure that our conclusions are logical. We ought not to make inferences and tie together unrelated passages. The idea of the rapture fails in this goal. *Even if* we interpret the passages about the snatching away the way Dispensationalists interpret, the passages that they use to support this do not define this purpose to be before the tribulation, nor regarding the tribulation. Further, we do not see the elect returning to earth with Christ for the millennium as Dispensationalists argue. While some passages may seem to support the rapture, a proper interpretation will disprove this, and even when interpreted favorably towards Dispensationalists, they still do not make a logical conclusion.

Finally, we should note that the idea of the rapture—and Dispensationalism itself—is an unorthodox view. It is not found in the Bible, and it was never part of church history. Early church fathers such as Irenaeus of Lyon and Augustine of Hippo advocated for a covenantal view of the Bible. While there were some disagreements regarding post- versus pre-millennialism, the idea of the rapture and Dispensationalism as a whole, did not come to light as a doctrine until the 1800s. When it did, it contradicted thousands of years of Christian theology that was based on Biblical standards. Again, history cannot be our only guide, but when such a case arises, we ought to take note because we ourselves are not perfect in interpreting Scripture. In the case of Dispensationalism, when we pause and take note, it runs contrary to the clear teachings of the Bible.

In short, the idea of the rapture is not found in the Bible. When the Bible discusses Christ coming quickly, it simply means that he is coming, and we ought to be ready. When he comes, he will come triumphantly. We ought not to read the idea of the rapture into these texts. The Bible indicates no need for the rapture, no sign of the rapture, nor is any event indicated. Instead, we

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<sup>24</sup> Or temptations. *ESV Bible*.

<sup>25</sup> Lingual analysis from Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1121.

ought to recognize that Christ *will* come and, in the meantime, we have been tasked with the gospel. We ought not to be foolish as the five virgins who did not bring oil, but rather serve as ambassadors of Christ's current kingdom.

### **Part 3: The nature of the Kingdom**

#### **INTRODUCTION.**

We have established the Kingdom has come, the devil is bound, and Christ is reigning. Why, then, is there so much evil in the world? We asked this question earlier and now we will examine it. We must understand the nature and scope of the Kingdom.

When looking back to the previous section about the devil's binding and the kingdom coming, we see a rather unfortunate trend between how man thinks God will act and God actually acts. Christ does not come with earthly power in triumph. Instead, He dies at the hands of his enemies. That death and then the following resurrection kills death and sin itself. The Jews expected a political revolution. Christ's conquering was subtle to the eyes of man, yet more glorious spiritually than any earthly conquering. This conquering gave Him all the power in the earth (Matthew 28:18).

In Matthew 28, Christ has just killed death through his own death. We could expect anything to happen at this point. Yet far too many Christians reject the means Christ gives. After saying all the power in the world is his, Christ says to go to all nations. Does he say to go with political might and overthrow rulers, passing just laws, and making the world visibly better? Far from this. Christ dedicates his entire power through what covers 70% of the earth's surface and something that happens in nearly every person's life every day: water and words, in baptism and the Word of God, respectively:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit... (Matthew 28:19)

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word... (Ephesians 5:25-26)

This is a powerful testimony to God's transcendence and immanence. Nearly every other world religion is exclusive or focused on the individual.<sup>26</sup> God chooses elements that are common, present, and acceptable, showing his immanence. Yet he accomplishes more spiritually than what we even perceive, showing his transcendence.

This is beautifully illustrated in Acts 8 with Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch. The Eunuch and Philip had a simple conversation regarding the Word of God. Then, seeing water, the Eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" (Verse 36). He had faith from the Word, was baptized, and then journeyed on to tell his country of the good news.

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<sup>26</sup> When we see an elitist or human centered religion, we see a religion made in the image of man. Christianity is in the image of God. This conflict between evil and good, the image of man versus the image of God, respectively, is first seen in the Garden of Eden with the original sin. Romans 1 expresses this concept well.

We commonly refer to the Word of God and baptism as means of grace, meaning that they are the means by which God carries out his divine will. Are these enough for God's will? What is God's will? And what does this have to do with the kingdom of God?

