

The Establishment of the Messianic Kingdom – Part 1

Revelation 20

Will you join me this morning by taking your Bibles and turning to Revelation chapter 20, an amazing passage of Scripture describing the millennial reign of our Lord Jesus Christ? Follow along as I read the text this morning, Revelation chapter 20.

And I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he should not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time. And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and 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 completed. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years. And when the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. And 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.¹

¹ Revelation 20:1-15.

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Here we have the Lord Jesus Christ revealing to us through his servant John, the culmination of human history. This is the consummation of God's plan to glorify himself, the establishment of the messianic kingdom on earth.

Man has always dreamed of living in paradise, a place where there is no more disease or dying, a place where there is no more violence, no more war, a place where there is no more deception and immorality and oppression and injustice, a place where you don't have to toil day in and day out to survive. Man has always longed for a place where all of the problems of life somehow go away.

Every culture has had a utopian dream, a longing, frankly, that makes man a very easy target for politicians who will promise them all of these types of things. But isn't it interesting? It never comes. It never comes. Despite all of the advances in health care, in medicine, in technology, science, philosophy and education, all the things we despise seem to still plague us.

But here in Revelation 20 we have a summary description of a Utopia on earth, one that is brought on by God, not man. We know, as we have studied in the book of Revelation that following seven years of cataclysmic judgments upon the earth and the utter destruction and reconfiguration of the earth, we know that what was lost in the Garden of Eden is suddenly going to be regained for 1000 years, and then at the end of this messianic age God will utterly destroy both the heaven and the earth and he will create a new heaven and a new earth, one that has never been nor ever will be polluted with sin.

As we studied before, the millennial kingdom will be a world ruled by the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, a world dominated by truth and holiness and righteousness and justice, a day when, according to Daniel 2:44, "The God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever."²

Again, imagine a world that will be transformed spiritually, socially, morally, politically and in every way you can imagine. Even the geologic structure of the earth will be radically altered. The climate will be different. The animal kingdom will be vastly different. Religious life will be different. All will be radically altered and maintained by the rule of God.

Imagine a day when the effects of sin on society cease to exist and the environment is finally reclaimed, when social injustices are reversed, when Israel will be finally restored as the witness nation that Jehovah God intended them to be, "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" according to Exodus 19:6. Imagine when Jerusalem will finally be the place where the Lord Jesus dwells, where the covenant God of Israel will reign as the mediatorial king. As Zechariah eight and verse three says, "Thus says the LORD, 'I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem.'"³ And imagine a day when God himself erects a magnificent temple beyond anything that we could ever comprehend, a

² Daniel 2:44.

³ Zechariah 8:3.

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place where he will dwell and where we will come to worship. The prophet Zechariah tells us in chapter 14 and verse nine, “And the LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one.”⁴

Now the kingdom of God was also described in the New Testament as well and it was promised in stages. We learn, for example, in Luke’s gospel that a new institution, the Church, would temporarily replace Israel until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled, Luke 21:24. And in answer to the disciples’ question in Acts 1:6 when they said, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”⁵ You will recall that he replied that it was not for them to know, “times or epochs which the Father has fixed by his authority,”⁶ in verse seven. Though he did not answer their question, he used the terms **CRONOS** (khron’-os) for times and **KAIROS** (kahee-ros’) for epochs or seasons which seems to indicate that there is going to be two periods, not one.

But then as he departed the angel gives us a clue about how he will return. You will recall in verse 11 the angel says he, “will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”⁷ Obviously this is a reference to the time when the restoration takes place. And Luke reveals to us in his gospel and in Acts that the kingdom is going to come in stages, that it is both here already, but not yet fully. The kingdom was already here in a spiritual sense in that when Christ came we see God rebuilding the house of David through his greater Son, the raised and reigning Jesus. In Christ’s first advent, the Abrahamic and the Davidic and the new covenant all received an initial, partial fulfillment. But obviously there was much more to come.

Remember in Luke one Mary was promised that her son will be great, that the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever and his kingdom will have no end. But when Jesus came certainly the king was there, but not fully the kingdom.

And in Luke one the Holy Spirit spoke through Zacharias and promised that the Lord God of Israel would, according to verses 72, “show mercy toward our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath which he swore to Abraham our Father to grant us that we being delivered from the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.”⁸ That didn’t happen, did it? Not yet.

