

# Amillennialism (Replacement Theology)

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## The Definition & Overview of Amillennialism

Amillennialism is the most prominent view among what we call Christendom today. It is one of the three main views of Bible prophecy. Amillennialism is a theological term used in the English language of today. The use of the prefix “a” before a word comes from the practice of the Greek language and negates the word (nullifies or denies the word as being true) when placing this letter in front of it. Therefore, the word amillennial actually means no millennium. Of course, the Latin words “mille” (thousand) and “annus” (years) means 1,000 years. But when the letter “a” is placed before the Latin word it cancels out the millennium and literally means “no thousand years.”

Actually, the amillennialist does believe in a millennium but it is not a literal millennium. It is a spiritual millennium instead of a literal earthly millennium. Therefore, it is appropriate to conclude that the amillennialist does not believe in a millennium in a literal sense. In this way they are amillennial. In reality, amillennialists do believe in a millennium but not the kind of literal millennium being taught by premillennialists. They see both the O.T. and N.T. references to the 1,000 years and the kingdom as being allegorical or figurative in meaning and teach that these references point to Christ’s reign over the church in the time period between Christ’s first and second advent. The amillennial view holds that the kingdom promises in the Old Testament are fulfilled spiritually rather than literally in the New Testament church. The promises to Israel about a land, nationality and throne are now being fulfilled in a figurative or spiritual way among believers. The promises of an earthly kingdom have taken on a spiritual dimension and have been transferred to the church where Christ becomes King of the church as He reigns over believers today. In this way the church replaces Israel of old and becomes the new Israel that God is working with today. Thus, the term “replacement theology” is given to this scheme of interpretation which means the church inherits Israel’s promises about a kingdom in a spiritual way and replaces the old Israel with old promises and becomes the new

Israel with new spiritual promises. The church is really the one people of God (Israel) in disguise. More will be said about this later. Of course, this figurative approach to the millennium cancels out the literalness of the millennium. So when it comes to a literal fulfillment of a millennium it can be correctly stated that amillennarians are anti-millennial. Jay Adams, who is amillennial, states that his position is not amillennial. He claims that this term is a misnomer and strongly affirms that he believes in a millennium but not a literal millennium on earth. He calls his system of interpretation by the name "realized millennialism." This simply means that the millennium is a present reality existing in the hearts of people. The millennium or kingdom becomes a present realization in the hearts of God's saints.

Amillennialism is the theory that says that there will be no literal, earthly kingdom following the Second Coming of Christ. Amillennialism teaches that when Christ returns, eternity begins with no prior thousand-year millennial reign occurring on planet earth. It is the system of interpretation that denies a literal reign of Christ upon earth for 1,000 years. In brief, amillennial theology teaches that Satan was bound at the first coming of Christ through His death and resurrection. Hence, the kingdom of God began at the first advent and continues as a present spiritual reality with Christ reigning in the hearts of His saints or over the new spiritual Israel – the New Testament church. The promises given to Israel (the old church) concerning a land, a nation, a king and a kingdom (Gen. 12:2; 15:18-20; 2 Sam. 7:12-16) have been cancelled out due to their disobedience. This means that God is finished with Old Testament Israel or the Jewish nation as a whole. Because of Israel's past disobedience these covenant promises have been transferred to the church and now take on a new spiritual dimension or have a figurative meaning attached to them.

According to amillennialism, the church today is termed as "spiritual Israel" because she is the creative invention of figurative interpretation. Spiritual Israel is a figurative expression and symbolic redefining of Old Testament national Israel. The church is called "spiritual Israel" because she has become a new spiritual entity (figurative expression) of the old physical Israel and has inherited the new spiritual promises about the present day King and kingdom. The physical and literal covenant promises have been spiritualized or figuratively interpreted with another meaning instead of the normal, literal and physical meaning. Thus, the covenant promises and kingdom prophecies given to Israel of old are transferred to the present day church with a new spiritual dimension attached to them. And it's the new

Israel or continuing covenant community of God, by a process of spiritualized interpretation, who inherits these spiritual promises about a millennium that Christ is presently reigning over and ruling in the hearts of His people. Hence, the New Testament church replaces Israel and the church receives her covenant promises in a spiritualized/figurative fashion that envisions Christ ruling as King over His church saints in a spiritual kingdom, which is seen to be on earth, or in a heavenly kingdom where the saints depart after death. This is why amillennialism is called replacement theology.

Spiritualized interpretation is a scheme of interpretation that changes the literal meaning of the O. T. covenant promises to a figurative meaning. Physical realities such as national Israel and the physical covenant promises given to them become transferred into figurative expressions such as “spiritual Israel” and a present “spiritual kingdom” that Christ is reigning over today. By a process of figurative interpretation national Israel assumes the title of “spiritual Israel” and the earthly millennium becomes a “spiritual kingdom” (the present day church of saints) that Christ reigns over both on earth and in heaven (figurative rule of Christ). The term “spiritual” must then be linked with the allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament covenants and promises given to Israel. By a process of allegorical or symbolic interpretation amillennarians create figurative expressions and promises that are termed as being spiritual in design or creation. Thus, amillennialism teaches that the present age between the first and Second Coming of Christ is said to figuratively represent the fulfillment of the millennium or this time when Christ is reigning over His new spiritual Israel (the church) who has inherited the Old Testament covenants.

The amillenarian views most of the book of Revelation as dealing with prophetic events already fulfilled during the actual time of the books writing (past fulfillment) or as an interadvent period of time between Christ’s first and second advent which deals with present day events and conditions that are happening on earth. This view spiritualizes the book and makes it fit into the present day conflict between evil and good and sees it as an apocalyptic dramatization of the continuous battle between God and evil. This is the idealistic view or what I call the imaginative view. An idealist is a person who treats subjects imaginatively considering things as they might or should be rather than as they are. This view gives strictly a spiritual interpretation of the book of Revelation. The whole book takes on the age-long conflict between good and evil. It is simply a picture of the continual

struggle between right and wrong that goes on in the heart of man. Then there is the preterist view of the book of Revelation, which assigns a past meaning to the book.

In other words, the events of this book were fulfilled in John's day. Others hold the historicist view of the book of Revelation, which sees the book as giving a history of the church from apostolic times to the end. This group must also associate many of the judgments predicted in the book with events in the past. Most amillennialists in some measure assign a past historical fulfillment to the book of Revelation but at the same time still hold that the book of Revelation contains a present day fulfillment of what is happening in the world in connection with the tribulation that the church faces today. In other words, there is a mixing or blending together of the idealistic, preterist and historicist views. Most proponents of these views believe that the millennium is being fulfilled now on earth through the church, which is the theory that Augustine held. They claim that the millennium began during Christ's sojourn on earth and was operating in the apostolic history of the church and is carried over into the existence of the church today. And the kingdom is destined to be revealed throughout eternity in the fullness of life to come.

Other amillennialists primarily teach that the millennium is being fulfilled only in the saint's complete victory in heaven where Christ reigns over the glorified saints. This view is traced back to Duesterdieck (1859) and Kliefoth (1874). The noted Benjamin Warfield (1851-1921) taught this spiritualized concept of the 1,000 years in Revelation chapter 20 even though he was actually a postmillennialist believing in an earthly millennium. It can be observed that various segments of amillennial teaching overlap with postmillennial beliefs. For some amillennialists the millennium has nothing to do with any spiritual reign of Christ upon earth over believer's lives but with the blessed condition of the saints in heaven where Christ is ruling over their disembodied spirits.

This theory holds that there is some kind of "heavenly millennium" and spiritualizes those texts dealing with the 1,000 years and the earthly kingdom by equating them with heaven. In other words, the promises of the millennium are being fulfilled in heaven right now. Christ's kingdom is said to be heavenly and not earthly. The kingdom promises in the Bible are said to be fulfilled in the state of blessedness of the saints in heaven and Christ's position at the right hand of the Father. In other words, Christ's

position in heaven is seen to be the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises about His kingdom rule. It is a kingdom rule in heaven and not on earth. This more contemporary view within amillennialism was only developed in the nineteenth century and has become a popular and acceptable idea of the millennium. Instead of the church being the millennium/kingdom on earth the millennium/kingdom is in heaven where Christ is seen ruling over His departed saints as the Davidic King.

So it can be seen that there is division in the ranks of amillennialism when it comes to interpreting and understanding what the millennium is and how it is being fulfilled today. We can see how spiritualization only breeds confusion. Some amillennialists adopt both views and speak about the present kingdom on earth that Christ is reigning over and the kingdom that He reigns over in heaven where His redeemed saints dwell. There are still amillennialists who are convinced that the true kingdom or millennium is being fulfilled in the church today. This belief is basically the amillennialism of Augustine who denied a literal millennium and believed that a spiritual millennium is being fulfilled in the present age of the church. This is still the view of the Roman Catholic Church. Amillennialists uniformly teach that the kingdom has a spiritual fulfillment of some kind. Either the millennium is being fulfilled in the church today as Christ reigns in the hearts of the church/kingdom here upon earth or it's being fulfilled in heaven as Christ reigns over the souls of departed saints. In their interpretation of Scripture passages you see these two millennial views being promoted.

For instance, the multiple references to the thousand years in Revelation chapter 20 are taken figuratively and spiritualized by the amillennialist to convey the idea of completeness or perfection. To the amillennialist the thousand years expresses no determined period of time. It is actually and undetermined interadvent period of time, known only by God, between the two advents of Christ. This view primarily regards the kingdom as being present today through the church. Thus, the texts dealing with one thousand years and the whole concept of the millennium are interpreted allegorically or figuratively instead of literally. For most present day amillennialists, the 1,000 years and the millennium are only a perfect description of the blessings that the church experiences today as Christ rules in the hearts of His saints. In this sense, Christ is said to be King of the church. Furthermore, the 1,000 years and millennium can also point to the blessings the church experiences in heaven as Christ rules over the church as the heavenly Davidic King. This heavenly millennial scene is

envisioned in Revelation chapter 20 as crowned martyrs are seen ruling with Christ.

The amillennialist sees the 1,000 years encompassing an unknown and undetermined period of time between Christ's ascension and His Second Coming at the end of the age to usher in eternity. It is a time period where Christ is reigning in the hearts of His saints as King while they live on earth or when He rules over them in heaven. Many times amillennialists teach a combination of these two millennial views and blend them together by claiming that the millennial kingdom of Christ's spiritual rule is being fulfilled in the church/kingdom during the present age on earth. But this leads to even greater glory when she will reign with Christ in heaven as is clearly depicted in Revelation chapter twenty with the martyred dead. This is when the millennium will be fully realized for the saints. As a result, the Old Testament prophecies dealing with the earthly kingdom promises are said to be fulfilled in the blessed peace that the church/kingdom experiences today on earth and ultimately in heaven when the King will rule over the departed saints.

In short, the millennium or the 1,000 years is not a literal and specific reference to time but a reference to Christ's rule over the church today and finally in the splendor of heaven itself. The kingdom concept and 1,000 years to the amillennialist is a spiritual kingly rule of Christ over God's saints (the church), while living on earth, as well as His ultimate rule over the saints in their future state in heaven. Christ is said to be ruling in the hearts of believers on the earth, as well as over the souls of the saints in heaven as the victorious Davidic King. The concept of a spiritualized or figurative millennium (consisting of people or heaven itself) is presented as a valid interpretation of the 1,000 years and is satisfactorily embraced as being the place of this millennial rule.

It is then taught by amillenarians that at the end of this spiritual millennium, where Christ is ruling in the hearts of His people on earth and over His people in heaven, that He will literally return. This return will result in a literal, physical and universal resurrection of all the people from Adam to the last person who has died. The remainder of people living on earth will be translated to this scene of judgment so that all the people born throughout time will stand together in a time of general judgment. All the unsaved of earth's history will be judged and cast into the Lake of Fire and the saved will enter into the eternal state. What that eternal state will be to

the amillennialist varies since some take the new heavens and new earth (Rev. 21-22) as only a spiritual description of what Paul calls the “new creation” of the church (2 Cor. 5:17). Some amillennialists apply the vision of the new heavens and earth to a nonmaterial state of existence in heaven. Other more conservative amillennialists and postmillennialists seem to stress the idea of people living on a brand new planet after the Second Coming. In any event, amillennialists will normally use a passage such as Matthew 25:1-46 to teach their theory of a general judgment on the last day (John 5:29). It’s assumed that all the saved and unsaved of humanity, which have been born from the time of Adam to the end of the age, will be judged at the same time. But in their attempt to push this theory of a general judgment they fail to realize that the judgment in Matthew 25 does not picture any resurrection but only a judgment of those gathered nations already living upon the earth when the Messiah returns.

In addition, the differences between the judgments of the church at the Bema Seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10), the judgment of the surviving nations following the tribulation period (Matthew 25:31-46), the judgment of Israel (Ezekiel 2:33-38), the judgment of fallen angels (2 Peter 2:4; Rev. 20:10) and the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:11-15) are glossed over and these separate events are lumped together and looked upon as one single event. This creates serious mistreatments of Bible texts and confusion. The idea of only one general resurrection, one combined judgment, one people of God, and one return of Christ seems much easier for the amillennialist to grasp. But we must ask ourselves these questions: Why can’t there be a Rapture and Second Coming of Christ to earth? Why can’t there be three resurrections instead of just one? Why can’t there be three different judgments? Why can’t there be two classes of people on earth? The answer of the amillennialist to these questions is that it conflicts with his amillennial theology. But on the contrary, these findings do not contradict the Bible when it is literally interpreted.

In short, amillennialism rejects any future literal events and prophetic time periods known as the Rapture, Bema Seat of Christ for the church, seven-year tribulation period, judgment of the living nations at the end of the tribulation and the millennium. Amillenarians spiritualize the tribulation period and refer to it as the tribulation that the church faces today. Revelation 6-19 is taken to be fulfilled in history or either in various contemporary events of the present time. The millennium is allegorized as God’s perfect rule in the hearts of His church today and ultimately in

heaven. Prophetic parables and other portions of Scripture that deal with the tribulation and kingdom are seen to be already fulfilled historically and/or in respect to Christ reigning over the church today as King. The great prophetic portions of the Word of God are spiritualized as presenting contemporary events that the church faces today in the world while Christ reigns within the hearts of His redeemed saints.

This amillennial concept is the view of the Roman Catholic Church, the Greek Orthodox Church and the major view among the large segment of Protestantism – both conservative and liberal. The Roman Catholic Church, Greek Orthodox Church, major sections of the Presbyterian and Reformed churches, certain branches of the Lutheran Church, Methodist Church, Southern Baptists and even various segments in the Church of God, embrace this kind of spiritualized theology. Of course, this does not make it the correct view of Scripture in regards to the interpretation about the kingdom, church and other prophetic truth.

It is very interesting to remember how the liberals also embraced this amillennial position because it fit into their way of viewing the Scriptures. If Christ's millennium or kingdom could be spiritualized than Christ's resurrection, miracles and His Second Coming and judgment of people in hell could also be spiritualized to mean something else. Modern liberals can justify their denial of literal resurrection by the use of the same hermeneutical rules of interpretation that the amillennialist follows. This mishandling of Scripture opens the door for liberalism to treat the Scriptures in the same way – in an unbelieving and spiritual/allegorical way - instead of a literal way. The history of higher criticism of the Bible lends itself to the amillennial interpretation of Scripture.

Dr. John Walvoord said:

“If amillennialism did not furnish the material of modern liberalism, it at least provided the atmosphere.”

The danger of this type of figurative interpretation of Scripture should be apparent to everyone who respects inspiration of Scripture and the plain, normal and literal meaning of the Bible. This method regards nonfigurative language as figurative and its only limitation is the mind of the interpreter. This type of “spiritual hermeneutic” has robbed the Bible of its legitimate meaning. If words mean something then the words of Scripture in their grammatical, normal and literal understanding can adequately express truth



without the process of spiritualization. I'm reminded of how Paul reprimanded Hymenaeus and Philetus for spiritualizing that the physical resurrection was something already past. These men were affected by Greek philosophy and like Origen and Augustine they tried to harmonize the two together – both Greek philosophy and Scripture.

2 Timothy 2:17-18 says:

“And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.”

Greek philosophers typically viewed the soul as immortal and the body as its temporal prison. The idea of the physical resurrection of the body was therefore foreign and difficult for them to grasp. Because of this there was a natural tendency toward heresies, which rejected the physical bodily resurrection (1 Cor. 15:35; Acts 17:32). The heresy of Philetus and Hymenaeus probably involved the idea that the resurrection of the believers was a purely figurative expression or spiritual affair, which occurred at the time of conversion or baptism. They were the “spiritualizers” and “allegorizers” of the early church. Like the Sadducees, they rejected the literal concept of the resurrection (Acts 23:8).