### **EVALUATING THE SCOPE AND PURPOSE OF THE KINGDOM.**

We are fallen. We improperly define good. Thus, when looking at the purpose of the Kingdom, we ought to look at what Bible says, not what we expect. Let us look:

Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven..." (Matthew 6:9-10)

The purpose of the Kingdom is a place where the Father's will is done. Definitionally, the Kingdom exists to execute God's end for the earth. Let us look at God's will in this light:

This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. (1 Timothy 2:4-6)

But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. (2 Peter 3:7-9)

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. (Hebrews 13:20-21)

We see, quite clearly, that God's will is the gospel. God desires the salvation of the world. Thus, when we evaluate what God's will is, and what the purpose of the kingdom is, we see the gospel. This is why, in Matthew 28, Jesus, after receiving all power in heaven and in earth, delegates this in the Great Commission. In this commission, we see the elements of the Word of God and the Sacraments. These are means of grace, as the conquering of Christ has already occurred. For example, in the Hebrews 13 passage above, we see the "blood of the eternal covenant" equipping us for this commission.

We should note that the Church *is* the kingdom, and the gospel *is* the kingdom. Thus, the kingdom is not immediate. It starts small, and it spreads:

He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." He told them another

parable. “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.” (Matthew 13:31-33)

Over time, the kingdom grows. What occurs when it “becomes a tree,” or is “all leavened”? The Kingdom accomplishes three hopes that will come about during this age.

First, the gospel will spread:

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (Matthew 24:14)

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.” (Romans 1:16-17)

For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. (Galatians 6:8-10)

Second, the Church will be unified:

The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. (John 17:22-23)

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. (Ephesians 4:11-14)

How exactly will this come about? Will the Church be unified into one denomination? Quite simply, we are not given full details about the unity of faith. What we do see is “the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers” building up the body of Christ. Thus, we understand that by the teaching of the Word of God the church is sanctified and unified together.

Let us consider the earlier part of the passage in Ephesians:



I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:1-6)

We are unified by sharing a common Lord (the Trinity), a common faith (the blessed hope of Christ's death, resurrection, and second advent; see Hebrews 11), and a common baptism (the initiatory rite; see 1 Corinthians 12:13). By the same means that Christ gives in the Great Commission in Matthew 28, we are unified.

Finally, the Church will be sanctified:

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. (Ephesians 5:25-27)

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. (2 Peter 3:11-13)

Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; (Revelation 19:7)

The spread of the gospel is not weak. The unity of the Church is not broad. The gospel is spread and the Church is unified, all done in truth and grace. Christ has truly conquered death.

We should note especially the Ephesians passage above. By “the washing of water with the word,” the Church is presented without a “spot or wrinkle,” sanctified for heaven. Once again, we see the means of grace in Baptism and the Word of God. We expect God to come with earthly power, yet he comes with Baptism and the Word of God, common, imminent elements. Yet they are powerful elements, enough to fulfill the Kingdom.

By Baptism and the Word of God the Church spreads, is unified, and is purified, all to the glory of God. Truly, God's transcendence and imminence is perfect.

We do not change the world; God changes the world. We do not spread the gospel; God spreads the gospel. We are called to faithfulness. By faith, God will transform the world.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> There are four questions from the Westminster Shorter Catechism that are of profit.

Q. 85. *What doth God require of us that we may escape his wrath and curse due to us for sin?*

A. To escape the wrath and curse of God due to us for sin, God requireth of us faith in Jesus Christ, repentance unto life, with the diligent use of all the outward means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption.

## EVALUATING THE ELEMENTS OF THE KINGDOM.

We are given something of a riddle in Revelation 20 regarding two resurrections and two deaths.

Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. **This is the first resurrection.** Blessed and holy is the **one who shares in the first resurrection!** **Over such the second death has no power,** but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and **they will reign with him for a thousand years.** (Revelation 20:4-6)

Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. **This is the second death, the lake of fire.** And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:14-15)

But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that **burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.**" (Revelation 21:8)

Some will argue that this "first resurrection" refers to the idea of the rapture. However, we see here people being, first, resurrected differently than sinners, and also living through tribulation from "had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus." Thus, the rapture is not seen here. When we look at Scripture, we see a very different discussion of resurrection:

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. (Romans 6:1-5)

We see quite clearly how Baptism is a Kingdom element now. We have seen how Christ has conquered death by his death. We are united with him in his death by Baptism. We are thus made agents of the Kingdom through Baptism. Baptism raises the Saints to reign with Christ.