And in Acts two verses 30 through 36 Luke tells us that Jesus currently, right now sits at the right hand of God and he is “sitting on the throne of David.” The idea is he is there in that sense already. But he also adds that he “will rule over the house of Israel and make his enemies a footstool for his feet.” It has not happened yet, has it? So, in a sense, he was there already as the king in the kingdom, but yet not yet fully.

⁴ Zechariah 14:9.

⁵ Acts 1:6.

⁶ Acts 1:7.

⁷ Acts 1:11.

⁸ Luke 1:72.

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We see this, as well in Jesus' promise that he would not celebrate a Passover feast with his apostle again until all of the kingdom promises were fulfilled. Luke tells us that in Luke 22 verses 16 and 19. In fact, in Matthew 26:29 we read, "But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."⁹ So it is not fully here, not yet. Moreover, the kingdom had not yet come in its fullness because the apostles were not yet sitting on thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel as promised in verse 30. So there is more to come is the idea. Indeed, we see the already, but not yet promise of the messianic kingdom even in the New Testament.

In fact, in the New Testament the kingdom is referred to by other names. For example in Matthew 19 verse 28 Jesus called it the regeneration when the Son of man will sit on his glorious throne. And in Acts 3:19 Peter called it the times of refreshing that will come from the presence of the Lord. And then in verse 21 he described it as the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from ancient time. And in Ephesians chapter one verse 10 Paul described it as an administration, literally a dispensation suitable to the fullness of the times, that is the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth.

And now here in Revelation 20 the Lord gives us a summary description of this promised earthly kingdom which has been described in great detail all though the Old Testament.

Now, please, know that you must have an understanding of the kingdom in order to understand Bible prophecy. It is for this reason that I have labored intensely for the last three years with our men on Tuesday nights in S I T to help them understand these glorious truths. We carefully examined Barry Horner's landmark work *Future Israel: Why Christian Anti-Judaism Must Be Challenged*, where he exposes the historical roots and the exegetical fallacies of Augustinian eschatology sometimes known as Supersessionism or Amillennialism or Replacement Theology—a new work that is frankly shaking the foundations of those who hold those views. And for almost two years now we have been examining Alva J. McLain's great work *The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God*, a work that every serious student of Scripture must read.

Beloved, this subject is of profound importance. Why? I will tell you why. Because even before sin entered the garden, God set into motion a magnificent plan of redemption that would ultimately glorify himself and it would ultimately find its consummation in an earthly kingdom where the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, would reign as King of kings and Lord of lords. That is why it is important. And at the end of that earthly kingdom, the history of man will be complete and God will uncreate what he created and create a new heaven and a new earth that will be utterly bereft of any trace of sin. And that new reality will become the everlasting kingdom, the eternal and glorious state of heaven.

⁹ Matthew 26:29.

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Now, over the next several weeks we are going to exegetically examine this magnificent text. We are going to look at seven themes. Let me give them to you briefly. We are going to see the incarceration of Satan, the allocation of rulers, the resurrection of saints, the incineration of rebels, the retribution of Satan, the disintegration of heaven and earth and the damnation of sinners.

Now, there should be no serious dispute about this very straightforward text. And, frankly, there was none for about 300 years after the Lord ascended into heaven, the early days of the Church. But soon thereafter this chapter along with many others that promise an earthly millennial reign and a reinstated nation of Israel ignited a firestorm of controversy that rages on to this very day. This is why I have spent so much time detailing the issues of the kingdom when we went through the book of Acts and even now as we are in the book of Revelation. And this is why I am compelled to spend our time this morning explaining these controversies rather than examining the text, which we will begin next week. I am usually uncomfortable with doing this, but I feel it is that important that I must do this. So don't necessarily shut your Bibles, but know that we are not going to be examining the text verse by verse as we normally do.

Now, without covering a lot of ground that I have covered before, I wish to give you the highlights of three competing views concerning the millennial kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the key to arriving at these positions involves the issue of hermeneutics, which is the science and the art of biblical interpretation.

Now, before you all start groaning and start saying, "Boring, irrelevant," please know that each of these views will impact you with respect to how you view the world today, how you view politics today. It will impact you in terms of an understanding of where the world is heading. It will help you understand the role and the purpose of the Church. It really helps define how you view ministry, how you view the Church, how you view missions and especially how you understand evangelizing Jewish people.