This writer is not suggesting that conservative amillennialists reject the physical resurrection of Christ or the physical resurrection of the believer at the end of the age. But he is making the valid point that the spiritualization of Scriptures that deal with the first resurrection (Rev. 20:4-5), the 1,000 years, the kingdom and the normal understanding of Israel and her physical covenants are abandoned for the sake of a deeper spiritual meaning. Amillennial teaching is like gangrene eating away at the foundational truth of the prophetic Word and God's clear mind about the meaning of words and His literal covenant promises to Israel. When one abandons the literal interpretation of the Bible and reduces literal words to mean figurative truth they reduce the Bible to nothing more than a book of symbols in the whimsical or fanciful hands of man's own creativity. It is the opinion of this writer that amillennialism, with its figurative approach to the Word of God, creates a gangrene affect on the Scripture that can only discredit God's Word and lead to unbelief and error in connection with God's eschatological program.

Kenneth Kantzer has said:

“The only way to appropriate biblical authority and to refrain from reducing the Bible to a book of mere suggestions and optional opinions is to understand the Bible in the plain, normal sense intended by the authors.”

In the next portion of our study we want to trace the history and roots of allegorical interpretation.

### The History of Amillennialism

This system of theology is traced back to St. Augustine (A.D. 354-430). Before Augustine, for the first three hundred years of the church existence, the premillennial view was virtually the only view to be found in the church. It's very important to realize that the Jews were looking for a literal kingdom when Christ was here upon earth (John 12:12-13; Acts 1:6; Matt. 19:28). If the Jews were not looking for a literal earthly kingdom then why did Jesus say: “And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Lk. 22:29-30)?

The Jews believed in the literal approach of Scripture. The apostles and early church taught the literal approach to Scripture and believed in a literal kingdom (Acts 15:15-16; 19:8; 2 Timothy 4:1; Hebrews 1:8; Revelation 11:15). They believed in the literal approach to Scripture since it was taught to them by the Lord while He was here upon earth and prior to His ascension (Acts 1:3).

Will Durant, the 20<sup>th</sup> century historian, says:

“What did he (Jesus) mean by the Kingdom? A supernatural heaven? Apparently not, for the apostles and the early Christians unanimously expected an earthly Kingdom. This was the Jewish tradition that Christ inherited; and he taught his followers to pray to the Father, “Thy Kingdom come, they will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

The early church for nearly three centuries was clearly premillennial in its beliefs and theology. Louis Berkhof claims that half the church was amillennial during the second and third centuries but gives no proof for his statement. There is no proof that the church was amillennial in its belief. If amillennialism was the prevailing view during this time period of the church we are left without sources of evidence. The church was premillennial as

we think of some of the names who supported premillennialism: Clement of Rome (30-95), Barnabas, Ignatius (35-107), Polycarp (70-155), Papias (80-163), Justin Martyr (100-164), Irenaeus (130-202), Tertullian (160-220), Hippolytus (died in 236), Cyprian (195-258), Commodianus (third century), Nepos (third century) and Lactantius (240-330). These are just some examples of premillennial thinkers and teachers during the first few centuries of the church. These men were contemporary to the apostles and in some cases instructed by them. They taught premillennialism because the very apostles instructed them in this teaching. Collectively they are known as the apostolic fathers or those who lived during or around the time of the apostles and who received their oral and written instruction. These men were in the successive line with the apostles and taught what was taught in the early church by the apostles of Christ. Various works such as the “Epistle of Barnabas” and the “The shepherd of Hermas” during this era were premillennial in teaching.

The historian Philip Schaff, the prominent German Reformed theologian, writes: “The most striking point in the eschatology of the ante-Nicene age is the prominent chiliasm, or millenarianism, that is the belief of a visible reign of Christ in glory on earth with the risen saints for a thousand years, before the general resurrection and judgment. It was indeed not the doctrine of the church embodied in any creed or form of devotion, but a widely current opinion of distinguished teachers, such as Barnabas, Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Methodius, and Lactantius.”

The English historian, Edward Gibbon (1737-1794), also verifies that millenarianism or the belief in a literal 1,000 years was the belief or view of the early church during the first three centuries. Gibbon’s writes: “The assurance of such a Millennium was carefully inculcated by the succession of fathers from Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, who conversed with the immediate disciples of the apostle, down to the Lactantius, who was preceptor to the son of Constantine. Though it might not be universally received, it appears to have been the reigning sentiment of the orthodox believers.”

One notable exception of premillennial thought was that of the early church father Origen (A.D. 185-254) of Alexandria, Egypt (“Mr. Allegorism”). Origen was a prime mover in making allegory the key method of interpreting the Bible. Origen and other scholars in Egypt (Clement of Alexandria – 155-216) were greatly influenced by Greek philosophy and

attempted to integrate this philosophy with the Scriptures. They searched the Old and New Testaments for the deep and hidden spiritual meanings behind the normal understanding of Scripture. The influence of the Greek philosophers Philo and Plato was keenly felt among these men. Like the philosopher Aristobulus, Philo sought to reconcile the Law of Moses with Greek philosophy so that the Mosaic Law might become acceptable to the Greek mind. This is because Scripture at face value seems like foolishness to the Greek thinking mind.

1 Corinthians 1:23 says:

“But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness.”

Origen was charmed by Greek philosophy. A kind of Neo-Platonism began in Alexandria in the third century A.D. where speculative philosophers such as its founder, Ammonius Saccas, and Plotinus, tried to formulate platonic teaching into a religious philosophy. Clement, Dionysius and others of the Alexandrian School, such as Origen, were affected by this teaching and called Plato the “Moses of the Africa.” The school in Alexandria Egypt sought to copy the practice of Philo, Plato and other Greek philosophers by integrating pagan Greek philosophy with Scripture. Other men such as Pantaenus and Clement of Alexandria believed in the divine origin of Greek philosophy and taught that Scripture must be allegorically understood which means that we must assign to Scripture a hidden spiritual meaning instead of a literal meaning. It was in this school that Origen developed the allegorical method of interpretation, which stood in contrast to the literal and historical – grammatical method. Origen was Clement’s student and eventually he was appointed as president of this key school that questioned the literalism of the Bible. Origen rejected the idea of physical resurrection and believed in universal salvation of all human beings and fallen angles.

The historian Schaff, who is unbiased, wrote this about Origen:

“His great defect is the neglect of the grammatical and historical sense and his constant desire to find a hidden mystic meaning ... Origen was the first to lay down, in connection with the allegorical method of the Jewish Platonist, Philo, a formal theory of interpretation...”

Origen taught that Scripture has a literal meaning only so it might furnish a mystical or spiritual sense to the mind of the hearer. Those who stand on the high ground of philosophical knowledge can interpret the spiritual

meaning of Scripture. One basic teaching of Greek philosophy was the idea that everything material and physical was inherently evil. Influenced by this thinking, these Alexandrian scholars concluded that an earthly kingdom of Christ, with its many physical blessings, would be something evil. Origen could not accept the position of premillennialism. Instead, he accepted an alternate position and taught that a spiritual, nonphysical kingdom would be a better idea. He spiritualized the language of the prophets. With this idea Origen developed a whole new approach to the interpretation of Scripture, which is now termed as the allegorizing approach. Because of his popularity this form of interpretation was accepted by the Greek Church. Other church fathers during the fourth century such as Jerome (345-420) and Ambrose (340-397) helped spread this allegorical virus throughout the church.

At this point we should define what we mean when speaking about the allegorical interpretation of Scripture. Allegorical interpretation is that system of interpretation, which disregards the historical context of a biblical passage and treats the literal sense of a scripture text or verse as secondary to a deeper, more spiritual meaning. It assigns figurative meanings to Bible passages that should be taken literally.

Origen wanted to find hidden and mystical meanings in the plain words of Scripture. Origen's approach to Scripture was to spiritualize it and as a result he denied the literal meaning of prophecy. According to him, prophetic language was highly symbolic and expressed deep spiritual truths instead of conveying literal future events. Origen rejected the popular Christian hope of a coming earthly millennial reign of Christ. As a result, he questioned the authenticity of the book of Revelation and treated the book symbolically. Origen taught that Christ's coming in the clouds refers to Christ's coming into the souls of the openhearted who accept the basic truths of doctrine. In Origen's thinking, Christ's Second Coming occurs when mature Christians find Jesus in the hidden meanings of Scripture.

Extreme amillennial "preterism" of today claims that the coming of Christ has already occurred in the events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70. This is when Christ returned historically as symbolically pictured in Matthew 24:27-31. This theory holds that the prophecies about Christ's coming were fulfilled in the period of history that they were written. Hence, the coming of Christ already occurred. Christ has already returned to judge the Jews in the destruction

of Jerusalem and this allows for the generation of Jews to pass away as Jesus said (Matt. 24:34). Therefore, national Israel is abandoned by God and the new spiritual Israel has superceded the old Israel. Of course, this is nothing more than a rehash of Origen's attempt to spiritualize the Second Coming of Christ and is not only bizarre but outside the realm of orthodox beliefs.

Origen and his other scholars were the people who began to question the premillennial view but it was actually Augustine (354-430) who systemized and developed amillennialism as an alternate view of premillennialism. The works of Augustine are the foundation of amillennialism. He is regarded as the founder of this church-kingdom idea where Christ is ruling over His saints in a present spiritual sense.

Augustine wrote:

“The saints reign with Christ during the same thousand years, understood in the same way, that is, of the time of his first coming...Therefore, the church even now is the kingdom of Christ, and the kingdom of heaven. Accordingly, even now His saints reign with Him.”

There are at least three reasons why Augustine changed his view from premillennialism to amillennialism:

1. Influence of Greek philosophy
2. Carnal view of millennial teaching
3. Condition of blessing in the church

Like Origen, Augustine had been schooled in Greek philosophy and could not escape its influence in spite of what the Scriptures themselves warned.

Colossians 2:8 says:

“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy (Greek philosophy) and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.”

Farrar writes:

“Allegory by no means sprang from spontaneous piety, but was the child of Rationalism which owed its birth to the heathen theories of Plato.”

Augustine was a great admirer of Plato and made every attempt that he could to reconcile Platonic philosophy with Christianity. Even Warfield admits that Augustine's teachings were "built largely out of Platonic materials." Augustine sought after the wisdom of the world (1 Cor. 2:6) and developed the idea that the kingdom was not a literal future reality but a spiritual existence, which constitutes the church or the true people of God.

Augustine also concluded that premillennialism promoted a millennium, which looked forward to a time of carnal enjoyment and fleshly excesses. He taught that no spiritual minded person could follow this view. Because of this he developed a wrong view of millennial teaching.

Augustine wrote:

"But since they say that those who are to rise again will enjoy a holiday of most immoderate carnal feasts, in which food and drink will be so plentiful that not only will they observe no limits of moderation but will also exceed all bounds even of incredulity, all this can be believed only by the carnally minded. Those who are spiritually minded call those who believe these things, in Greek, chiliasts, and we may in Latin translate the term literally as millenarians."

Another reason why Augustine changed his position from premillennialism to amillennialism is because in his own day he saw how the Roman Empire was crumbling. He witnessed how the church was seemingly going to take the place of the Gentile empire and experience earthly blessing even in his own lifetime. Because of these changes taking place before him, Augustine saw no need for an earthly literal millennium. It made the need for an earthly millennium obsolete. If the church was headed toward a time of earthly blessing in his own day and time there would be no necessity of a literal millennium. The Christianization of the Roman Empire under the Emperor Constantine seemed to also dismiss the whole idea and need for a future earthly millennium and paved the way for the spread of Augustinian theology. Thus, Augustine began to teach that the kingdom is the spiritual rule of Christ over the church in the present day society.

Augustine found Origen's method of allegorizing the Scriptures, in regard to the millennium, a helpful tool to sidestep the whole approach to a literal millennium. It's very clear that Augustine's attitude and theology has dominated much of the church even today. So Augustine came to reject the premillennial idea of a literal earthly reign of Christ, which had been held

since apostolic times. He followed the allegorical method of interpretation of Origen. By Augustine's day many had already adopted the pagan Greek philosophical system. Therefore, his compromise of mixing or integrating pagan philosophy with Biblical truth was widely accepted. One form of his compromise was that he interpreted the non-prophetic portions of Scripture as literal and the prophetic portions of Scripture allegorically. This was a dualistic interpretation of Scripture that was biased and unscholarly. This Augustine dualism was accepted without much debate in the Roman Catholic Church.

Other men that promoted this new mixture of Greek philosophy and Scripture were Tyconius (died in 400) and Jerome (347-420). Jerome was also opposed to the Jews being restored in a millennial earth and promoted a heavenly concept of the kingdom. In his commentary on Daniel, chapter 7:18, he wrote: "...but the saints will never possess an earthly kingdom, but only a heavenly. Away, then, with the fable about a millennium."

The Roman church in the fourth century embraced Augustine's doctrine wholeheartedly and regarded themselves as the continuation of Israel as a spiritual entity. The political and theocratic character of Israel as well as its religious life was considered as a continuing form in the Roman Church. Thus, the Roman Church believed what Augustine said concerning the church being an extension of Old Testament Israel. Of course, the Roman Church wanted to rule and they claimed that since they were the new Israel or people of God they had the legal right to legislate and govern in a political way. It was in this same time that the church claimed authority over the state. Thus, the Roman Church transferred the physical promises of Israel to their present situation and became what they considered to be the spiritual successor and inheritor of Israel's promises. This conclusion was derived from Augustine's concept of how the church was a spiritual extension of Israel and how the church as a present spiritual kingdom of people fulfills the Old Testament kingdom promises.

Amillennialism was embraced by Romanism throughout the Middle Ages and was later adopted by many of the Protestant Reformers such as John Wycliff, Martin Luther, Philip Melancthon, John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli. However, William Tyndale and many of the Anabaptists along with the Moravians and Huguenots were generally premillennial. Because the Reformers returned to a quality of orthodoxy many followed in their



acceptance and endorsement of amillennialism claiming that it was a natural part of orthodoxy.

Unfortunately, the Reformation did not change the spiritualized theological teaching about the church and the amillennial kingdom view. It continued, by in large, to mix Israel with the church and viewed the kingdom as a present day reality where the King was reigning in the hearts of His saints. The Reformation could not completely remove itself from Roman influence. This is why Calvin consistently refers to the saints of the Old and New Testament under the one title of the “church.” Sadly, the Reformers had to deny the Jews of their earthly rights and privileges as a nation and their distinctive promises and continue to embrace Augustinian teaching. Thus, the Reformation was not a Reformation from Augustinianism and amillennialism. So from the Reformers amillennialism was carried into the present day churches that have stemmed from the Protestant Reformation.

Today most Reformed churches such as the Reformed Church of America, the Christian Reformed Church and the Presbyterian churches follow this amillennial theology and allegorized system of eschatology. Various branches of Southern Baptists, Lutherans and other denominations also follow this teaching. Those churches today, which espouse this non-literal view about the kingdom, are in some measure following in the train of the platonic allegorization of Origen and Augustine. They are committing the same error of mixing the platonic philosophy of allegorization with Scripture.

Augustine’s amillennialism of the 4<sup>th</sup> century remained the dominant view of the organized church until the 17<sup>th</sup> century when a scientific intellectual revolution began to occur and a return to literalism was accepted by many people. Many people became interested in the way the universe was articulated and how literal measurements and calculations could be measured to understand the universe better. Augustine taught that any interest in the universe was carnal enjoyment and was a work of Satan. This view of the amillennial teacher and other allegorical views were rejected and a more literal approach to understanding the universe and even the Scriptures began to usurp the amillennial view. People began to once again believe in a literal kingdom concept upon the earth and a shift from amillennialism to a literal kingdom concept upon the earth began to take shape.

Unfortunately, it was primarily a postmillennial concept that was erected to take the place of amillennialism for several centuries. It would not be until the 20<sup>th</sup> century that postmillennialism came under fire because of two world wars. The postmillennial idea that the world was heading toward global peace or some kind of utopia became abandoned. As a result, a switch to amillennialism took place once again. Most of the postmillennialists went back to teaching Augustine's amillennialism. The majority of protestants (liberal and conservative) converted to amillennialism and went in agreement with the Roman Catholic Church and Eastern Orthodox Churches who remained amillennial. Thus, the dominant view of Christendom by the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and even today is amillennial. More recent theologians and men whose writings are well known, such as Vos, Kuyper, Machen and Berkhof, all promote the amillennial position.