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Q. 86. *What is faith in Jesus Christ?*

A. Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel.

Q. 87. *What is repentance unto life?*

A. Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience.

Q. 88. *What are the outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption?*

A. The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption, are his ordinances, especially the word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.

From what is described, then, the “first resurrection” is Baptism, which raises Saints. The second resurrection would be people being raised to be judged by Christ. The first death is our death in the flesh, whereas the second death is the eternal punishment in the lake of fire. Thus, those who participate in Christ’s baptism do not experience the punishment of the lack of fire.

Baptism raises the Saints. We see that Baptism has the power to conquer the world in the optimism the Kingdom promises. Let us look:

For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. (Colossians 2:9-12)

First, here, we see the fulfillment of an Old Testament hope. Abraham is made the father of righteousness by his faith, imputed through circumcision (Romans 4:11-12). This promise is then given to the Gentiles through Baptism, seen in this passage, as the promise of Baptism is to “all nations.” Second, we see a matter of continuation and descent here, as circumcision was done to male infants under the mosaic law. It was given to offspring, showing decent. Thus, by this, we see Baptism uniting us with Christ, in Abraham’s faith, and continued generation after generation.

...because they formerly did not obey, when God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him. (1 Peter 3:20-22)

In the days of Noah, water saved eight people. In a similar fashion, in Baptism, water saves us. This is done through Christ’s resurrection, who has all power. We see a special power in Baptism here. In Colossians 2, we see Baptism being a matter of lineage and continuation. In 1 Peter 3, we see the waters of Baptism covering the world. The flood affected the world, as will Baptism. Clearly, we see the power of Baptism unifying us with Christ, being for lineage, and for the world, which fully covers the hopes of Postmillennialism presented. In short, Baptism accomplishes all facets of the Great Commission through the conquering power of Christ. Peter teaches this quite clearly at Pentecost:

And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” (Acts 2:38-40)

We see this filling us with forgiveness, for our children, for those who are far off, and finally conquering of the “crooked generation.” Truly, Christ has conquered, and his gift in baptism will

conquer the world with his power. Baptism is the yeast which leavens the entire lump (Matthew 13:31-33) and raises Saints to reign with him (Revelation 20:4-6)

Let us also look at the Word of God:

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God<sup>28</sup> may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

God's word completes the "man of God," which is then for the world:

Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. (John 17:17-19)

With this, we see truth being for the world. Yet truth does more, as it sanctifies the world:

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. (Ephesians 5:25-27)

We should note that Paul says it is by "water" or Baptism "with the word," or the Bible, the Church is sanctified. Thus, the purification of the Church happens through Baptism and the Word of God.

Further, the "making disciples of all nations" in Matthew 28 happens through the receiving of the Word of God:

As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty." (Matthew 13:23)

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. (Romans 10:14-17)

Faith comes from hearing, and those who have faith are saved by God's grace (Ephesians 2:8). This is brought by those preaching the Word of God, making disciples of all nations. The Church preaches and baptizes, thus sanctifying the Church, unifying the Church, and spreading it around the world.

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<sup>28</sup> From the ESV translation notes: "That is, a messenger of God (the phrase echoes a common Old Testament expression)."

## THE KINGDOM IS NOT VISIBLE.

Christ does not promise a political, visible kingdom. His kingdom is above the powers of earth. He accomplishes it through elements that are common through means we do not expect: water, and the Word. Consider a passage that we looked at earlier:

So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus answered, “Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?” Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?” Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. **If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.**” Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” (John 18:33-37)

Christ does not need politics because he transcends it. He is above it. Thus, he does not use the elements of the world’s power, but his own power. Consider another:

Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, “The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.” And he said to the disciples, “The days are coming when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. And they will say to you, ‘Look, there!’ or ‘Look, here!’ Do not go out or follow them. (Luke 17:20-23)

The kingdom is within us, the Church, with whom God has made an eternal redemptive covenant. In the midst of the Church are the elements Christ builds his Church with, the means of grace. Truly, not by visible elements is the kingdom built, but by invisible elements. By grace Christ sanctifies. He does not need earthly power because his power is greater.