So please hear me, dear friends. This is not some obscure debate for seminoids in ivory towers. This is a debate that we all should understand. And for those believers who have fallen prey to a lazy mind, to sloppy exegesis, to doctrinal indifference and the whole dumbing down of the saints, please know that an incorrect understanding of this topic, the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ will lead you to an incorrect understanding of over one-fourth of the Bible. So it is a significant issue, a sobering thought for all who would be faithful to Paul's words to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:15 to, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth."¹⁰

Now, while I mean no disrespect to brothers that I love dearly who will differ with some of the things I am about to say, I am sure they would agree that regardless of your position, it needs to be one that is thought out very carefully. So that is what I will intend to do, and especially for those of us who teach the Word of God, we have a stricter

¹⁰ 2 Timothy 2:15.

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judgment. So it is very, very important that we understand what Scripture teaches on this very important issue.

Now, the three positions regarding the millennial kingdom. And I am going to begin with a concept with which all positions will agree, and that is if you interpret the Bible consistently with a literal interpretation, taking into consideration all of the grammatical, historical, contextual, chronological aspects of the text, taking Scripture at face value, interpreting passages according to the normal meaning of language, you will end up a Premillennialist. Premillennialism simply means that Christ is going to come before the millennial kingdom, that he, in fact, is going to inaugurate the kingdom.

Now, if you don't agree with that statement and you feel more comfortable with a spiritualizing method of Bible interpretation where you allegorize the prophetic words, then you are going to end up with one of two views—and there are many variations of them—and that will be either a Postmillennialist or an Amillennialist. The Postmillennialist simply says that Christ is going to come at the end of the kingdom, and we are going to understand more of what they believe in a moment, that frankly things are going to get better and better until we hand the kingdom over to Christ. Or you are going to be an Amillennialist, A meaning no, meaning there really is no millennial kingdom, it is all figurative and we are living in the kingdom now.

Obviously these two views do not share the same system of hermeneutics that I do and I hope you do. They would, for example, disregard the chronology of Revelation. I believe that in Revelation 1:19 the Lord himself has outlined his revelation for us. He speaks of “the things which you have seen.” That is chapter one, a vision of the glorified Christ. And, secondly, he speaks of “the things which are.” That is chapters two and three, the letters that were written to the prominent churches that are representative of churches down through history. And then he speaks, thirdly, of “the things which will take place after these things.” In other words, after the Church has been translated into heaven in the rapture and that is chapters four through 22, all of the rest of the text. There is a chronology there.

For example, from chapters 6 through 19 you have the seven seal judgments, the seven trumpet judgments and then the seven bowl judgments. You have the details regarding the rise and fall of the antichrist and the false prophet, details regarding the protection and the redemption of Israel. You have then, finally, in chapter 19 the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. He comes in all of his glory. He seizes the antichrist and the false prophet. There is the slaughter of the enemies of Israel at Armageddon and then we come to where we are at here, chapter 20, when he establishes his earthly kingdom. He binds Satan for 1000 years, releases him at the very end. Satan leads one final rebellion and then God sends fire from heaven and incinerates them. He throws Satan into the lake of fire forever and judges all of the lost at the great white throne judgment. And then you have chapter 21 which is the descent of the New Jerusalem and chapter 22 which is the delight of the New Jerusalem and the eternal state. And then it concludes with an epilogue of comfort.

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There is a chronology there. It is not just one big allegory. So a Premillennialist would argue that the chronology of Revelation is crucial in an understanding of the arrival and nature of the kingdom. And he would also take into consideration the chronology of the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24 and 25, the chronologies that we see in the Old Testament. For example, Daniel's 70 weeks of judgment and so forth. And if you look at all of these things you see that ultimately things are going to get worse. Christ is going to come and establish the kingdom. That is Premillennialism.

Also a Premillennialist, using a literal hermeneutic would interpret the phrase that we have here in Revelation 20, "a thousand years" as guess what? A thousand years. Why would you want to interpret it any other way? Whereas our other dear brothers would interpret it as just a long period of time, who knows what the time would be.

And you might ask, "Well, why couldn't you interpret it that way?"