Reformed Theology of our present day heavily relies upon Augustine's writings since he is the founder of amillennialism. He was the first to develop the idea that the kingdom mentioned in Daniel chapters two and seven and Revelation chapter twenty was the church. Augustine taught that the 1,000 years is simply a number of generations to which God keeps His covenants (Deut. 7:9) and which actually becomes the spiritual kingdom of believers (the church) that Christ is reigning over today.

In his book entitled the "City of God," Augustine developed the idea that the organized Catholic (universal) church is the Messianic Kingdom and that the millennium began with the first coming of Christ. His main thesis was that the present age was a conflict between the city of God (God's people – the kingdom or church) and the city of Satan (Satan's kingdom or the world) consummating in the Second Advent of Christ. Augustine espoused a preterist (past) view of the book of Revelation instead of a futuristic view of this book.

Those today who follow in the train of Augustine look at the book of Revelation as something that is past and in many of the same ways as he did. Augustine claimed that the time period of the book of Revelation began at the first advent of Christ when Satan was bound and cast out of the hearts of true Christianity. This is when the saint's reign over Satan began. The millennium began with the birth of Christianity and was fully realized in the present day church who rules today over Satan. The beast in the book of the Revelation symbolizes the wicked world and the first

resurrection in Revelation chapter 20 is that of dead souls to spiritual life and a resurrection of souls continues every time a person is born again in the present millennium, which we live. The thousand years is a symbolic expression of completeness in this present time period of the Messiah's spiritual reign over his people. According to Augustine, this period of time will be followed by a new persecution of the saints under Antichrist. After this persecution will be the general resurrection and judgment followed by eternity in heaven in the period of the New Jerusalem. Augustine actually believed that this spiritual millennium would end in A.D. 650 with Christ's return after the seventh spiritual millennium of earth's history. It's then that the ultimate triumph of righteousness would abound.

Although Augustine taught a spiritual concept of the millennium he also held to a literal 1,000-year time period that would end with Christ's coming. Augustine spiritualized the millennium and the 1,000 years as a figure of completeness. But Augustine also wanted to retain a certain amount of literalness in regards to the 1,000 years and taught that Jesus would return 1,000 years after the ascension of Christ. This would end what he calculated to be the final millennium of earth's history. Of course, this fanciful dream is not mentioned by modern day followers of Augustine. They would rather view the millennium or the 1,000 years as an undetermined amount of time where God is ruling over His saints and limit the actual time of perfect peace and righteousness to the saint's departure into heaven or either the eternal state.

It's interesting that the early Augustine seemed to be premillennial in his beliefs but later he changed to the amillennial belief system rejecting the idea of any literal earthly kingdom. He claimed that the church is the kingdom and that the binding of Satan took place during the ministry of the Lord. The first resurrection of Revelation chapter twenty is the new birth of the believer whereas the second resurrection is the physical resurrection of the human body. This is the same kind of undermining work and spiritualization of the Scriptures that many embrace today in the Reformed tradition of teaching. Much of the teachings and beliefs of today in relationship to the prophetic Scriptures are still following Augustine's interpretive scheme, which was rooted in pagan Greek philosophy. It is a sad mark upon the church today to reject the literal interpretation of the prophetic Scriptures. Even to this day I have heard Calvinistic preachers talk about the City of God story, which Augustine has invented. They are still reading his writings and overthrowing the truth of Scripture!

Few would disagree, according to the abundant historical facts, that Augustine was the first to develop the amillennial theology (no literal millennium) that much of the church embraces today.

Crutchfield remarks:

“...Augustine articulated an amillennial view in which no future thousand-year reign earthly millennium was expected.”

Augustine injected into the blood stream of the church this Greek philosophy, which is regarded as truth today. Sadly, much of Christendom has accepted an interpretive scheme of Scripture that has been welded together with Greek philosophy.

Farrar concludes by saying:

“Unhappily for the Church, unhappily for any real apprehension of Scripture, the allegorists, in spite of protest, were completely victorious.”

We can conclude that the allegorizing method was not born out of the study of the Scriptures but out of the desire to unite Greek philosophy and the Word of God. This unholy mixture occurred in the Alexandrian school of Origen and was then passed down to Augustine. However, the School of Antioch in Syria was altogether different in its approach to Scripture and rejected allegorization and the mixing of philosophy with Scripture. This school from the third century to about the eight century became an important center for the development of sound Christian theology and literal interpretation of Scripture. This is the same place where the term “Christians” was first used (Acts 11:26).

We would have a different history of interpretation in the church today had the interpretive method of the Antioch School prevailed. Instead, the church embraced a philosophical method of interpretation that carried over into the Dark Ages until the Reformation period (1517-1648) when sound exegesis of Scripture and interpretive principles were once again revived. In fact, it would not be an understatement to say that the whole Reformation movement began because of the desire to return to a literal method of interpreting the Scripture. Men such as Erasmus emphasized a return to the study of the original texts and laid the foundation for the grammatical interpretation of Scripture. John Wycliffe wanted to translate the Scriptures and promote the literal understanding of the text.

Farrar writes what Wycliffe said:

“The whole error in the knowledge of Scripture, and source of its debasement and falsification by incompetent person, was the ignorance of grammar and logic.”

Luther said:

“Every word should be allowed to stand in it’s natural meaning and that should not be abandoned unless faith forces us to it ... It is the attribute of Holy Scripture that it interprets itself by passages and places which belong together, and can only be understood by the rule of faith.”

Calvin also said:

“Let us know then, that the true meaning of Scripture is the natural and obvious meaning, and let us embrace and abide by it resolutely.”

In the Preface to the book of Romans, Calvin says:

“It is the first business of an interpreter to let his author say what he does say, instead of attributing to him what we think he ought to say.”

In spite of the Reformer’s desire to return to the literal interpretation of Scripture, history reveals that many of the Reformers still allegorized prophetic Scriptures since they were heavily influenced by Augustine and were not fully devoted to reviving the prophetic studies of Scripture. They were more interested in reviving truth that was connected to the person and work of Christ and the salvation of man. But sadly there was not a return to a literal and dispensational approach to many of the prophetic Scriptures. This can be seen in the writings of Calvin, Luther and other Reformers who still embraced a degree of allegorization in their prophetic interpretive scheme of Scripture. Luther believed that it was a “dream” to believe that Christ would literally reign upon the earth. Unfortunately, the Reformation was not a full or complete reversal of allegorical interpretation but it paved the way for literalism overall and a new respect for the meaning of the Bible.

In the Post-Reformation period many men followed closely in the footsteps of the Reformers by applying the grammatical and literal method of interpretation to Scripture. This is noteworthy and they must be commended for their stance. The literal method of interpreting Scripture was the method of early Church Fathers that lived during and after the days

of the apostles until the time of Origen when he developed the idea of integrating and harmonizing Scripture with Platonic philosophy. Augustine's influence (A.D. 354-430) was heavily felt when he systemized and developed amilennialism. He was absolutely convinced that the "chiliasts" (premillennialists) were in error in promoting a literal millennium.

One would think that the literal approach to Scripture would prevail in light of the Reformation and Post-Reformation return to Scripture. In reality, the literal interpretation of Scripture, on a large scale, does prevail today. The true church accepts that philosophy does not have a part in interpretation of Scripture. But we must understand that the Reformation still did not produce a literal concept of a kingdom that would be established upon the earth. Augustinian Platonic theology, such as Augustine's spiritualization of the doctrine of the millennium and church, still had impact upon the Reformers. The Reformers practiced other Augustinian doctrines such as infant baptism and using the sacraments as a means of grace. Luther accepted Augustine's idea that the spiritual presence of Christ was in some way found in the sacraments.

The view of Augustine, which taught that sex was always shameful and sinful, except for producing children, was also embraced. The very Augustine who gave the Roman Catholic Church the seed doctrine of purgatory and who promoted the worship of Mary was not fully abandoned as a heretic. Much of his teaching was still embraced and regarded as trustworthy. Men like Calvin continued to follow Augustine's teaching of spiritualization in some measure. Calvin saw the church in the Old Testament instead of seeing it as a unique mystery truth of the New Testament (Eph. 3:1-8). They also did not recognize a literal reign of Christ upon the earth. Their theology was still influenced by Augustine. The effects of Platonic philosophy were still latent and being felt in the Reformation period. Calvin relied heavily upon the writings of Augustine as he developed his millennial views and views on predestination.

Unfortunately, Augustinism is here to stay in spite of the attempted resurgence of a literal approach to Scripture during the Reformation era. In short, the Reformation period did not take us far enough in the revival of a literal method of approach to the prophecies of Scripture especially in regards to a literal kingdom. The immediate concerns that the Reformation dealt with were justification by faith alone, the priesthood of every believer and the final authority of Scripture for faith and practice. A more adequate

and literal study of prophecy would emerge during the end of the 1800's as the prophetic Scriptures were beginning to be revived out of the dark dungeon of past centuries of Augustinianism. Another Reformation was on the horizon that would seek to interpret the Scriptures literally from an overall prophetic and dispensational standpoint. This would come in the late 1800's and the dawning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the resurgence of the great prophetic conferences.

## The Teaching of Amillennialism

### *Covenant Theology Teaching*

As stated at the beginning of this study, amillennialism is the belief that there will be no literal millennium or future reign of Jesus Christ on planet earth. It's also linked with what is called "Covenant Theology" because this system of theology follows the allegorization method of interpretation and embraces a non-literal approach to the millennium. Covenant Theology rejects dispensationalism since dispensationalism believes in the literal approach to prophetic Scripture and sees a clear distinction between Israel and the church and also believes in a literal 1,000-year kingdom reign upon earth. Dispensationalism teaches that God still has a plan for national Israel and that God has not abandoned His covenant promises given to His people. It does not spiritualize the prophecies and promises about the millennium equating them with Christ's rule over the church today on earth or in heaven. Therefore, the system of Covenant Theology must reject this system of interpretation, which threatens their spiritualized scheme of thinking on the Bible.

Covenant theology is primarily a Post-Reformation teaching formulated in Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries that was introduced to America primarily through the Puritans. Covenant theology in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries has been taught by such men as the American Charles Hodge and Herman Bavinck, Abraham Kuyper and Louis Berkhof of Holland. This system of theology was not developed in the early church, the Middle Ages or by the prominent Reformers such as Luther, Calvin, Zwingli or Melancthon.

Louis Berkhof says:

"In the early Church Fathers the covenant idea is not found at all."

According to Berkhof, Kasper Olevianus (1536-1587), a secondary Reformer, was the real founder of a well-developed Covenant Theology. Other men who taught this concept were Rafael Aglinus (1559-1622), William Ames (1576-1587), who ministered in England and Holland, and Johannes Cocceius (1603-1669), who was a German. Herman Witsius (1636-1708) was credited for teaching that this covenant of grace was created in eternity past when the Godhead agreed upon the terms for redemption. These were men whose influence was secondary to the great Reformers of the time. The main Reformers did not teach or develop a covenant scheme like other lesser-known men. Cocceius actually set forth the view of two covenants of works and grace in a work published in 1648. However, the teaching was spreading, since one year before the publication of Cocceius's work the Westminster Confession's covenant of works and grace appeared.

Renald Showers adds these important notes:

"The system started to be developed in the Reformed Churches of Switzerland and Germany and passed to the Netherlands, Scotland, and England. In 1647 the Westminster Confession of Faith in England became the first confession of faith to refer to Covenant Theology."

Charles Ryrie adds:

"Covenant theology came to America through the writings of Francis Turretin and Herman Witsius and was championed in the new world in the works of John Cotton and others."

Covenant Theology receives its name because of the emphasis or place that it gives to the covenants within its theological system. It represents the whole of Scripture as being covered by two or three covenants. This theological system begins its allegorization scheme of interpretation by claiming that God only made two or three covenants. These are covenants postulated or proposed by theologians. The first covenant consisted of a covenant of redemption between the Godhead in eternity past. This theological system claims that the covenant of redemption came about because of some secret agreement that was made between the Father and Son in eternity past. God the Son agreed to provide salvation through His death upon the cross and the Father agreed that the Son would be the Redeemer and head of the elect.



Second, there is a covenant of works, which God made with Adam (Gen. 2:17). God entered into a covenant relationship with Adam and promised life for his obedience and death for his disobedience. Adam was temporarily put on probation to see what he would do. When he failed he plunged the world into sin and spiritual death and became the head of a human race that would be separated from God.

The third covenant consisted of a covenant of grace after Adam sinned (Gen. 3:15) which was the promise of salvation through a coming Redeemer. God offered the covenant of grace to Adam in order to bring salvation to him through Jesus Christ. And today God is operating under this same grace-redemption covenant purpose, which is now being extended to the elect. The covenant of grace offered to Adam and the entire world is actually based upon the covenant of redemption, which was made in eternity past. Covenant theology views both history and prophecy through the lenses of this proposed covenant of grace and this is what directs their interpretation of Scripture, causing the prophecies about the millennium to be spiritualized and interpreted figuratively, as the present day church. According to Covenant Theology, there is the need to simplify the national Jewish covenant promises, through the process of figurative/spiritualized language, since this makes the unifying concept of salvation and grace easier to be seen and understood throughout history.

It's very significant that there is no mention of these proposed covenants in Scripture. The first time the word covenant is used is with Noah (Gen. 6:18; 9:11). The covenant of works and grace are not Biblical covenants as Reformed Theology teaches. Covenant theologians base their entire system of theology on a deduction rather than a clear statement of Scripture. Abraham no doubt understood that a covenant was being made when he cut the animals in half and when God passed through the pieces of the sacrifice (Gen. 15:17-21). But this cannot be said of Adam. Adam was not aware of some kind of covenant of works and grace taking place as Covenant theology assumes happened.

Covenant Theology can only hope that a covenant of grace was either "assumed" to have taken place or that it was "cryptically" realized as having occurred in relationship to Adam. It's interesting that Covenant Theology wants us to emphasize the supposed covenant of grace over the Abrahamic covenant, which God clearly gave to Abraham. It must be understood that the covenants of redemption, works and grace are

manmade theological covenants but not biblical covenants. God's dealing with Adam was in the form of a test and the subsequent provisions given to Adam if he fails the test. It was not necessarily a covenant. Scripture never verifies that this was a covenant as it does with the other covenants (Gen. 6:18 = Noahic; Gen. 15:18; 17:2 = Abrahamic; Deut. 4:12-13 = Mosaic; Deut. 29:1 with 30:3-10 = Palestinian; 2 Chronicles 21:7; Ps. 89:3 with 2 Samuel 7:8-18 = Davidic; Jer. 31:31; Heb. 8:8 = New).

This means that the whole premise of Covenant Theology crumbles because they argue for covenants that are not even directly or clearly mentioned and revealed in the Bible as covenants. Even if one was to assume that a covenant of works was made to Adam and a covenant of grace was the result of Adam's failure, it does not mean that every other covenant mentioned in the Bible must be spiritualized to fit into some kind of single covenant scheme of grace, which leads to nullifying other covenants of their literal promises to national Israel. Covenant Theology is in error because it tries to make all of the other covenants subservient to the one imaginary covenant of grace.

It's true that other covenants contain a picture of God's grace in that He acts on the behalf of the people. Even in the Mosaic Covenant there is the institution of the gracious sacrificial system. But this conclusion does not give the interpreter the permission to spiritualize the other covenants in an attempt to give them one common goal – salvation by grace. Covenant Theology has only one goal that it focuses on – salvation by grace. But this single goal throughout history is too narrow. We must remember that God has other goals that He intends to fulfill during the course of history which contribute to His ultimate purpose for history. God has different goals for nations (Job 12:23; Isa 14:24-27) and rulers (Dan. 2:21, 4:17). God has judgment plans for planet earth (Revelation 6-19). He has plans for Satan (Rev. 12:7-10, 20:1-3) and even for the redemption of nature (Matt. 19:28; Rom. 8:19-22). Likewise, God has a plan for the Gentiles (Rom. 11:25) and for the Jews or national Israel (Romans 11:26-27). He promises the Jews a literal kingdom (Daniel 7:27; Luke 12:32).

These goals cannot be overlooked or spiritualized in order to try and unify the working of the grace of God in some kind of generalized and spiritualized program of one common people and goal that embraces grace and salvation. To try and narrow the goals or plans of God by squeezing them into a single covenant of grace, whereby all covenants must reflect

this one covenant and be spiritualized to mean something that reflects grace and salvation, does not do justice to God's other plans that He is working out in history.

Renald Showers observes:

“Since God has many different programs which He is operating during the course of history, all of them must be contributing something to His ultimate purpose for history. Thus, the ultimate goal of history has to be large enough to incorporate all of God's programs, not just one of them.”