We often fail to see the glory and potential of Christ’s imminent yet transcendent elements. However, Christ has conquered. His will to save is bigger than our will to sin, because “It is finished.” Now, the promise of the gospel is for the world, and it *will* succeed with grace and glory.

## Conclusion

### THE CHIEF END OF MAN.

We should conclude with the Parable of the Ten Virgins from our Savior in Matthew 25. In this parable, five virgins had filled oil in their lamp; they were prepared for the bridegroom. Five foolish virgins did not have oil and were not prepared. When the bridegroom came, the five foolish virgins needed to leave to buy oil for their lamps. When they returned, the bridegroom responded, “I know you not.”

Christ’s message is clear: be ready. When we look at the purpose of man, we see us partaking in his glory and doing the will of the gospel. He has tasked us with the gospel. He has given us the Word of God and Baptism. He has conquered death. His promise is for the world. The glory of the

Kingdom will succeed through his grace, his promise, and his love. Truly, our Triune God is transcendent, imminent, and forever sovereign in love.

We do not need to speculate about the trials proceeding the second coming because we know Christ will conquer. Our doctrines on eschatology matter because they point us to the truth of God's triumph. We ought not be like the foolish virgins. We must, first, meditate upon the grace of God revealed in His plan for eternity. We must, second, be urgent as the wise virgins, sharing His grace and mercy with all.

His grace is enough. May we share His love and look forward towards His coming.

The funny stuff is on the next page.

## Funny Stuff.

EACH ESCHATOLOGICAL VIEW, REPRESENTED BY AN EMOJI:

Postmillennialism:



Amillennialism:



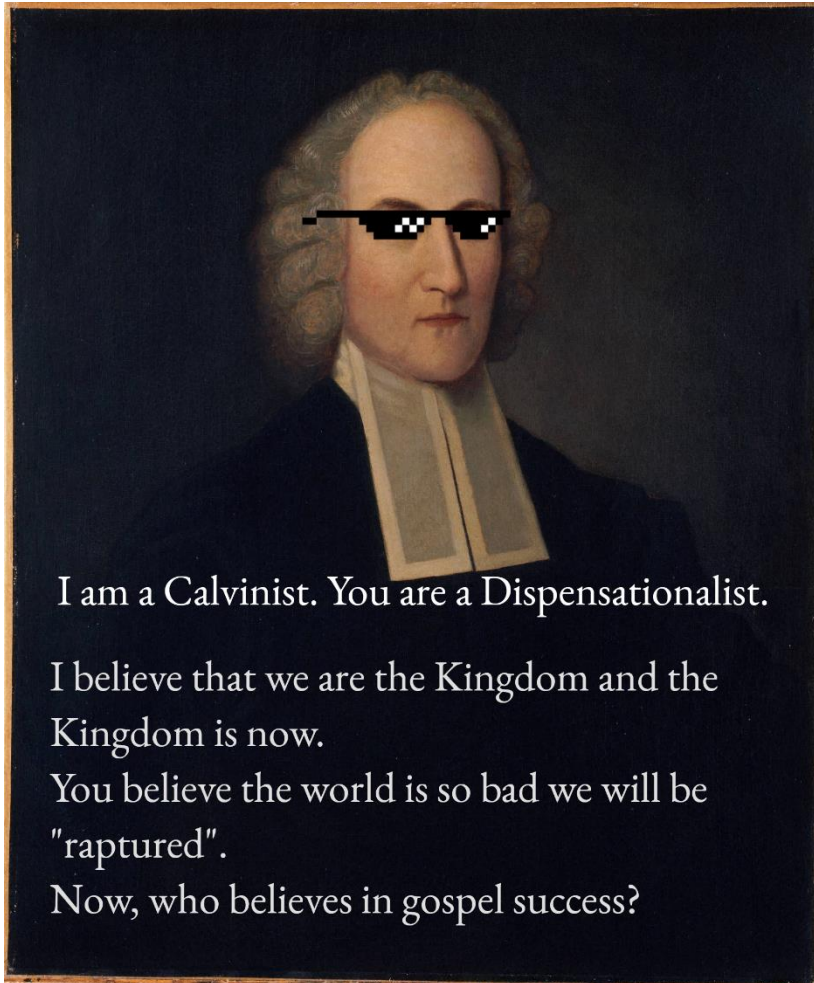
Premillennialism:



Dispensationalist Premillennialism:



A MEME:





## Appendix: Why use the term “Postmillennialist”?

I am fully aware that describing myself as a “Postmillennialist” comes with a number of presuppositions, stereotypes, dangers, concerns, comments, questions, objections, and confusions. The views of Dispensationalists and Premillennialists can be understood separately since they place the timing of the kingdom after the second advent. However, Amillennialism and Postmillennialism have something of an intersection by both understanding that the second advent is after the kingdom. The difficulty is understanding the scope of the kingdom.

I have found multiple occasions when, after describing myself as a Postmillennialist, people understand that I believe in the establishment of the kingdom before the second advent and the successful spread of the gospel. They separate this from the Amillennialist position, which they understand presenting no gospel success and merely metaphorical kingdom absent from this earth. In short, they understand the Amillennialist kingdom as a sort of gnostic reality. Postmillennialism stands contrary to this.

Yet there have also been times when, especially in discourse with Anglican brothers and sisters in the faith, my position sounds exactly the same as theirs. We believe in the presence of the kingdom now and in gospel success by the grace of God through the ordinary means of grace.

And, perhaps most troublingly, when I describe myself as a Postmillennialist, some believe that I see man’s works as necessary to the spread of the gospel, nodding to the graceless theology of Charles Finney. Others believe I am supporting American exceptionalism and manifest destiny. Still more understand that I support the Social Gospel movement. Even more perceive me supporting the troubling modernist theology of Rushdoony, Bahnsen, and North, which replaces grace with law, understands idolatry as mere foolishness (or as some mental disorientation rather than as sin), and sees the millennium as a period when we *finally* elect some good cage stage Calvinists into political office.<sup>29</sup>

To put the matter simply: there is a range of expressions that could be called either Postmillennialism or Amillennialism. Both Postmillennialists and Amillennialists claim Augustine (and others) as a father of their doctrine. The prefixes *Post-* and *A-* are rather new. Perhaps I could describe my view with either term. Why go with “Postmillennialism” as the favored term? Four reasons:

1. “Postmillennialism” deals with what may be the greatest matter of debate: the timeframe. It thus provides the clearest distinction away from Premillennialism and Pretribulationist Premillennialism (which also are semantically built on time frame).
2. “Postmillennialism” establishes, both semantically and in a layman’s understanding, the reality of Christ’s kingdom on earth. The Church is tangible. The sacraments are tangible. Postmillennialism dismisses the gnostic tendencies that appear especially among Baptists who describe themselves as Amillennialism.
3. The variations within Postmillennialism have their own set of terms to set themselves apart. E.g., “American exceptionalism,” “Social Gospel,” “Theonomy,” “Christian

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<sup>29</sup> The term “cage stage” comes from R. C. Sproul, “Escaping the ‘Cage Stage,’” *Ligonier Ministries*, November 25, 2013, [www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/escaping-cage-stage](http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/escaping-cage-stage).

Reconstructionism,” etc. Anyone engaged in scholarly debate will dig deeper to find out what faction of Postmillennialism any given person is. I am inclined to say that the Amillennial camp would be better suited to describe themselves as “Postmillennialist” and then describe their understanding of the scope of the kingdom with another term. After all, this debate is around the *scope*, not the *timeframe*.

4. There are Christians within Reformed circles who describe themselves as Postmillennialist with whom I concur on eschatological principles (e.g. R. C. Sproul and Keith Mathison).<sup>30</sup> My views being confused as Amillennialism occurs primarily within Anglican, Lutheran, and Roman Catholic circles, not the Reformed circles I am primarily working within.

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<sup>30</sup> Mathison also, however, understands the difficulties of this sort of classification. Mathison goes as far to argue that the view of Christ’s kingdom being synonymous with the church age is a relatively new use of the term “Postmillennial.” If Mathison’s judgment is correct, then, historically, my view might be called “Optimistic Amillennialism”—a term understood as an oxymoron by some. Keith Mathison, “The Millennial Maze,” *Ligonier Ministries*, November 25, 2013, [www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/millennial-maze](http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/millennial-maze).