Well, the answer is because there is no contextual reason to do so. In fact, every other number in Revelation is literal with the exception of two that are symbolic which is the seven spirits in chapter one verse four, descriptive of the seven fold work of the Holy Spirit as well as the number 666, the mark of the beast in chapter 13 verse 18. All the rest are literal numbers. You have got seven churches, seven pastors, 24 thrones, 24 elders, 12 tribes, 12,000 from each tribe equaling 144,000. You have got seven stars, seven golden lamp stands, five months, one third of mankind, two witnesses, 42 months, 1260 days three demons, seven kings, five have fallen, a crown of 12 stars on Israel, 12 gates, 12 angels, 12 apostles of the Lamb. The New Jerusalem has 12 foundations. It is described as 1500 miles in length and width and height and its wall is 72 yards and the text tells us in chapter 21 verse 17 according to human measurement which are also angelic measurements.

Now how do you get anything figurative out of any of that? If everything else is literal why would we come to 1000 and say, "Well, you know, that really doesn't mean 1000 years like it says"? That is the point. So in chapter 20 when the Lord repeatedly described the events of his kingdom with the phrase, "a thousand years" we would interpret that literally.

You might ask, "Well, why would anybody interpret it differently?" And the answer, as we are going to see, is because they have a theological agenda. They have a presupposition that they must support and that is that the Church has replaced Israel permanently. And if that is your presupposition, then it is going to change how you view all of the prophetic literature as we are going to see.

The Postmillennialist and the Amillennialist begin with what I believe, humbly, is an errant presupposition. And if you have a weak foundation, then the super structure of your eschatology is ultimately going to collapse.

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As a footnote, another term often associated with Premillennialism is Dispensationalism. Let me give you these big words and get them out of the way. You will know them from now on and you will never have question about them again. I have heard people say, “I am not going to that Church because Harrell is a Dispensationalist.” And you think, “Man, that sounds like a bad disease or something.” Well, what is a Dispensationalist? Well, it is one who believes that in God’s eternal purposes to glorify himself he administers his rule over his creation in different ways in different eras. That is all it means.

In fact, the tenets of Dispensational theology can be summarized in two ways. One, God’s program for Israel is distinct from the Church. And, secondly, the purpose of God’s program is doxological, meaning that ultimately his program is to glorify himself.

So a Dispensation is merely a term referring to those various administrations in the outworking of God’s plan. Dispensationalists hold to a system of biblical interpretation that interprets and applies Scripture in a normal and literal way including the prophetic Scriptures. We are not going to interpret some things that way and then come to the prophetic Scriptures and interpret it in a radically different way. And certainly that interpretation will take into account the different ways that God rules in a given era and therefore it will perceive a distinction between God’s program for Israel and the way that he deals with the Church.

Now, I might add although his plan of redemption never changes, salvation is always by grace through faith, we see that the way he administers his plan is going to vary from dispensation to dispensation. For example, God’s unique focus was on Israel during the dispensation of the Old Testament while the Church consisting now of both Jews as well as Gentiles has been his focus since their rejection of Jesus, especially beginning at Pentecost. And, ultimately, God’s focus is, once again, going to return to Israel during the millennial reign of Christ on earth. And the prophetic literature is filled with the pivotal role that Israel will play during this time.

Quoting John MacArthur he says, quote, “Dispensationalism teaches that all God’s remaining covenant promises to Israel will be literally fulfilled including the promises of earthly blessings and an earthly messianic kingdom. God promised Israel, for example, that they would possess the Promised Land forever, Genesis 13:14-17 and Exodus 32:13. Scripture declares that Messiah will rule over the kingdoms of the earth from Jerusalem, Zechariah 14:9-11. Old Testament prophecy says that all Israel will one day be restored to the Promised Land, Amos 9:14-15, that the temple will be rebuilt, Ezekiel 37:26-28 and the people of Israel will be redeemed, Jeremiah 23:6 and Romans 11:26-27.” He finally concludes, “Dispensationalists believe all those promised blessings will come to pass as literally as did the promised curses,” end quote.

So that gives you an idea of Premillennialism and Dispensationalism that pretty much go hand in hand.

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But what about Postmillennialism? This is the idea that Christ is going to come after some kind of a kingdom. Let me give you a little understanding of this. Again, they would teach that the Church brings in the kingdom through the preaching of the gospel and through political reform, that the world is going to get better and better until eventually it is going to be Christianized and then Christ is going to return after a long period of righteousness upon the earth, the quote, 1000 years, and they believe that there will be an earthly kingdom, but Christ is going to rule over it from heaven.