In other words, there is no reason to assume that just because God acted in grace toward Adam that He was setting down a single goal that would be seen throughout all of history, which would exclude various distinctions that are seen in other covenants, and exclude the literal promises of God by giving them a spiritual or figurative application to the one covenant of grace. Covenant Theology fails to see the important distinctions between the covenant programs of God and attempts to unite them all under one umbrella – salvation by grace. This leads them to nullify the covenant promises given to the Jews and spiritualize them. However, these distinctions among the covenants cannot go unnoticed. The distinctions within the covenants verify that God has more than just one program or purpose operating in history and in the future. When the covenant programs of God are interpreted literally and the distinctions between God's covenant programs are clearly seen, it will allow for a future kingdom for national Israel.

It is shameful to override the distinctions found in God's covenant programs by not allowing the covenant promises to convey literal realities. Distinctions cannot be set aside without falling into grievous error. For instance, Paul makes a clear distinction between the Mosaic covenant and Abrahamic Covenant by arguing that the promised seed cannot be based upon both the Law and Abrahamic covenant at the same time (Gal. 3:18). There are clear distinctions between the covenant of the Law and the Abrahamic covenant. One said, “Do this and you will be blest” where the other said, “I will do this for you so you will be blessed.” The Mosaic Covenant instituted conditions that were not required in any earlier covenants. There is also an expressed distinction between the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant (Jer. 31:32). Furthermore, the Mosaic Law was an administration of death (2 Cor. 3:9) whereas the New Covenant is an administration of righteousness (2 Cor. 3:9). In addition, the

Old Mosaic Law was written on tables of stone whereas the New Covenant is said to be written upon the tables of the heart (2 Cor. 3:3). The idea that all of the covenants have a single meaning, purpose and common goal attached to them (salvation by grace) is too narrow. It's very clear that God has made clear distinctions between the covenants and has different goals to fulfill for national Israel throughout His covenant dealings.

We have the Noachic covenant with the rainbow of promise (Gen. 9:11-15). We have the Mosaic covenant with the demands to obey for blessings and resulting curses for failure (Deut. 27:14-26). Then we have the Abrahamic, Palestinian and Davidic covenants with the promises of a continuing people, future land and future kingdom. We have the New Covenant with the promise of the permanent indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit (Ezek. 36:27). The differences are more than minor as Covenant Theologians suggest. They are major differences that demonstrate the outworking purposes of God as being much more involved than just salvation by grace.

John Walvoord says this about Covenant Theology:

“In order to make the various covenants of the Old Testament conform to the pattern of the covenant of grace, it is necessary to interpret them in other than their literal sense. This is illustrated in the promises given to Abraham and to Israel which are interpreted as promises to the New Testament church ...The covenant theory allows no place for literal fulfillment of Israel's national and racial promises and either cancels them on the ground that Israel failed to meet the necessary conditions or transfers them to the saints in general.”

In other words, Covenant Theology follows the earlier amillennial teaching, which claims that the church today has inherited the Old Covenant promises of Israel in a generalized spiritual way. And this is based upon the fact that God has made a unifying covenant of grace to the entire world, which covers the time of Adam to the end of the age. The covenant of grace is the primary covenant and all other covenants such as the Abrahamic, Davidic, Palestinian and New are simply an extension of the one covenant of all history and the future. Thus, the theology of this system sees no difference between the added requirements of the Mosaic covenant and the covenants given to Abraham and David. Failure to spiritualize these literal covenant promises might exploit the greater and overall plan of salvation in the covenant of grace.

The Covenant Theology of amillennialism views all the covenants of the Bible to be progressive revelations of the one covenant of grace. They are all squeezed into the same mold as the covenant of grace. Covenant Theology stresses that there is a unifying covenant (the covenant of grace), which encompasses all the rest of God's covenants. And since there is only one general covenant that God is working with throughout history it is proposed that there can be only one group of people that He is working with in both the old and new dispensation – the church. And to keep the unifying principle of the covenant of grace in tact there must be a spiritual or figurative transfer of the Old Testament covenant promises to the church today. There must always be a unifying spiritual principle followed throughout God's covenants – salvation by grace.

Covenant Theology attempts to simplify God's sovereign program by combining different people into one entity and various dispensational economies into one generic phase of God's work. Amillennialism opts for an oversimplification of God's earthly plans and tries to avoid unwanted distinctions at all costs to keep what they term as "A more feasible working hermeneutic."

Here is a practical breakdown of Covenant Theology.

Unified goal = salvation by grace through the covenant of grace which began after Adam's fall or at the official giving of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12). There is the unified goal of a common\universal plan of salvation for all people.

This leads to a ...

Unified people = the church in both the Old Testament and New Testament is the same people of God experiencing the one plan of grace and salvation. Israel's disobedience and failure cancels out God's covenant program and the earthly promises given to them. But there still remains a unified/universal people down through the ages to receive of this common salvation.

Which in return leads to a ...

Unusual Spiritualization = allegorization of the Old Testament covenant promises and the transfer of these promises to the church today in a

figurative way. The church replaces Israel and inherits her covenant promises by becoming a spiritual kingdom of people that Christ rules. This simplifies and generalizes God's outworking program of grace to the one people of God.

It is said that these kingdom covenant promises given to Israel were typically teaching about the spiritual blessings of Christ ruling over His church, which is the present day kingdom of people that the King indwells and rules. There is the need to spiritualize these promises to arrive at a common goal that magnifies grace and salvation in the church today. This results in a unified goal and purpose of salvation for one people that blurs all distinctions between Israel and the church and cuts off any literal future for Israel and the millennium on planet earth.

The point of Covenant Theology is that too many different covenants and different programs would steer us away from God's common plan of grace and no longer create a common picture of redemption throughout history. Thus, this unifying theological interpretation claims that the people from the time of Adam or Abraham, to the present time, are the institutional church or the one\same people that are unified together in this covenant of grace. And the church today has been given spiritual promises instead of physical promises in order to verify the common goal of God's covenant of grace and salvation to the present church in history. This is why the church today is called Abraham's spiritual seed. They have received or inherited the Old Testament promises in a spiritual or figurative way as evidence by the New Testament.

In other words, there is only one people of God throughout all of history and that is the church. This is the elect group under this one covenant of grace that cannot be separated or made distinct in any fashion. There is a unifying people of God under the outworking of the one covenant of grace. This is why Covenant Theology replaces national Israel of the Old Testament with the church today. They claim that they are the same people who must replace the old people since there is to be a unifying people under the one covenant of grace.

According to Covenant Theology and their New Testament analysis, those covenants that are mentioned in the Bible (Abrahamic, Palestinian, Davidic and New) are all viewed as being a spiritual or non-literal extension of the covenant of grace. Furthermore, it's promoted by this interpretive system

that all of the Old Testament covenants are in some way related to the promised salvation blessings given to the universal church down through the ages of time – even the New Testament church of today. For many the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 12) is seen to be the official beginning of the covenant of grace and the institutional church. Abraham is seen as the head of the covenant of grace. Other amillenarians see Adam as fulfilling this role as head of the covenant of grace and view the church beginning back in Genesis chapter 3:15 with the promise of the Redeemer. Berkhof suggests that in Genesis 3:15 we see the revelation of this covenant but it was not until the time of Abraham that this covenant was officially established.

### *Present Day Beliefs of Reformed\Covenant Teaching*

Reformed Theology of today continues to embrace this covenant of grace relationship with God and claims that the children of saved parents are born within the covenant of grace relationship. Like Old Testament Israel, those born to regenerate parents (the new Israel) experience a “legal relationship” with God within this covenant relationship. These children become like the spiritual seed of the believers. In other words, children enter this covenant of grace by physical birth. When they come to the age of accountability before God they are then expected to enter the “communion of life” aspect of this covenant, which involves salvation. As a rule, God gathers the number of His elect out of those who stand in this legal covenant relationship with Him. Those who are born in the covenant of grace relationship have a privileged position and it is believed that God gives them special blessings such as the Spirit’s conviction, striving and common grace (Gen. 6:3; Mt. 13:18-22; Heb. 6:4-6). By the process of spiritual transfer and replacement the new sign of the covenant relationship between God and His people today (the new Israel) is baptism (sprinkling), which replaces the old sign of circumcision in the Old Testament Abrahamic covenant. This is the seal of the covenant of grace and the young children are considered the “children of the kingdom” to which the Gospel must be preached first of all (Matt. 8:12; Luke 14:16-24; Acts 13:46).

This Reformed way of thinking and baptismal practice of infants runs contrary to Scripture. The Bible never calls circumcision the “seal” of the Abrahamic covenant let alone baptism becoming the seal of the New Covenant. This is terminology not used in the Bible. The Holy Spirit is the

seal of the present dispensation (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30). Furthermore, nowhere in the Bible does it state that infant baptism and circumcision is the same thing. They cannot signify the same thing since children of believing parents are not Israelites and since circumcision was only performed on males whereas baptism was practiced on both males and females. In addition, New Testament baptism followed the salvation of any person, no matter what age they had reached, whereas circumcision was performed on children eight days old (Gen. 17:12).

To argue that baptism replaces circumcision and becomes a seal of the covenant of grace that we have with God is nowhere stated nor even assumed in the entire Bible. If the baptism of boys replaces the Old Testament practice of circumcision, then what does the practice of infant girls replace? Verses that are used by covenant theologians to support the notion that infant baptism replaces infant circumcision teach nothing about baptizing infants (Col. 2:11; Matt. 19:14). The supposed proof text of Colossians 2:11-12, which Reformed theologians use to support the idea of baptism replacing the sign of circumcision, says nothing of infants! However, this passage does teach that salvation is a spiritual operation of circumcision that does not involve the hands of man. It does teach that salvation takes place through the spiritual operation that God performs in our life when we are spiritually identified with the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord and brought into new life with Him.

Berkhof makes one more interesting point about this universal covenant of grace. He says, "As long as children of the covenant do not reveal the contrary, we shall have to proceed on the assumption that they are in possession of the covenant life." By comparison, where do we read that all the people within Old Testament Israel, who were in covenant relationship with God, were actually saved? Even today Paul says that all Jews, who are born as Israelites and circumcised, are not necessarily part of the true regenerated Israel (see Romans 9:6). This tells us that it is dangerous to assume that some person born into a covenant relationship with God possesses eternal life. These kinds of confusing statements made by Reformed Theologians result when failing to distinguish between membership in a covenant people and membership in the true church through faith in Christ (Heb. 12:23). As can be expected, this kind of covenant thinking has led to all kinds of abuses, where churches sprinkle infants in order to give them the sign of the covenant of grace, and where baptism begins to be viewed as the seal of salvation itself. They are



introduced as children of the covenant and in some way are always seen to be children of the covenant! Thus, their sealing through baptism within this covenant of grace and their relationship to the Reformed Church itself seems to suggest that they are saved when in reality they are not saved. They have never made a personal decision to believe on Jesus Christ (Acts 16:31).

Reformed Theology also teaches that since Jesus is the Mediator of the New Covenant (Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24), which is but an extension of the Covenant of grace, it's reasonable to assume that Christ is the Mediator of the Covenant of Grace. It is Jesus Christ who goes between God and sinful man and brings man into right relationship with a holy God. But problems arise when churches begin to identify baptism as some kind of sealing agent into the covenant of grace. The dangers arise when people understand that the Mediator of the covenant transfers His actual saving work to their lives, in this covenant of grace relationship, through the act of baptism. This is nothing more than a works salvation (Eph. 2:8-9).

Perhaps covenant theologians do not intend to teach that baptism regenerates little children but their statements would teach otherwise. The statements of covenant theologians seem to imply salvation by the act of baptism.

Murray says:

“Baptized infants are to be received as the children of God and treated accordingly.”

Bromiley, writing about the children of promise, says:

“Baptism declares the inward regenerative cooperation of the Holy Spirit which makes us conformable to Jesus Christ.”

In his book entitled *Baptism: Its purpose, Practice and Power*, Green wrote these words: “Baptism is the initiation of the Christian person. It is his inclusion in the salvation history of God. It is the incorporation into the church, the Body of Christ.”

Calvin, writing in his “*Institutes of the Christian Religion*” recorded these words: “The sign [of infant baptism] ... opens to them a door into the church, that, adopted into it, they may be enrolled among the heirs of the Kingdom of heaven.”

Once again we must understand that this interpretive scheme of Covenant Theology allegorizes truth by mixing Israel with the church, which is presented in Scripture as a distinct group of people with a different calling. Covenant Theology embraces the allegorical method of Augustine by destroying God's dispensational working in the Bible with Israel by equating the church today with Israel of old and canceling out any future promises for national Israel. It teaches that the church of the New Testament becomes a new spiritual Israel and that the church today has inherited Old Testament Israel's covenant promises and blessings. The church becomes the spiritual successor of Israel. Since Israel disobeyed God, He has forsaken them and has no future plans for national Israel. Instead God has transferred all of Israel's promises over to His new spiritual Israel - the New Testament church.

According to amillennialism, the references to Israel in the New Testament refer to spiritual Israel – God's New Testament church which now replaces the Old Testament church as found in national Israel. Thus, God has always had His church, even in the Old Testament. But today's church is the new community of Israel, which is given a present day spiritual kingdom and also heavenly promises to which the earthly promises of old foreshadowed. The earthly promises of a kingdom to old Israel (the old church generation) are replaced by the spiritual promises of a kingdom that Christ reigns over today in His new Israel (present church generation). Of course, this is an incredible hoax on the Bible. It is huckstering the Bible (2 Cor. 4:2) to try and fit a Platonic interpretive scheme that is contrary to belief in a literal Bible.

In other words, the amillennialist claims that the church consists of God's redeemed people of all ages. The church is seen in the Old Testament as Israel and the church in the New Testament replaces Israel as the new spiritual Israel or church of the New Testament. This is sometimes called "replacement theology." This new Israel (church) or community of people inherits old Israel's covenant blessings. The Old Testament covenant promises given to Israel are now transferred to the church today and applied to the church in a spiritual way.

This is the crux of covenant theology and the amillennial position: The promises given to Israel about a land, a nation, a king and a kingdom (Gen. 12:2; 15:18-20; 2 Sam. 7:12-16) have been given to the church and take on

a new spiritual dimension and meaning. Thus, the promises and prophecies given to Israel of old through the covenants and prophets are transferred, by the process of spiritualized interpretation, to the church. The church is simply a continuation of the concept of Israel, which replaces the old Israel in God's program. This means that the Old Testament texts must be spiritualized or have a hidden spiritual meaning attached to them so that they can be applied to the new Israel or church today. Thus, the spiritual meaning in these Old Testament texts is opted for instead of the literal meaning of these promises and prophecies.

Since the old Israel rebelled against God's conditional covenants and ultimately rejected Christ, she forfeited her right to enjoy any earthly kingdom. Now the promises and prophecies must be cancelled out for the old Israel and be spiritualized and take on a figurative meaning for the present day church, which is called the spiritual children of Abraham. In other words, the promises about a land, a nation, a king and a kingdom have been spiritually fulfilled in the church today, which is the present day kingdom, where Christ is reigning in the hearts of His "continued community" of covenant people. The prophecies connected with the millennium have a spiritual meaning and can be interpreted as meaning the peace and tranquility that God's people have today as the King reigns in their hearts. Or they can be interpreted as referencing heaven itself where the King reigns over His saints. Some amillenarians combine both of these viewpoints about the kingdom.

Calvin went so far to say that the literal interpretation of Israel's earthly promises were not even to be interpreted by the Jews to mean a literal earthly kingdom. Rather, they were given to teach realities about their glorious prospect of heaven.

Calvin States:

"The point of controversy between us and these persons, is this: they maintain that the possession of the land of Canaan was accounted by the Israelites their supreme and ultimate blessedness, but that to us, since the revelation of Christ, it is a figure of the heavenly inheritance. We, on the contrary, contend, that in the earthly possession which they enjoyed, they contemplated, as in a mirror, them, in heaven."

Since Covenant Theology sees one program of salvation for a single people of God throughout all of the ages, Israel and the church do not have

distinct programs in God's economy or working. They share in a continuous program and the promises directed to the old Israel have been now made applicable to the church in a new spiritual dimension because of their disobedience. As Allis wrote, "The millennium is to be interpreted spiritually as fulfilled in the Christian Church." This interpretive scheme leaves large areas of the Old Testament without any generally accepted meaning by the amillennarians. This is because when you advance your own mind upon the Scriptures there are countless number of conclusions that will be promoted for the meaning of Scriptural texts. Amillennialism, with its multiplied spiritualized schemes to find hidden meanings behind literal texts in the Old Testament, is a blight upon the understanding of Scripture and causes wreckage to occur in the study of the Bible (2 Tim. 2:15). It comes to the Scripture with subjective reasoning where the meaning of a text is at the mercy of the interpreter instead of interpreting Scripture objectively in its grammatical, ordinary and literal sense.