This was popularized in the 19th century when the world was not at war. It is a very optimistic view. It is optimistic about the future impact of the Church upon the culture and as you might imagine, it has waned significantly since that time, but it also takes on other forms. In fact, this is the driving force behind what is called Theonomy. Theonomy just means God's law. And that is a position that argues that the moral laws of the Old Testament are still binding on Christians today. It goes by other names like Christian Reconstructionism or Dominion theology. You see this a lot in the ecumenical movement where the Church is trying to ultimately come together and control government on the earth before Christ will return so that we can give the kingdom to him.

Postmillennialism dominates the Pentecostal and the Charismatic movements. You will hear them talk a lot about how that we have got to take back the dominion from Satan over the world. And so they have all these deliverance ministries and they are binding Satan in people and in nations and in regions. You see this in the Word of Faith movement, the Latter Day Rain movement, Pat Robertson, a big proponent of this type of thing. In fact, most of the leaders in the Promise Keeper's fad held this position. And it is also the driving force behind the Christian Right. Most of the Christian Right political movement today, James Dobson's *Focus on the Family*, Pat Robertson's *Christian Coalition* and the... what is it called? The Christian Broadcasting Network, those types of things.

In fact, Post Millennialism is becoming increasingly influential in the homeschooling movement and in the classical education movements. Christian Reconstructionists or Theonomists love to push, for example, their textbook called *The Institutes of Biblical Law* by Rousas Rushdoony who is considered to be the founder of the modern homeschooling movement. And, again, these people insist that the Old Testament laws still apply today, that it should govern or dominate all aspects of society and that the mission of the Church is ultimately to change society, you see, so that we can Christianize the world and, ultimately, bring in the kingdom. That is the idea.

And they believe, for example, that home schooling is a critical method for implementing these changes in society. I would also hasten to add that not all homes schoolers agree with that at all. So don't... I am not painting with a broad brush. But you do want to be careful. Frankly, this is just a sophisticated form of Legalism.

Postmillennialism also spawned what is called Liberation Theology, that Christians are to work for social and economic justice. It has as its fundamental... one of its fundamental tenets the redistribution of wealth to eliminate poverty and oppression. Liberation

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Theology was spawned by Latin American Catholics in the 1960s. They used a lot of Marxist and Socialist ideas to frame their ideology. You may recall in South America a number of years ago there was the Sandinista National Liberation Front which was the Socialist party of Nicaragua and they really gave birth to a new movement that we are now aware of called Black Liberation Theology. We have seen that up close and personal with the Reverent Jeremiah Wright. Our president is a part of that whole church, and there the gospel of Jesus Christ has been redefined to emphasize Black victimization and the need to somehow free blacks from White oppression and so forth. In fact, if you read many of the seminal authors in that movement, you will see that it is disturbingly racist. But, again, the mindset here is that somehow the gospel is all about bringing in this utopian age and ultimately we are going to hand that over to Christ.

Well, this is just a few samples of the distortions of the Word of God that can happen—now catch this—once you leave the parameters of a literal, grammatical, historical, contextual hermeneutic. All of a sudden it opens you up into all manner of ideas. And rather than saying, “Thus saith the Lord,” it is, “Thus saith whoever is saying whatever he is saying.” You see, that is the danger.

So Postmillennialism is very optimistic. It is interesting. There is a bit of literalness to their beliefs as well as the non literal. The Church, they believe, will bring in the kingdom. So they literally believe there is going to be a kingdom and they are going to hand it over to Christ who is going to reign for a long period of time in righteousness. But they also believe that the Church has permanently replaced Israel which requires a non literal interpretation because there is absolutely no exegetical support for that whatsoever anywhere in Scripture. All right?

So we have got Premillennialism which says the world is going to get worse until the Lord comes. We have got Postmillennialism that says that it is going to get better and then we are going to give it to the Lord. And then you have got Amillennialism which is basically there is no millennial kingdom, that we are in the kingdom of God now, that it is a spiritual kingdom, that the reign of Christ is occurring right now, that it is figurative. Christ is already come they would say. He is reigning in a spiritual sense. There is no literal 1000 year reign in Revelation 20. And for them the next event is merely the return of Christ followed immediately by the final judgment.