### *Spiritualized Teaching*

Amillennialism claims that prophecy primarily contains figurative and symbolic language and because of this the great millennial teachings of the Bible take on a spiritual dimension and not an earthly literal fulfillment. Thus, the amillennialist spiritualizes the prophecies of the Old Testament prophets and those promises given to Israel concerning a millennium, which means that they find a so-called "spiritual sense" in these passages instead of a literal sense. Since God has set national Israel aside because of her idolatry and rebellion, those kingdom prophecies and promises found in the Old Testament, have now been transferred to the church or the new Israel and take on a spiritual or figurative meaning. This is why we see the amillennialist spiritualizing the prophets that deal with the kingdom and those events associated with the kingdom.

Amillennialists actually teach that the literal has been superceded by the spiritual and that the kingdom promises now can be legitimately spiritualized and find fulfillment in the present day church. For instance, the promise of Isaiah 11:6-9, which says that ferocious animals will be tame, is interpreted in a spiritual way in which the carnal or animal nature in man will be tamed by supernatural rebirth. Animals residing together in peace is nothing more than poetic language describing peace in the heart of God's people where the King reigns or the perfect peace that will ultimately be experienced in the eternal state following the Second Coming.

Homer Hailey gives us an example of the spiritualization approach in the Isaiah 11:6-9 passage. He sees a spiritual church-related sense in this passage when saying: "The description of peace and harmony from the animal kingdom can no more be taken literally than can the description of a rod preceding out of the mouth of Jesus... The prophets were not looking to a time when animals of the natural world will be living without enmity, but he is describing the peace of those in Jehovah's holy mountain, the kingdom of God, who have undergone moral and spiritual transformation...The prophet is describing the animal carnal nature of man as it is brought under subjection to the spirit and will of Christ."

In this scheme of thinking the kingdom promises and prophecies given to Israel in the Old Testament are fulfilled spiritually in the New Testament church or present-day kingdom that Christ is reigning over. The main point is that the promises and prophecies given to Israel are usurped by the church. All of God's promises to Israel were conditional and have been transferred to the church because the nation did not meet the condition of obedience to God. Of course, the Mosaic covenant was conditional and dependent upon their obedience. But the other covenants such as the Abrahamic, Davidic and Palestinian were not dependent upon obedience. They were unconditional promises given to the nation that God said He would fulfill (Genesis 17:6-8 – "I will").

Except for the original condition given to Abraham to leave his home, there were no conditions given for the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. In fact, when God officially entered into this Abrahamic covenant, He caused a deep sleep to fall upon Abraham and while Abraham was sleeping God walked among the two halves of the animals indicating that He alone was responsible for the fulfillment of this covenant promise (Gen. 15:9-18). The enjoyment of personal blessing during the days of Abraham and Israel was dependent upon their obedience but the actual fulfillment of the covenant promises of an everlasting nation, land, king and kingdom is dependent upon God's unconditional promise. In fact, if the fulfillment of the covenant was dependent upon the obedience of Abraham and Israel then the Redeemer could not have come into the world. The Abrahamic covenant included a universal blessing to the world through the coming of Abraham's seed, Jesus Christ (Genesis 12:3). If Christ's coming were dependent upon the obedience of the Jews, then the coming of Christ would have been jeopardized and never taken place.

Amillennial theology, which insists on the conditional nature of this covenant, does so to its own demise. God has unconditionally promised a future land, king and kingdom to His national people. Abraham's sins (Gen. 16:20), Isaac's sin (Gen. 26:1-4) and Jacob and his son's sins (Gen. 37:18-36; 38:12-16) never resulted in God breaking His covenant with His national people. When they were in Egypt God made it clear to Moses that the Abrahamic Covenant was still in effect (Ex. 2:24; 6:2-8). In fact, Moses promised that even though Israel would become idolatrous and evil and be scattered among the nations of the world, that God would not forget His covenant with His ancient people (Dt. 4:25-31). David regarded the Abrahamic Covenant to be in effect with Israel during his own day (1 Chronicles 16:15-18). And even after Israel's history of rebellion and idolatry the Holy Spirit indicated that God would still deliver them from their enemies as promised in the Abrahamic Covenant (Luke 1:67-75). Even after Israel committed the national sin of rejecting the actual Messiah, Peter still stood up on Pentecost and addressed the Jewish national people in the present tense ("are the sons") and children of the Abrahamic covenant (Acts 3:12-15; 25-26).

The fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant is dependent upon God's faithfulness to national Israel and not Israel's faithfulness to Him. Furthermore, to claim that God has given up on national Israel because the nation fell into rebellion and that God has now transformed their physical promises into some kind of spiritual promises for a new Israel today (the N. T. church) is unscriptural in every way. It categorically denies what the Bible says about the nature of this unconditional covenant and denies the obvious literal meaning of scriptural texts. No person has the authority to go into the Old Testament and explain away the national promises given to Israel and those prophecies that point to the future kingdom. There is no reason to spiritualize the Old Testament promises and prophecies about a literal millennium since the promises of a future millennium given to national Israel are still in the future and will yet be fulfilled. God has not forgotten His national people and the promises given to them about a future literal millennium. The Old Testament covenant program of God requires that Israel will remain a national people forever so God can fulfill His everlasting covenants with them.

Isaiah 49:15-16 says:

“Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me.”

In fact, outside the Mosaic Covenant, a study of Israel's remaining covenants will reveal that they are all unconditional. The Abrahamic covenant is declared to be eternal (1 Chronicles 16:7; Ps. 105:10). The Palestinian Covenant is also declared to be everlasting (Ezek. 16:60). The Davidic Covenant is described in the same terms (2 Samuel 7:13, 16, 19; 1 Chron. 17:12; 22:10; Isa. 53:3; Ezek. 37:25). The New Covenant with Israel is also eternal (Isa. 61:18; Jer. 32:40; 50:5; Heb. 13:20). These promises given to national Israel in the Old Testament will not be abrogated or annulled by God and this makes amillennialism, with its spiritualization of Israel's promises, stand on sinking sand.

Many amillennialists interpret the Old Testament prophecies, which deal with the kingdom covenanted to Israel, as being fulfilled literally in Israel's past history and their entrance into the land of Canaan (historically fulfillment). This gives them the flexibility and leeway of not having to spiritualize every detail connected with Israel's kingdom promises such as the dimensions of the land. Others simply explain these kingdom covenants and subsequent prophecies as dealing with the eternal state, which occurs after the Second Coming, when the new Israel or present day church will come into a full blessing (futuristic fulfillment). They see many of these kingdom promises having a fulfillment in the eternal state. Others see them as a present fulfillment in heaven where the saints are presently experiencing the peaceful blessing of the King's rule over their disembodied spirits (heavenly millennium concept).

When the interpreter is left to spiritualize and assign a figurative meaning to the literal covenants and prophecies there is going to be no general consensus in regards to their exact meaning. But all of these interpretive conclusions by the amillennialist do not take away from what most amillennialists teach in regards to a present day spiritual (figurative) fulfillment and application of the kingdom covenants and prophecies in the church today. Another main thesis of amillennial theology teaches that these covenant promises, by spiritualized typology, can also be applied to the church today as they take on a new spiritual dimension or meaning

where the kingdom becomes God's new covenant people that the King is presently ruling over.

Although amillenarians see these promises and prophecies as having been canceled out in history or fulfilled in heaven or the eternal state, they generally conclude that these same covenant promises and prophecies to Israel about a land, nationality and throne are being presently fulfilled in a spiritual way among believers in the church. Jesus Christ is reigning on David's throne today as He reigns as King over the church. The grievous error of amillennial theology supports the thesis that the covenant promises about a literal kingdom promised to the old Israel (church) are now fulfilled in a spiritual kingdom that God is ruling over today which is the new spiritual Israel (church) that He indwells. As a result, those key passages such as Romans chapter eleven which deal with the national restoration of Israel and Revelation chapter 20 that deals with a literal millennium are spiritualized or given a non-literal application to the new Israel - God's present day church which has inherited the promises of old Israel.

Amillennialism denies the distinction between the nation of Israel in the Old Testament and the church. This system of interpretation believes that the church existed in the Old Testament as Israel and the church today is simply the continuing covenanted community of old that inherits the promises of the old Israel (church) in a spiritual way where Christ is now ruling over His church in a spiritual kingdom called the millennium. In other words, the church existed throughout all history as people who have had a covenant relationship with God. But the new Israel (new community or church) has inherited the old Israel (old community) covenant promises not literally but in a spiritual sense where Christ rules in their hearts by faith. In summary, the Old Testament prophecies and prophets are allegorized by the amillennialist as teaching typology about the New Testament church since the New Testament itself verifies how the Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled in the present day church. Since the New Testament interprets the Old Testament symbolically the exegete of Scripture should interpret the Old Testament texts symbolically as well. It would appear that the amillenarian gives himself permission to put a symbolic meaning back into the Old Testament since he concludes that the New Testament calls for a symbolic and spiritual understanding of the Old Testament.

The amillennial theologian, Louis Berkhof, states that the New Testament "does contain abundant indications of the spiritual fulfillment of the



promises given to Israel.” Berkhof suggests how the New Testament confers that the church today is the spiritual seed of Abraham and gives the impression that the church is a spiritual extension of Abraham who now receives the promises given to Abraham in a spiritual or figurative sense. Proof is given that the New Testament takes on a spiritual or figurative fulfillment of the entire Old Testament covenants and the Old Testament people of God (Israel) since Jesus spoke about the kingdom that is “within you” (Luke 17:21) and how the church today is called the “Israel of God.”

### *The Kingdom is Within You*

Of course, these words of Jesus in Luke 17:21 are more accurately translated in the Greek language “The kingdom is in the midst of you.” Jesus was there as the King offering a literal kingdom to the people during His earthly ministry. The translation “within you” is often misunderstood. The Pharisees were rejecting Him as the Messiah and were not believers. They were distinct from the disciples Jesus addressed beginning in verse 22. It would not make sense for Jesus to have told the Pharisees that the kingdom of God was within them as if it were some sort of spiritual kingdom. It is better to translate the phrase “within you” as “in your midst.” Some feel that the force of the expression is “within your possession or within your reach.” Jesus’ point was that He was standing right in their midst as the King. All they needed to do was acknowledge that He was the true Messiah and Savior who could bring in the kingdom and then the kingdom would arrive on planet earth.

It is believed by amillenarians that the New Testament gives a theological basis for changing the original meaning of the Old Testament. The amillennialist believes that New Testament theology gives him the liberty to take Old Testament passages and apply them “spiritually” or figuratively to the church. Thus, amillennial theology assumes that the church replaces Israel based upon New Testament theological grounds. They look at many statements and places in the New Testament, which mention about events and episodes of the Old Testament, and claim that these appearances of the Old in the New Testament substantially verify that the Old Testament era was spiritually fulfilled in New Testament teaching. Thus, they base their spiritualization procedure on the ground that the New Testament fulfills the Old Testament (Matt. 1:22; 2:15, 23; 4:14; 13:35; 26:56; 27:35; Mark 14:49; 15:28; Luke 21:22; 24:44; John 12:38; 13:18; 15:25; 17:12; 18:9, 32; 19:24, 36; Acts 1:16; James 2:23). Amillennialists come up with a

“fulfillment formula” to teach that the entire covenant program of God with Israel has been replaced, since there are many Biblical examples concerning Christ fulfilling Old Testament prophecy and Joel’s account of fulfillment on the Day of Pentecost. All these fulfillment prophecies verify and give ample proof that the New Testament actually fulfills the Old Testament in a spiritual way.

### *The Difference Between Illustration and Spiritual Replacement*

On the surface this sounds convincing but when one stops to contemplate what the amillennialist is saying he finds some serious flaws in his fulfillment formula. In the first place, not every occurrence, where we find the New Testament speaking about the Old Testament, should lead us to the conclusion that the entire New Testament is fulfilling the Old Testament. The mentioning of some fulfillment passages does not speak for the rest of those references where the Old Testament is mentioned in the New Testament. Many times Paul simply uses analogies and draws upon pictures from the Old Testament to teach how the church is a “holy temple” (Eph. 2:21) and a “holy priesthood” offering up spiritual sacrifices (1 Peter 2:5). Using these examples in no way indicates that the New Testament is spiritually replacing all the literal kingdom prophecies given in the Old Testament.

When the church is likened to a temple, Paul is not insisting that the church becomes the fulfillment of Ezekiel’s prophecy about the glorious temple during the kingdom. When the Bible speaks about the believer being “translated into the kingdom of His dear Son” (Col. 1:13) it is not suggesting that the church replaces the kingdom prophecies of the Old Testament prophets. It is a mere assumption to think that whenever a New Testament writer uses an analogy of the Old Testament, or some other kind of application to the Old testament (1 Cor. 10:1-15), that he is indicating an entire spiritual fulfillment or spiritual replacement of the Old Testament prophetic picture of Israel, the land and the kingdom.

The mere presence of certain typological fulfillments of the Old Testament in the New Testament and various analogies of the Old in the New does not automatically necessitate the argument for the spiritual replacement of all the literal Old Testament prophecies given to Israel about the kingdom. We must guard ourselves from jumping to invalid conclusions just because we see various Old Testament fulfillment in the New Testament and

various Old Testament analogies being compared to the church. We must be careful about reading too much into an analogy. There is no warrant for placing Paul and the New Testament writers into some kind of rigid mold or practice and claim that they were writing about the New Testament as an entire spiritual replacement for the Old Testament. To come to these conclusions when viewing how the writers of New Testament revelation used Old Testament passages and analogies, and to conclude that they were overriding all the literal kingdom promises and prophecies given to Israel, becomes an incredible stretch of the imagination.

It is one thing to see certain Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in the New Testament and various analogies and applications drawn from the Old Testament. However, it's quite another thing to argue for a total different meaning and replacement for the kingdom prophecies that were given by the prophets and those covenant promises given to Israel. Application of the New Testament to the Old Testament is one thing – entire replacement is another matter. We might also add that just because some Old Testament type is unveiled in the New Testament does not give any theologian the right to interpret the entire Old Testament typologically and spiritually (figuratively) so that the entire New Testament fulfills and replaces the Old Testament. Old Testament prophecies about the kingdom will be fulfilled literally even as the prophecies about Christ were seen to be fulfilled literally. Why should one see the New Testament literal fulfillment, concerning the prophecies of Christ, and then turn around and argue for a spiritual fulfillment of the other Old Testament prophecies concerning the kingdom? This is being unfair and biased in every way. Prophecy demands a literal fulfillment.

Amillennialism attempts to explain how the epistle of Hebrews and Christ's finished work fulfills the typology of the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament. From this point they seek to apply this same spiritualized typology and teaching tool to show how the New Testament church of today fulfills what they call was the Old Testament church with its related covenant program. In other words, amillennialism presses typology too far by forcing Israel to be a type of what they call the new Israel or church of the New Testament. Their outlandish claim is that the New Testament church of today fulfills, by way of spiritual typology and teaching, the promises given to old Israel. The church today is merely an extension of the Israel or church within the Old Testament, who inherits the past land and kingdom promises in a spiritual kingdom. The regathering of Israel and

Canaan become types of heaven and the eternal state. The kingdom promises become spiritualized into a present day kingdom composed of the saints, which Christ is presently reigning over. Once again, the double hermeneutic of amillennialism cannot go unnoticed. Amillennialism argues for a literal fulfillment of Christ upon the cross to fulfill the typology of the Old Testament sacrifices but then turns around and argues for a spiritual fulfillment for all the covenant promises given to Israel.

Within the writings of amillennarians we see a consistent dual system of interpretation where the writers take certain prophecies of the Bible literally and give them a literal fulfillment but at the same time they spiritualize or assign a figurative meaning to the future promises and prophecies given to Israel. Since the Old Testament prophecies, in regards to the birth of nations (Daniel 7:1-7) and Christ's own birth (Isa. 7:14; 8:6; Micah 5:2) have been fulfilled literally, there is absolutely no reason to believe that the prophecies that surround Israel's future kingdom blessing will not be fulfilled literally. Only theological bias would lead a person to believe otherwise.

The interpreter must remember that the New Testament does not "transcendentalize" (go above and beyond) the normal literal understanding of the Old Testament prophecies and the land promises given to national Israel. Typology cannot be applied to eschatology or the doctrine of future things in the sense that it overrides the initial literal promises given to Israel about a literal kingdom on earth. The lifting of physical promises given to Israel out of their intended contexts and meanings and changing them into spiritual promises (spiritualization) directed toward the church today creates endless confusion and carelessness with the Word of God. Amillennialists use an artificial system of typology to come to their conclusions about the spiritualization of Old Testament covenants as they try to read back the entire New Testament into the Old.

Ryrie has well stated:

"Of course, there is everything right about letting the New Testament guide us in our understating of the Old Testament, but there is everything wrong about imposing the New Testament on the Old."

## *Abraham's Seed*

For instance, Romans 4:13 does not indicate that the church replaces Old Testament Israel and her covenant promises. The promise is never given that Abraham's future spiritual decedents (spiritual or saved seed) would inherit the promise of some new spiritualized form of the kingdom. Rather, it talks about the spiritual seed of Abraham becoming heirs of their spiritual Father Abraham through the wonderful promise of salvation found in the Abrahamic Covenant. The promise that was given to all the spiritual descendants of Abraham, who are those that believe through faith as Abraham did (Gen. 15:6; Gal. 3:26), refers to the promise of salvation through the promised sacrificial seed of the Messiah (Genesis 12:3; 15:5; Heb. 2:16). It does not refer to the church inheriting the promise of some kind of spiritualized kingdom that is now manifested in the present day church. When the Bible says that believers in the church are "Abraham's seed" (spiritual seed - Galatians 3:26) it is not saying that the church replaces Israel and becomes the new spiritual Israel before God. Rather, it is saying that the New Testament church inherits the blessings of salvation through the promise given to Abraham. It is not saying that the church today inherits the land promises given to Abraham in some spiritual dimension or in some kind of present spiritual church kingdom.

We are spiritual heirs of Abraham through faith in the promised seed but the church does not become heirs of the land promises of the covenant through inheriting a spiritual kingdom in the present order. Paul's argument is not that the church inherits some kind of spiritualized Abrahamic Covenant promise about a figurative rule of Christ over a kingdom of people today. His argument is that those who believe and become part of the church today receive the spiritual promise of justification by faith (Gal. 3:6-9). We are heirs of the spiritual blessing of salvation promised to come through Abraham (Gen. 12:3) but not heirs of the physical and earthly promises of the covenant.

Roy B. Zuck has said:

"The fact that our salvation is by faith, just as was Abraham's, and that we therefore are related spiritually to him, in no way dissipates the promises made to Abraham about his physical descendants possessing the Promised Land as an eternal possession."

Avowed amillennialists push the notion that the only people that are considered Abraham's seed are those who are spiritually tied or linked to Abraham. They become the new spiritual Israel or church of the New Testament. But the facts cannot be denied. In the Scriptures, the spiritual seed of Abraham is never called the church in order to give the indication that the church has somehow replaced Israel's earthly kingdom covenants. It is suggested by some amillennarians that God never made any promises to any physical seed of Abraham but only to a continuing covenanted community of spiritual or saved seed. This means that the only seed of Abraham, as God sees it, is the spiritual seed of Abraham. But this defies the clear teaching of a physical seed and Abraham's understanding of physical descendents of people (Gen. 12:2; 15:5; 17:19; 28:13-14). Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all understood the term "seed" as having reference to their physical lineage.

We know that the physical Jews or Israel as a nation is addressed again and again after the formation of the church on Pentecost (Acts 3:12; 4:8, 10; 5:21, 31, 35; 21:28). Paul prayed that his brethren in the flesh would be saved (Romans 10:1). The term "Jews" continues to be used in the New Testament as a separate class of people, who are Abraham's physical seed, even after the beginning of the church (1 Cor. 10:32). There is absolutely no justifiable or defensible reason to conclude that the seed of Abraham has no connection with a physical seed of people who can claim to be inheritors of the Old Testament Covenant promises. The amillennialist must try to get rid of the physical seed of Abraham in order to escape the possibility of a future covenant program with a Jewish nation. The amillennialist wants to replace the earthly land promises of national Israel with a new spiritual Israel or church that has inherited the kingdom promises of the Jews in a spiritual way.

Some amillennialists, like Albertus Pieters, go to great lengths to try and convince people that there are no true Jews today, who are pure Jews physically tied to Abraham. They claim that through Gentile mixture there is no true Jewish ancestry. But this is an absurdity and goes to show what some extreme amillennialists will do to try and support the notion that only one spiritual seed of Abraham exists today, which is the new Israel of God or the present day church. To try and change the earthly promises of a kingdom, into some kind of spiritual kingdom that Christ rules over today in the new Israel (the church or spiritual seed of Abraham), is a clear case of eisegesis or reading into the text something that is not there. The attempt

of the amillenarian to try and create a universal or common people of God in both testaments and simplify their theology has actually caused great conflict and confusion in the understanding of Scripture.

### *The true Israel of God*

When Paul addresses the true “Israel of God” within the Galatian church (Gal. 6:16) he is not referring to how the church of the New Testament has replaced the old Israel. The evidence does not support such a conclusion. First, the context indicates that two groups are in view – the “circumcision” (Jews) and the “uncircumcision” (Gentiles) – Gal. 6:15. Second, all the 65 other occurrences of the term “Israel” in the New Testament refer to Jews. It would thus be strange for Paul to use “Israel” here to mean Gentile Christians. Third, Paul elsewhere referred to two kinds of Israelites - believing Jews and unbelieving Jews (see Rom. 9:6). Paul is distinguishing between the physical status of Jews and their spiritual status. There is a remnant of saved Jews within the church today (Romans 11:5 – “there is a remnant according to the election of grace”). Those Jews within national Israel who receive Christ as their Savior are the true Israelites according to Paul’s teaching. They are the spiritual (saved) descendants of Abraham and become part of the New Testament church along with the Gentiles. Together both saved Gentiles and saved Jews become spiritual decedents of Abraham through the promise of the sacrificial seed of the Messiah. The church today is a spiritual recipient of the promise of salvation through Abraham but not a spiritual replacement of the Jewish nation.

The church does not replace the physical and literal land promises of a coming kingdom in some kind of present spiritual kingdom. These kingdom promises will yet be fulfilled to a Jewish nation who believes on the Messiah when He returns (Zech. 12:10-13:1). Some may think that Paul was anti-Semitic because of his statements concerning those in the nation who taught salvation by circumcision (Gal. 6:12-13). But Paul proves them to be wrong by demonstrating in this closing benediction (Gal. 6:16) his deep love and profound concern for the true Israel, that is, Jews who had come to Christ through personal faith in the Messiah. Amillenarians have taken this to mean the church. However, “the Israel of God” refers to those Jews by natural birth who accept the Lord Jesus as their personal Messiah and enter the church. There was neither peace nor mercy for those Jews who walked under the law and followed the lost Judaizers. This greeting is then addressing both groups of people in the Galatian church – saved

Gentiles (“them”) and the saved Jews (“the Israel of God”). Israel of God is in contrast to Israel after the flesh.

### *The True Jews*

In Romans 2:25-29 Paul was not assuming that Gentiles become spiritual Jews or the new spiritual Israel of God that has replaced old Israel and her covenants. Rather, Paul is distinguishing between two categories of ethnic Israel. Paul is drawing a distinction between the Jewish believer and the Jewish unbeliever. He shows that a Jew who is not a believer, whose Jewishness is merely outward, is not exempt from divine judgment. A true Jew in God’s sight is a Jew who has undergone another type of circumcision, the inward circumcision of the heart, which is the Old Testament way of expressing regeneration. A true Jew is a completed Jew who has both types of circumcision – outward and inward. It is these born again Jews who become part of the church today, which is also composed of Gentiles (1 Cor. 12:13). And our Jewish and Gentile oneness in the body of Christ today does not erase a future for national Israel.

It’s interesting that the Bible never calls Gentiles Jews. It’s equally interesting that the Bible never calls Gentiles Israel. This would leave us with the inescapable conclusion that the Gentiles, who are part of the church, should never be identified as spiritual Israel. Furthermore, the merging together of Jewish believers and Gentile believers is not an indicator that God has abandoned Israel as a national people and replaced them with a new spiritual Israel. The church is simply a separate plan and program that God is working with during the course of history. Racial distinctions, national distinctions and covenant promises still remain in tact even though God is working with the church.

### *The Royal Priesthood*

Amillennialism also tries to extrapolate their replacement theology out of such a text as 1 Peter. 2:9, where the church is explained as God’s royal priesthood and nation. It’s assumed that this is conclusive evidence to show how the church of today is merely an extension of the one people of God and has become the new Israel of God. This is because God spoke of Israel as a priestly nation in the same way that He spoke about the priesthood of the church (Ex. 19:5, 6a). However, we must remember that similarity does not necessarily give us the warrant to interpret the church as



possessing the same identity as national Israel. Because of unbelief Israel failed to realize the covenant promises of God, and the nation forfeited its place as God's own people. During the present age, the church occupies the favored place that national Israel lost through disobedience. The church today is a special chosen generation of people, chosen by God before the foundation of the world to belong to Christ (Eph. 1:4). But instead of being an earthly race like Israel, with common ancestry and distinct physical characteristics, Christians are a heavenly people with a divine parentage and spiritual resemblances (Eph. 1:3-4; Col. 3:1-3). The church is also a royal priesthood. As holy priests, they enter the sanctuary of heaven by faith to worship. As royal priests, they go out into the world to witness. Believers are a holy nation. It was God's intention that Israel should be a nation distinguished by holiness. But the Israelites stooped to the sinful practices of their Gentile neighbors. So Israel has been set aside temporarily (Matt. 21:43) and the church is now God's holy nation.

### *The Identity of Israel and the Church*

As stated above, amillenarians claim that the church of today is simply a continuation of the concept of Israel, or the church that began in the Old Testament. The church of today is simply more refined and developed than Old Testament Israel. However, the church has replaced Israel in God's continuous unfolding drama of the one people of God and now becomes the "new Israel" with new spiritual promises that have replaced all the literal promises and prophecies given to the old Israel. Thus, the identity of the term Israel in New Testament teaching has reference to the new Israel – the church.

This spiritualized approach of identifying Israel with the church and a present spiritual kingdom that Jesus rules over is false for several reasons. First, the church is not found in the Old Testament (Eph. 3:1-9). Ephesians 3:5 states this about the church: "Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit." The church was a "mystery" in the sense that it was not God's operating purpose in the Old Testament. The church is the new purpose of God! It is a new purpose for a new age. Amillenarians will say that the church was known in the Old Testament but not to the same extent as it is now. They claim that today we have a fuller revelation, but we are still the Israel of God, that is, a continuation of God's people. But the adverb ("as") in Ephesians 3:5 is not used by Paul to try and compare the

lesser knowledge that OT saints had about the church with the greater knowledge that NT saints have about the church. That is an erroneous understanding of Paul's use of this adverb. Paul uses the adverb to describe a first time revelation of the church truth in the NT in comparison to the OT. It is not a question of the degree of revelation but of the fact of it. It is a completely new revelation and new purpose of God unknown to the OT prophets (see 1 Peter 1:10-12). Therefore, the church could not exist in the Old Testament.

All attempts to identify the "mystery" about the church and the "mystery of the kingdom" (Matt. 13) with the new Israel or kingdom church that God is ruling over today is exegetical fallacy of the worst sort. Second, since the church is actually Christ's body, welded together by the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13), the church's birthday could only occur on Pentecost, when this baptism initially took place (see Acts 1:5; 2:41,47). Peter later talks about this as "the beginning" of the church (Acts 11:14). Israel existed for centuries prior to this baptism. Therefore, since no Spirit baptism took place in the OT, the church could not have been formed or existed before Pentecost. Spirit baptism is something that is only promised on NT ground. As a result, there could be no church in the Old Testament. Third, within the confines of the same verse the church is said to be clearly distinct from the national people of Israel (1 Cor. 10:32; see also Rom. 9:4-5). Natural Israel and the church are clearly distinguished. Paul's distinction would be meaningless if Israel were the same as the church.

In addition, within the New Testament, natural Israel and Gentiles are contrasted after the church was already established (Acts 3:12; 4:8, 10; 5:21, 31, 35; 21:19). This would also indicate that Israel is a distinct entity from the Gentile people, even as Israel is a distinct entity from the church. It is still convincing to realize that the Bible never calls Gentiles Israel or Israel the church. They are always seen as separate entities. The term Israel is never used to replace another national or spiritual entity. The burden of proof rests on amillennarians to prove that Gentiles become Israel or Israel becomes the church.

Fourth, Paul still points out the national distinctions of the believing remnant of Israelites who were in the church (Gal. 6:16). Paul was addressing both groups of people in the Galatian church – saved Gentiles ("them") and saved Jews (Israel of God"). This tells us that the church and Israel are not the same – they do not possess the same identity. Fifth, Jesus prophesied

about the future church that He was going to build indicating that this was a new program, new work and new people that had not previously existed (Matthew 16:18). This indicates that at the moment He spoke these words, the church was not yet existent.

Sixth, the relationship that the Jews have with the Gentiles in the church is called a “new man” (Eph. 2:15). This indicates the church is something totally new to God’s working and program. Seventh, the church could not exist until after Christ ascended and He became its head (Eph. 1:20-23). These Scriptures in Ephesians also suggests that the church is built upon the foundation of Christ’s resurrection, meaning that the church could not exist in the Old Testament since Christ had not risen (Eph. 1:19-23). In other words, these events needed to occur before the church could be formed. Since they did not occur in the Old Testament no church could have existed.

Eighth, the church is said to be built upon the foundational teachings of the New Testament apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20). This means that the church could not exist until the New Testament prophets began to lay the foundational teachings of the church. Ninth, the church could not exist in the Old Testament for the simple reason that only after the ascension of Christ was the church gifted (Eph. 4:7-11). Tenth, in the book of Acts both Israel and church exist simultaneously. The term Israel is used twenty times and the term church nineteen times. Yet the two groups are always kept distinct. In fact, there is no historical evidence that the term Israel was identified with the church until A.D. 160. History, theology, grammatical, literal and exegetical interpretation, and common sense, all argue against interpreting the church and Israel as the same New Testament identity.

God has not given up on Israel as a nation and in no way has the church replaced Israel’s future program (Romans 11:1-2; 25-27). This is a very clear argument given by Paul. Only a covenant theologian with an ax to grind would interpret these verses in Romans as referring to the new Israel or church of the New Testament who has replaced the covenant promises of Israel with a spiritual kingdom. The language and understanding is very clear. God has a plan for national Israel in the future.

Eadie gives a convincing argument to prove that the church is not a new Israel when saying: “The apostle is not in the habit of calling the church made up of Jews and Gentiles - Israel. Israel is used eleven times in

Romans, but in all the instances it refers to Israel proper; and so does it and Israelites in every other portion of the New Testament. In the Apocalypse, the 144,000 sealed of Israel stand in contrast to “the great multitude which no man could number,” taken out of the Gentile or non-Israelitish races .... The apostle never in any place so uses the name, never gives the grand old theocratic name to any but the chosen people.”

Some modern amillennialists are abandoning the Augustinian notion that the church spiritually usurps all of Israel’s promises. Their claim is that the promises to national Israel have been totally nullified by God since Israel was disobedient. This gets them off the hook when it comes to inheriting the curses under the law system, which nobody wants to face or participate with. It also keeps them from trying to explain away the countless passages dealing with the earthly kingdom and the exact measurements of the land (Gen. 18:15-21) with some kind of fanciful spiritualized interpretation. It’s much easier to pass over these passages entirely and consider them to be completely abolished according to God’s plans.

Some contemporary amillennialists also teach that there are physical Jews, who are still called Israel, and the promises of restoration concerning Israel can be interpreted as a revival in the ranks of those saved Jews, within the true Israel or church. But they go on to say that only those elect Jews who are saved, along with the elect Gentiles, are together called the new spiritual Israel. The true Israel, down through the ages of history, has always been those people who have been regenerated and possessed a right relationship with God through grace. Amillennialists then claim that this is still true of the entire church today, both Jews and Gentiles. All those who are saved and have a right relationship with God are considered to be the new spiritual Israel. In any case, contemporary amillennialism still mixes Israel with the church. In their interpretive scheme there needs to be a blending or merging together of Israel and the church at some point so that a future eschatology for Israel can be cancelled out and a figurative interpretation embraced.

### Amillennialism and the New Covenant

The amillennialist is quick to point out that the church is linked with the New Covenant blessing. Since Israel was given New Covenant promises this becomes conclusive evidence that the church replaces Old Testament Israel and inherits her New Covenant blessings in the present day as the

new Israel of God. When observing the New Covenant passages, which seem to be directed to the church, it is assumed that the church is fulfilling all the New Covenant promises given to Israel and the church is understood to be the new Israel. In other words, the church is fulfilling the New Covenant blessings given to Israel and where the New Covenant prophecies relate to land promises they are simply replaced by present day spiritual blessings given to the church.