Now this is also based on the conviction that the Church is the new Israel. It is interesting. It is the idea that the curses on Israel happened literally. We know that that did happen. But somehow the blessings come to the Church figuratively. Now that is a real hard sell for Jewish evangelism. “Sorry, guys, you guys blew it. I know, yeah, you were God’s elect, God’s chosen people. But you didn’t live up to grace and so God has given you all of the curses. He has given all the blessings now to the Church. So you are going to be involved in the Church. There is no kingdom. All the stuff you have been hoping for, all of the stuff promised in the Old Testament you have got to understand that that is no longer applicable now.” Well, that is a real hard sell for Jewish evangelism. And we will talk more about that in days to come.

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Let me give you a brief history. And this is going to be very brief, just a sketch. Within a century and a half after Christ's ascension into heaven the Christian community had become so thoroughly convinced that God was finished with the Jews to the point literally of Anti-Semitism that they absolutely could not stomach any of the biblical promises for a future national Israel. And so as you read the history of the early Church you begin to see that they readily adopted the Greek philosophies of spiritualizing the Word of God introduced by Philo and Origen. And as a result, we ended up with what is called Replacement Theology, that the Church has replaced Israel permanently. And this would basically teach that Israel's national identity has been permanently eliminated and that ethnic national and territorial Israel has all been absorbed into the universal Christian Church.

Now, by the fourth century this view was so pervasive that one of the Church Fathers, Augustine, along with most of the Christian Church of that day, fully believed that the Church was the earthly representation of the heavenly city of God. The Puritans and most of the Reformed theologians like Luther and Calvin even adopted this view. And it became central to their philosophical development of what is called Covenant Theology. They rightly adopted Augustine's soteriology, in other words, his doctrine of salvation. And that helped them in their protest against Roman Catholicism. It was right on. But they also adopted Augustine's errant eschatology which is essentially Roman Catholic eschatology along with some of the ecclesiology that is errant, I believe, that has been a part of the Roman Catholic Church and now you see much of that even in the Reformed Churches today, things like infant baptism and that it replaces circumcision and in many cases with the believers still under Mosaic law and so forth.

Now, remember. During those early days of Augustine and so forth, it was the Dark Ages and the Church was still struggling to free itself from the heretical grips of Roman Catholic soteriology, of their doctrine of salvation which is basically the doctrine of not grace alone by faith alone, or faith alone by grace alone, whichever way you want to describe it. It is grace plus works, faith plus works. So they were struggling to get out of that, but their understanding of eschatology had not yet been fully developed. And, frankly, it hasn't been until probably the last couple of centuries.

So for the Amillennialist the book of Revelation and the Lord's Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24 and 25 are merely figurative allegorical descriptions of God's judgment either upon the Jews in AD 70 which sometimes is also known as Preterism. Preterism comes from the Latin prefix preter which means past. And they would argue that Christ has already returned spiritually, that all of the events in Revelation are merely an allegorical description of what happened in AD 70. Or some Amillennialists would even not necessarily agree with that. They would say that all of the prophetic texts are merely a figurative expression of God's saving work.

Now they will not deny that their method of interpretation is literal in most places. Certainly their understanding of the doctrine of salvation is absolutely, as I say, it is just precise. It is dead on.

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But it is fascinating. It becomes allegorical where their system demands it—when they come to a text where all of a sudden you have got to differentiate between Israel and the Church. And I might add, as well, more recently others have developed a more elaborate system where the New Testament is seen as the interpretive key of the Old Testament. And actually I don't believe they interpret the Old Testament with the New Testament. They reinterpret the Old Testament with the New Testament. You hear the term Supersessionism especially involved with that.

Now, let me give you a little bit of theology. Bear with me. You are not glazed over completely yet. A little bit of theology behind Amillennialism. And that is the issue of Covenant Theology. Covenant Theologians really invented three covenants that they believe account for the Bible's philosophy of history, a covenant of redemption, a covenant of works and a covenant of grace. And they have three major tenets.

Number one, the Church consists of God's redeemed of all ages. They do not believe that it began at Pentecost and ends at the rapture or anything like that. And they see no distinction between God's program for Israel versus the Church.

Secondly, they believe that the Abrahamic, the Davidic and the new covenants are being fulfilled in this present age in a spiritual sense.