This seems like a convincing argument but once again it has its share of holes. The Scriptures do not teach that the New Covenant blessings are fulfilled in the church and that the church replaces Israel because she receives her New Covenant blessings. There are some obvious reasons why this cannot be so. First, the New Covenant is promised to national ethnic Israel in the Old Testament (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:24-30). This is a crucial point that cannot be overturned. And since there is no hint that the church would replace Israel by receiving her New Covenant promises (1 Cor. 10:32), it stands to reason that the actual fulfillment of these New Covenant promises will take place in connection with national Israel. Second, the gospel writers of Matthew, Mark and Luke all put the “cup” of the New Covenant in an eschatological context relating to the coming kingdom – not to the church (Luke, 22:18; Matt. 26:29; Mark 14:25). The prophecies surrounding the New Covenant blessings have to do with the kingdom setting and Israel’s new blessings throughout the kingdom reign. They have nothing to do with the church and her future blessings. They will be “fulfilled in the kingdom of God” (Luke 22:16). Third, Paul’s use of the New Covenant has similar eschatological overtones as he relates this covenant to God’s faithfulness to Israel and her future blessings (Rom. 11:26-27; Heb. 10:16-17).

Fourth, in the New Covenant there is given the promises of land, fruitful production and freedom from oppression (Ezek.36:28-30). These promises could never logically be fulfilled in the present day church since the church is not dwelling in the earthly place called Palestine. When Christ returns Israel will receive the blessings that God promised to Abraham and his descendents in the Old Testament. Fifth, just because a covenant is “cut” and ratified does not mean that it is fully operational (Gen. 15). The covenant God “cut” with Abraham has not yet been fulfilled, even though God has already made the covenant. It has a future fulfillment attached to it even though the covenant has been ratified.

In a similar way, the New Covenant has evidently been ratified or formally sanctioned and confirmed through the shed blood of Christ (1 Cor. 11:25-26), which means that all the blessings of the New Covenant can take place because of the shed blood of Christ. There could be no New Covenant blessings if it were not for His shed blood and His provision of salvation. In fact, every provision in the New Covenant is based upon the blood of Christ. The covenant is founded and based upon the blood of Christ (Heb. 10:9). However, this does not mean that the New Covenant blessings are actually fulfilled in and through the church. The New Covenant does not find fulfillment in the church but the church has received some of the benefits and blessings connected with the New Covenant even before the true recipients (Israel) receive her full promises of this covenant. The New Covenant does not have any preliminary, partial or complete fulfillment in the context of the church but the church does receive preliminary and partial blessings that were promised in the outworking of the New Covenant. In other words, the New Covenant is given to Israel and will be fulfilled in a future time but some of the spiritual blessings spill over into present day church living. There is a vast difference between fulfillment and receiving partial benefits and blessings found in the New Covenant.

So what is the relationship that the church has to the New Covenant? It can be concluded that the New Covenant has no direct fulfillment in church life for today since it was promised to a future nation of Jews and Israel in general when the Messiah returns to establish His literal earthly kingdom (Ezek. 36:24-30). However, it is equally true that the church does enter into some of the spiritual blessings connected with the New Covenant, such as the complete forgiveness of sins (Matt. 26:26-28; 1 Cor. 11:23-25; 1 John 3:5), total acceptance before God (Heb. 10:4-17), the internalization of God's Law in the heart (2 Cor. 3:3) and the dynamic ministry of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 3:6, 17-18; Gal. 5:18, 22-25; Eph. 2:20).

In other words, the church is not a direct recipient of the New Covenant but in the outworking of God's plan He has chosen to give some New Covenant blessings to the church, which will be a prelude to the actual fulfillment of His covenant with Israel. God's people today (the church) are "ministers" of the New Covenant (2 Cor. 3:6) but not fulfillers of the New Covenant. This means that His present day people have a ministry based upon the Spirit's work even though the church is not fulfilling the New Covenant. The church can also be blessed with the intercessory work of the Mediator of the New Covenant (Jesus Christ) without becoming a direct

recipient and replacement people for the New Covenant blessings (Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24). The actual fulfillment of the covenant is future and will occur in connection with the return of Messiah and Israel's regeneration and entrance into kingdom blessing.

It might be summed up in this way. The new Covenant was ratified at the Cross. The blood of Jesus Christ brought the provisions of the New Covenant into effect. The actual fulfillment of the promises of this Covenant are yet future and deal with God's national people of Israel who turn to Christ at His revelation to earth (Zech. 12:10-13:1; Ezek. 36:24-30). However, the church in God's present dispensational economy is experiencing some of the blessings that will be given to Israel in the future day. The present blessings provided under the New Covenant are a foretaste of much greater things that will come upon Israel in the future. In the present time, God has chosen to give the church some of these same blessings and privileges without designating them as the people under the New Covenant or those who receive the actual fulfillment of the New Covenant.

This means that the church is related to the blessing of the New Covenant without becoming the direct recipients or the replacement for the original designees of the New Covenant. The New Covenant will be fulfilled eschatologically with the direct recipients of the covenant, the nation of Israel, but the church today presently receives of the soteriological and pneumatological blessings related to the New Covenant without replacing Israel in the plan of God. By God's grace the church has become a participant in some of the blessings related to this covenant following its ratification upon the cross.

## Amillennialism and Revelation Chapter 20

It's of utmost importance to the amillennialist that Revelation chapter 19, which deals with the Second Coming of Christ, does not follow a chronological pattern. If it does then the 1,000 years would have to be interpreted as a future time period of literal fulfillment. To get around this, the amillennialist claims that Revelation chapter 20 merely gives additional information on the period of time between the first and second advents of Christ, so that they can attach a figurative meaning to the binding of Satan, the 1,000 years and the first resurrection. As mentioned already, this allegorical approach to Scripture believes and teaches that the binding of

Satan in Revelation chapter twenty refers to the binding of Satan today. This will be discussed next as we investigate the amillennial interpretation of Revelation chapter 20.

### A. The Binding of Satan

Revelation 20:1-2 says:

“And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years.”

The amillennialist assumes that if the chain mentioned in this verse is not literal then the binding of Satan during a specific future time period of 1,000 years cannot be literal. Therefore, the amillennialist makes the outlandish claim that this reference teaches how Jesus, through His death upon the cross, has bound Satan in our present day and time and that Jesus is presently ruling over him with His authority. It's assumed that this binding, during the present millennium of God's rule over His people, conveys the fact that Satan has been rendered incapable of successfully hindering and resisting the forward advance of God's kingdom. But my Bible teaches that Satan is not bound. He is walking about as a lion “seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

To suggest that Satan is bound today is a very unsound and unscholarly interpretation and mishandling of this Bible text. A quick glance at the world, in which we presently live, will tell us very quickly that Satan is not bound in any sense. In fact, the book of Revelation, which is used to teach the binding of Satan concept, actually teaches the exact opposite (see Revelation 12:12). It must be understood that the death of Jesus defeated Satan's power over the realm of death and the saints of God (Colossians 2:14-15) but it did not bind Satan from working in the present or future days upon planet earth. There is a vast difference between the binding of Satan and the defeat of Satan.

Most amillennialists see the problem with the binding of Satan scenario. Because of this they attempt to explain that the binding of Satan only refers to the fact that Satan can no longer hinder people from hearing the Gospel. They claim that Satan is only bound in the sense that he is unable to keep people from getting saved. They then claim that the figurative expression of



the “bottomless pit” or the abyss in Revelation 20:1 simply explains the way Satan is curbed in his present day efforts to keep people in the realm of death and from hearing the Gospel. But my Bible teaches me that Satan still possesses the authority to keep unregenerate people in the realm of death (Hebrews 2:14-15). Satan still holds the lost in the realm of death until they believe on Christ for salvation. It’s only after people believe in Christ that they can be delivered from Satan’s tyranny and authority over their lives. The Bible teaches that Satan energizes unregenerate people in sin (Ephesians 2:1-3) and that Satan blinds the minds of people today from hearing Gospel truth (2 Corinthians 4:3-4).

Satan is not bound from deterring people from hearing the Gospel. Any Gospel witnessing Christian will realize this as he seeks to tell the lost about Christ and salvation. The blindfold and deception of Satan is very real. Satan is pictured as stealing the Gospel seed of the Word of God from the hearts of people (Matthew 13:19). He keeps people deceived and duped in error (1 Timothy 4:1) and sin (1 John 3:8-10). Paul also said that Satan hindered him from coming to Thessalonica so he might preach the Word and the Gospel (1 Thess. 2:18). He reminds us of how Satan’s adversaries are constantly working to hinder the Gospel from going forth (1 Cor. 16:9). Even during the final three and one half years of the tribulation period Satan will be confined to earth, where he will in fury cause great conflict against the cause of Christ (Rev. 12:7-10). Satan is not bound from hindering the Gospel and causing great havoc upon planet earth. This is the fanciful dream of the amillennialist. “If Satan is bound today,” It is often said, “the chain is too long.”

The Bible does not teach that Christ’s defeat on the cross has removed Satan from His place of authority over the lost world of mankind or from working effectively upon the earth. In actuality, the entire world of lost mankind is pictured as sitting in the lap of the devil (1 John 5:19). The binding of Satan occurs after Christ’s literal return to earth as outlined in Revelation 19. The words in Revelation 20:1 (“and I saw”) indicate a progression of thought in these “end time” prophetic events. Satan’s binding is going to take place in the future when Christ returns and strips him of His powerful place of authority over the earth. Jesus as the Victor has the rightful authority to rule planet earth and will overtake Satan when He returns (Hebrews 2:8). In the mean time, Satan is still the god of this age blinding minds from the Gospel and keeping people in sin, darkness and blindness (2 Cor. 4:4). But his 1,000 years of confinement during the

earthly kingdom, along with his demonic hordes (Zech. 13:2), will keep Satan from his soul-damning work and raising havoc in the restored millennial earth. And this confinement will begin when Jesus returns to earth and places Satan in the “abyss” (Rev. 20:1).

To claim that the binding of Satan and the 1,000 years are not literal, based upon the fact that the chains around Satan cannot be literal, is creating a scapegoat mechanism for amillennialism. The Bible teaches that spirit beings can be bound or restricted and the figure of chains represents this literal binding process even though literal chains may not be the instruments used to bind them (2 Peter 2:4). Furthermore, we must remember that the vision and scene that John witnessed was described in the exact manner that it was revealed to him. In this vision Satan was bound with a chain. He is pictured as the red dragon and old serpent in the book of Revelation, which at one point will be bound from operating in the world. So John actually saw a dragon-like serpent bound by chains. Of course, it's obvious that Satan, who is a spirit being, does not need literal or tangible chains to keep him bound. Nor could tangible chains hold any spirit beings in a place of confinement. Although John saw a serpent bound in chains, it's rather obvious that both the serpent and the chains, which he saw, are used as a symbolic reference to describe Satan's confinement during the kingdom era.

At this point, the questions must be asked: How do we decide what is literal and what is not literal in the Bible? Furthermore, how can we distinguish what portions of the prophecies are to be taken literal or figuratively? The answer to these questions is fivefold:

1. Figurative language is present when the statement taken in its normal sense would be impossible (Isa. 55:12; Ps. 57:1; Micah 1:2; Rev. 1:16; 5:6-13; John 1:29; Rev. 11:5; 17:9; 19:15; 20:1).
2. Take the figurative sense if the action is immoral (John 6:53-58).
3. Note if a statement is followed by an explanatory literal statement (Eph. 2:1; 1 Thess. 4:13-16).

4. Sometimes a figure of speech is marked off by a qualifying adjective (John 6:32; 1 Peter 2:4) or a word such as “like” or “as” or “as it were” (Rev. 4:6; 18:12; 15:2; Isa. 53:6; Dan. 12:3; Rev. 21:21).
5. The prophecies of God’s Word all have a literal fulfillment even if the language is symbolic (Dan. 2:31-35; 7:1-7). There is always a literal message of fulfillment behind the figurative. The figurative is a colorful vehicle for presenting a literal truth (Ps. 22:16; Isa. 53:6; 1 Peter 5:8).

It is understandable that Satan and demons do not need the kind of chains that we buy at a local hardware store to restrict them. The language in Revelation 20:1 must therefore be figurative and represent how Satan and demons will be bound or restricted by God in some unknown way during the future kingdom. We must remember that behind every figurative expression is a literal meaning. But these figurative expressions, consisting of a key and chain in Revelation 20:1-2, do not provide any support or logical reason to conclude that the entire scene becomes a figurative explanation of Satan’s binding during a figurative 1,000 years.

One figurative explanation does not provide a reason to abandon the literal interpretation of the prophetic word. One figurative explanation in a text of Scripture does not override a literal explanation of other words in the same text or context. We should always begin with the assumption that words must be taken in their literal and normal sense unless a figure of speech or symbol is clearly indicated. When the exegete abandons the literal meaning he will find himself explaining what he thinks the Bible means instead of allowing the Bible to explain what it actually does mean.

Premillennialism has always recognized the figurative element of interpretation for various prophetic texts in many parts of the Bible. But premillennialism also emphasizes that behind the figurative is a literal explanation of the prophecy. It’s also interesting that the figurative or symbolic will many times appear side by side with the literal language (Isa. 53:4-7; 55:12-13; Rev. 11:3-6; 19:14-16). Such is the case in Revelation chapter 20:1-6. Although the figurative expressions of a key and chain are used to indicate the confinement of Satan, there is no warrant to override the logical and literal meaning of the 1,000 years and the first resurrection by assigning a figurative meaning to them. There is no reason why these expressions should not be taken literally.

When taken in their normal sense 1,000 years always means 1,000 years and resurrection always means resurrection. These are normal statements that would not be impossible from literally taking place in the exact manner that the writer states. Thus, the figurative expressions concerning the key and chain must work in connection with the literal statements of 1,000 years and the first resurrection. Furthermore, since behind the figurative is the literal and since the context deals with events following the Second Coming of Christ, it must be understood that Satan will be bound during the literal 1,000-year reign of Christ upon planet earth. There is an obvious literal understanding behind the confinement of Satan during this expressed time period of 1,000 years.

Another problem with the amillennial teaching that Satan will be bound during an unknown period of time, where Christ is reigning in the hearts of His people (figurative millennium), involves the “little season” that Satan will be loosed following the millennium (Rev. 20:3; 7). This causes serious problems and flaws in their spiritual scheme. If Satan is bound throughout a symbolic millennium and the Second Coming ends this spiritual rule of God in the hearts of His saints on earth, then how can Satan be loosed for a literal period of time following a symbolic period of time? Not all amillennialists are clear on this point. Many are silent about it! It poses problems to them since Satan is bound for what they call an undetermined period of time before the Second Coming. Most amillennial writers, who tackle this problem, will suggest that this loosing and “little season” of Satan is literal and takes place immediately prior to the Second Coming. But this is very inconsistent with what they call a symbolic 1,000-year period of undetermined time before Christ returns.

Since amillennials choose to spiritualize the time factor or duration of the millennium, it causes conflict with their spiritualized interpretation of this passage, when they are forced to not spiritualize the time factor of Satan’s release prior to the Second Coming. Accepting this time factor as a literal reference to time demonstrates that they are “cherry picking” what they want to be literal and what they don’t want to be literal. But this time factor of a “little season” poses no problems to premillennialism because they take all the time elements as literal. Starting from Christ’s return in Revelation 19:11, through the 1,000-year millennial kingdom, all the events are literal – including Satan’s release after a specific time of 1,000 years and his final doom in the Lake of Fire. This is the only chronological and logical progression of thought in these verses.

## B. The One Thousand Years

As we have discussed already, this spiritualized teaching of amillennialism concludes that the church has replaced Israel forever in God's plans. Many claim that God is through with the Jews forever, that He has abandoned the nation of Israel and has now inserted the church as a substitute for Israel. Thus, amillennialism applies what are to be future kingdom blessings for Israel to the present church age where Christ is ruling as King over the church. And in doing so the allegorical interpreters naturally spiritualize the teaching about the millennium or 1,000 years. The millennial kingdom in the book of Revelation is symbolically interpreted as meaning the present day church (new Israel) over which God is reigning (a spiritual kingdom of people) and which is given the promise of ultimate victory over Satan during this time of reign (the binding of Satan).