And, thirdly, that the purpose of God's program is soteriological, that is, to bring man to salvation, that that is kind of the primary theme of God's program to save sinners.

Now, remember, for the Dispensationalist, the purpose of God's program is doxological. It is to bring glory to himself. The fact that he saves sinners is something secondary I believe.

And the question arises: What really lies at the heart of God's purposes in creating man and ordering human history? What is really at the heart of all of that? That is: Is human sacred history what the theologians would call anthropocentric or is it theocentric? Is it all about the salvation of man or about the glory of God?

My friend, Doug Bookman says this and I quote, "Although Covenant Theology has historically emphasized and celebrated the centrality of God's glory in human history, there is intrinsic to that system an anthropocentric focus, the redemption of men, that tends to be given an inappropriate measure of emphasis." He goes on to add, "The dynamic of a crowning and culminating kingdom on earth in which every knee bows and every tongue confesses that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God, Philippians 2:6, a concept profoundly central to Scripture, is entirely abandoned in favor of the notion that God's glory is thus displayed only in the world to come." At this very strategic point Bookman argues that, "Amillennialism's vision of God's purpose in history is significantly deficient as to its doxological dynamic," end quote.

The Establishment of the Messianic Kingdom – Part 1

Revelation 20

So if one holds to the philosophy of Covenantal Theology he is going to, like the Postmillennialist, spiritualize the prophetic Scriptures to avoid any distinction between God's dealings with Israel versus the Church.

So you ask yourself the question. Do you believe the world is getting better? If so, you had better work really hard. We had better get a whole lot more Republicans. As a matter of fact, I don't even know if the Republicans could do it now. You know, you have got to do a lot to somehow get the world to get better because we see it going rapidly in a free fall in the other direction.

Or do you believe that we are living in the kingdom now, that all of those promises in the Old Testament in particular were things that really God didn't mean, that they are just figurative expressions of blessings for the saints? Or do you believe that the world is getting worse awaiting the king.

Beloved, my understanding of Scripture is that God's purpose in creation and in history is first and foremost to glorify himself. And while this includes the redemption of man, I believe that his crowning glory will ultimately be manifested when he returns as King of kings and Lord of lords and establishes on earth his glorious kingdom in fulfillment of his covenants to his rebellious yet chosen people, the people of Israel.

Jeremiah tells us in chapter 23 verse five:

"Behold, the days are coming," declares the LORD, "When I will raise up for David a righteous Branch; And He will reign as king and act wisely And do justice and righteousness in the land. In His days Judah will be saved, And Israel will dwell securely; And this is His name by which He will be called, 'The LORD our righteousness.'"¹¹

Beloved, this concept here is at the very heart of Jesus revelation to us regarding his messianic kingdom in Revelation 20. And that is why in the days to come we are going to look at the incarceration of Satan, the allocation of rulers, the resurrection of saints, the incineration of rebels, the retribution of Satan, the disintegration of heaven and earth and the damnation of sinners.

I cannot imagine a more magnificent display of God's glory than this.

Oh, what a triumphant hope we have in Christ.

Triumphant King your glory bring,
And don the victor's crown.
Magnify your glorious name,
And cast your rivals down.

With sovereign might in world's full sight,

¹¹ Jeremiah 23:5-6.

The Establishment of the Messianic Kingdom – Part 1

Revelation 20

Complete your holy rout.
And raise your royal scepter high,
That every knee may bow.

Your kingdom come, your will be done,
On earth as now in heaven.
Exalted, sit upon your throne,
That praise to you be given.

For triumph great our hearts doth ache,
Oh, David's house restore,
Messiah, come to judge and save,
With passion, we implore.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for these eternal truths and the hope that is ours in Christ Jesus. Lord, may some of these difficult theological concepts somehow become very simple in our minds knowing that the simplicity comes from looking at the Word of God and interpreting it according to the normal meaning of language. Lord, we thank you for the clarity of your Word. And we thank you, Lord, that you have given us a hope that cannot be shaken even by all of the smoke and mirrors and deceptions that are out there today.

Lord, finally I pray for the lost as always. Oh, God would that you convict them of their sin. Would you cause them to see that unless they repent and confess you as Savior and Lord they will perish. Lord, may we be instruments of righteousness to that end? Come quickly, Lord Jesus, we pray in your name. Amen.

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