The number 1,000 is taken to stand for completeness by most amillennialists. Benjamin Warfield popularized this view and pointed out how the number ten relates to perfection. He then explains how the number ten cubed into one thousand results in the 1,000 years as "the idea of absolute perfection." For the amillennialist the number 1,000 refers to perfection instead of literal years. This view of completeness is then applied to both key references of the 1,000 years in Revelation chapter 20, where it represents Christ's perfect victory over Satan (Rev. 20:1-2), and His complete rule over His people either on earth or in heaven (Rev. 20:4-6). However, other amillennialists present different interpretive options for the 1,000 years such as "an exalted symbol of the glory of the redeemed" (Milligan); "only the idea that the Lord's victory is absolute" (Kliefoth); "a poetic picture of what actually happens on one day of the coming of the Lord" (Duesterdieck); "a symbolic number denoting the aeon of transition" (Lange); a symbol of the world perfectly leavened and pervaded by the Divine" (Fausset); "a symbolic picture of the interadvent period ... a poetic way of referring to this present age" (William Cox). In short, there is no united front concerning the exact meaning of the 1,000 years by amillennialists. How can there be agreement when the allegorical/spiritualized interpretation is inserted into prophetic texts that are to be interpreted literally?

It is also stressed within amillennial theology that the number 1,000 must be symbolic and only represent an undetermined amount of time due to the Bible's emphasis on the number 1,000 as not being literal in other

passages of the Bible (Deut. 7:9; Josh. 23:10; Ps. 50:10; 91:7; 90:4; Ecc. 6:6; 2 Peter 3:8). This is an assumption that must be challenged. In the first place, a careful examination of these passages does not deny a literal interpretation of the number 1,000. When God chooses to express a long length of time He can do it within the framework of literalism. One thousand years is a long length of time but it is still 1,000 years (Deut. 7:9; Ecc. 6:6). The soldiers in Joshua's day would chase the enemy out of the land and Joshua said they would chase a thousand men (Josh. 23:10 with Ps. 91:7). The cattle on a thousand hills (Ps. 50:10) are meant to convey the comprehensiveness of God's creative ownership.

Of course, even if God does not intend to convey an exact number in some of these references, it cannot override the literal meaning of the number 1,000 in other passages of Scripture. And in Psalm 90:8 and 2 Peter 3:8 the Bible never says that 1,000 years is not one thousand years as the amillennialist suggests. One thousand years in these verses is conveying a literal one thousand years. From God's eternal nature and vantage point one thousand years is like one day. This is because God is eternal. Man looks at a literal 1,000 years as a long length of time but from God's point of view a millennium is only like one day. The Bible does not spiritualize the number 1,000 and say that one thousand years is one day. In fact, this interpretation would defeat the amillennial argument anyway which intends to convey the 1,000 years in the book of Revelation, not as one day, but as a long undetermined period of time where God is ruling over His people. Of course, the amillennial position is that 1,000 years is always used symbolically and never literally.

The point is this. To try and make the 1,000 years in the context of Revelation chapter 20 symbolic is exegetically futile and is only done to support a theological dogma. It is an agnostic approach to the meaning of the number 1,000. It is an attempt to edit God's mind. The interpretive scissors of amillennialism cuts out the true meaning of the Bible. How can a person with a biblical conscious explain away the literalness of Isaiah 65:20, which says that people during a future reign of Christ upon earth will live well beyond 100 years of age? There is no reason to take this number in any sense other than its normal, grammatical meaning. No hint is given within this passage to take the number figuratively. In the book of Revelation, the vast majority of numbers are meant to be literal as is indicated by their exactness (Rev. 4:4; 7:1; 11:13; 14:1; 20; 9:16; 16:13; 8:13; 12:6; 21:12-14).

It's interesting how the amillennialist will constantly try to ignore the literalness of numbers in the book of Revelation such as 144,000 Jews (Revelation 7:4); 7,000 killed in an earthquake (11:13) or 42 months (13:5). When forced to deal with the numerics of these texts, the amillennialist will take them into his own hands and spiritualize these numbers, so that he can support his amillennial position of the 1,000 years in the final section of the book. The text of Revelation 20 does not force a person to spiritualize the number 1,000. Furthermore, a normal reading of the text would dictate that both resurrections are referring to physical resurrection. Nothing in the context would suggest that John is talking about two different kinds of resurrection (spiritual and physical). It's also worthy to note that John uses an indefinite time notation ("a little season" - Rev. 20:4) when he explains what is going to take place after the 1,000 years or millennium is over. When John wants to talk about an indefinite time period he talks about a "little season."

The point is this. If John wanted to be indefinite about the length of time associated with the millennium or the 1,000 years he certainly knew how to say it. This comparison between exactness (1,000 years) and an indefinite period of time ("little season") tells us that John was definite about the length and time of the millennium. There is a very clear non-symbolic understanding of numbers throughout the book of Revelation. If non-literalness is meant the presentation of a vast incalculable number is made very clear (Rev. 5:11; 7:9). Why would John all of a sudden change the normal and literal understanding of numbers in the book of Revelation when presenting the 1,000-year reign of Christ?

The number 1,000 is repeated six times in this text of the book of Revelation (Rev. 20:1-7). Mentioning a number six specific times would indicate that John was not conveying a symbolic number but presenting a literal understanding of the 1,000 years. The positive testimony of Revelation chapter 20 with its six reference to the reign of Christ on earth for one thousand years is still a stubborn foe of amillennialism, which cannot in any measure successfully be dismissed.

It is often stressed by amillennarians that premillennialism hangs its hat on these few verses to prove about the kingdom. However, this is not true. The fact of the kingdom is a major theme of the entire Word of God. The contribution of Revelation chapter 20 only relates to the length of the kingdom and not to the fact of the kingdom.

## C. The Two Resurrections

### Revelation 20:4-6

“And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.”

I will take some time to evaluate the amillennial interpretation of the two resurrections in Revelation 20:4-5 because the interpretation of the first resurrection is the crux of the amillennial position. They hang their amillennial eschatological hats on the fact that the first resurrection must be spiritual since there is to be only one physical resurrection at the end of time and not two physical resurrections separated by one thousand years. Therefore, it is paramount that the amillennialist refuses to accept two literal resurrections in this passage or else they will be forced to embrace the premillennial position that scripturally advocates an ordered sequence in God’s resurrection program (1 Cor. 15:23-24), which consists of intervals of time between the various resurrections. Premillennialism correctly teaches that there is the resurrection of church age saints prior to the seven-year tribulation period (1 Thess. 4:13-17; Rev. 3:10) and then the resurrection of Old Testament saints and tribulation martyrs at the end of the tribulation period before the 1,000 years (Daniels 12:2; Isaiah 26:19). Finally, there will be a resurrection of the unsaved after 1,000 years of peace upon planet earth (Revelation 20:5; 12).

The natural understanding and flow of this text in Revelation 20:4-5 promotes two physical resurrections. The first resurrection will consist of the martyred dead of the tribulation period, who will be raised before the millennium begins, so that they can reign with Christ. The second resurrection will occur after the millennium and will consist of those unsaved dead who will be raised following the millennium to stand before the Great White Throne. But the amillennialist must spiritualize the first resurrection in order to arrive at only one physical resurrection at the end of



the age. This is done so his Augustinian eschatology can fit into the Bible. He must attempt to make the first resurrection mean spiritual regeneration or salvation so he can only promote one physical general resurrection of all the saved and unsaved at the end of time.

As we have already discussed, most amillennialists view the first reference to the one thousand years as Christ's complete triumph over Satan and his forces of evil today (Rev. 20:1-2). The second reference refers to the perfect rule of Christ over the redeemed saints on earth in a spiritual kingdom and finally those redeemed saints in heaven (Rev. 20:4-6). They claim that this is a prophecy (vss. 4-6) that finds constant fulfillment in the intermediate state of believers between death and their physical resurrection as God rules over His people in a spiritual kingdom. This claim sidesteps the premillennial argument that there are numerous literal prophecies yet to be fulfilled in connection with Israel's future such as the tribulation period and kingdom reign.

Of course, the amillennialist objects to these literal prophecies because of their rejection and abandonment of the literal land and kingdom promises given to national Israel. Thus, the reference to 1,000 years in verse four is said to be a constant fulfillment of prophecy as saints are regenerated in this present life (first resurrection of vss. 4-6) and enter the spiritual kingdom or when they are taken to the heavenly kingdom (1,000 years of vs. 4). It is advocated that this understating of the 1,000 years argues against the fulfillment of multiple future prophecies.

The amillennialist interpretation of this text in Revelations 20:4-6 once again claims that the first resurrection refers to a spiritual resurrection of the soul instead of a bodily and literal resurrection. If they take the resurrection to be literal, then it would open the door for the 1,000 years to be literal and also upset their eschatological scheme of only one resurrection on the last day. Therefore, they need to spiritualize the first resurrection by claiming that it refers to the continuous fulfillment of resurrected souls or the salvation of souls (new birth of believers) throughout the present period in which we live. They claim that the reference to the first resurrection speaks of the time when people are regenerated; it's then that their soul is resurrected from the dead and Christ in a spiritual sense begins to rule in their hearts as the King. At death this reign continues in heaven. Thus, Revelation chapter 20 and the martyrs in heaven depict what Hoekema has called "the present reign of the souls of

deceased believers with Christ in heaven.” The primary scheme of amillennial interpretation intends for us to understand that the 1,000 years depicts the final state of perfection that the church will experience with Christ ruling over them in heaven.

This whole conclusion is absurd simply because resurrection in Scripture is never linked to the resurrection of souls. Nor is the subject of regeneration every likened to a spiritual resurrection of the soul. Regeneration is always linked to the inward spirit of people – not to resurrection (John 3:6). In Scripture immaterial souls are never referred to as being resurrected. Only physical bodies are termed as being resurrected (1 Cor. 15:35-50; John 11:23-25). Amillennialism confuses the terms regeneration with resurrection. Regeneration points to the spiritual change of a person’s spirit on the inside whereas resurrection points to the physical change of a person’s body on the outside. To interpret physical resurrection of the body as a spiritual regeneration of the soul is a serious exegetical error.

Alva McClain has summarized:

“In spite of all that has been written on the point, no one has ever produced a single indisputable instance in the New Testament where the Greek *anastasis* [resurrection] is ever applied to man’s soul, or an instance where the new birth is ever called a resurrection. Such evidence is incontrovertible.”

In John eleven Jesus used the example of physical resurrection to teach a spiritual truth to Martha but He did not teach that bodily resurrection of the soul is equal to spiritual regeneration. Jesus clearly separates the two concepts in verses 25 and 26. In no way was Jesus teaching a spiritual resurrection of the soul. He was simply using literal physical resurrection as a teaching tool or starting point to lead into a spiritual reality. He was not substituting or replacing the physical for the spiritual as the amillennialist does with Revelation chapter 20. We must remember that Lazarus was literally and physically raised from the dead. This is something that the amillennialist fails to remember from this account. Jesus never spiritualized the meaning of physical resurrection. He never did say that physical bodily resurrection is like a spiritual resurrection of the soul. Jesus simply used a physical reality to teach a spiritual truth like he did with Nicodemus in John chapter three.

We must remember that illustrating the spiritual by use of the physical is altogether different than interpreting the physical as the spiritual. In Revelation chapter 20:4 the amillennialist interprets the physical as the spiritual. Just because physical resurrection is used to illustrate a spiritual coming to life (Eph. 2:1, 5-6; Col. 2:13; 3:1; Romans 6:4-5, 13) in no way demands that one must interpret passages that clearly teach physical resurrection as spiritual regeneration. These verses are not interpreting literal resurrection as a spiritual resurrection of regeneration. They are simply used to illustrate how physical resurrection can be applied to spiritual regeneration. But the spiritual cannot override the physical reality of resurrection in those contexts and verses that clearly call for physical resurrection. The interpreter must determine that in most cases there is no warrant to even apply a spiritual emphasis to physical resurrection since the contextual evidence does not demand that the interpreter can do so with a good conscience.

The serious error and flaw of amillennialism in Revelation chapter 20 is that they interpret physical resurrection as being spiritual. There is nothing in this context or portion of Scripture that would even allude to the fact that John was giving a spiritual lesson, let alone committing the horrendous and horrific error of interpreting the physical, as the spiritual. This is changing the obvious meaning of the Word of God and allowing the interpreter to teach his ideas instead of God's end-time truth about two physical resurrections. One must note how these martyrs were already regenerated. It's obvious that these people were beheaded because of their allegiance and identification with Christ. This identification with Christ marks them as God's regenerated followers.

It would be inconsistent with John to go on and say by the use of the term "lived" (Rev. 20:4) that these people were regenerated after already implying by their martyrdom that they were already regenerated. This breaks the normal sense of understanding. People who have already died for Christ can hardly experience a spiritual resurrection or new birth as the amillennialist says. The term "lived" must refer to physical resurrection and not spiritual regeneration or else the martyrdom of a group of already regenerated saints makes no sense. In other words, it only makes sense that physical resurrection follows the physical death of saints and not spiritual resurrection or regeneration as is claimed by the amillennialist.

Paul Benware has well said:

“Since it is the physical death of these already-regenerated people that is being spoken of here, it must be their subsequent physical resurrection that is being discussed.”

Some amillennial interpreters try to get around this important point by saying that the martyrs “coming to life” refers to their entrance into heaven at the point of their death and how they lived or “came to life” in heaven beyond the point of their earthly deaths. They interpret this as a celestial millennial reign of already regenerated saints in heaven instead of a specific reference to a terrestrial spiritualized reign of regenerated saints living on earth today. The problem with this heavenly/millennial understanding of verse 4 is that chapter 20 follows chronologically with the return of Christ to earth in chapter 19 and the mentioning of the 1,000-year reign of Christ upon earth in chapter 20:2-3.

This brings the scene to earth following Christ’s return. There would be no logical reason for John to mention these martyrs living in heaven, at the point of their deaths, since he already mentions about Christ returning to earth with the armies of heaven (Rev. 19:14). Earlier scenes in the book of Revelation also depict how the saints will reign over the earth (Rev. 5:10; 3:21; 2:26) and how the Lord Jesus Christ will bring reward to the saints when He returns to earth (Rev. 11:18). The fact that these already regenerated martyrs lived (“they lived”) after the return of Christ to earth implies that they can only live again in one sense – the sense of a literal resurrection. The text then conveys that these martyrs are resurrected physically to live during the 1,000-year reign of Christ upon earth.

The “thrones” that are already occupied in the beginning part of verse 4 may very well have reference to the victorious church (the Lamb’s bride), which has already been raised at an earlier stage in God’s resurrection program (1 Thess. 4:16 – the Rapture) and is now seen returning with Christ as the armies of heaven and reigning on earth (Rev. 19:14, 19). These are earthly thrones – not heavenly thrones. The 24 elders, representing the church, are given the promise to reign over the earth (Rev. 5:10). The remaining “souls” (people) joining this resurrected group of people (the church), which is already pictured as reigning in the earthly millennial kingdom, are those people martyred during the tribulation period. This prophecy gives them the promise of physical resurrection and subsequent ruling privileges in the kingdom era along with the church.

These martyrs are marked out as having a special reigning part, along with the church, in the millennial earth. Since the final number of martyred souls has now been completed (Rev. 6:9, 11) they too are given the promise of physical resurrection at the end of the tribulation. They too will have part with the victorious resurrected church in her royal reign upon earth. Thus, these people (“souls”) are given the promise of physical resurrection, along with the church, who has already been pictured as being raised and returned with Christ. This implies that there are several phases to the resurrection program of God, the martyred dead being only one phase of the first resurrection program.

Amillenarians still insist that this must be a heavenly millennial scene with the saint’s reign in heaven since “thrones” in the rest of the book of Revelation are always seen to be in heaven (Rev. 4:4; 11:16). It is taught that these thrones are once again heavenly in their character and represent the previous account of martyred “souls” seen in heaven (Rev. 6:9). Furthermore, it is assumed that the reference to the “souls” must indicate that these people were in their disembodied state and were sitting on thrones in heaven prior to their physical resurrection. But these assumptions are false. As was already stated, there has been ample evidence already given in the book, which suggests an earthly rule of people (Rev. 5:10; 3:21; 2:26).

The prophetic sequence of events and contextual setting argues for earthly thrones instead of heavenly thrones. They are earthly thrones representing the saint’s regal and judicial authority to reign upon earth (1 Cor. 6:2). Furthermore, the term “souls” does not necessarily refer to disembodied immaterial beings. It can also be a reference to the conscious physical life of people living on earth (Rom. 13:1; 1 Cor. 15:45; James 5:20; Rev. 16:3). It’s understandable that only physical beings (“souls”) can be beheaded and martyred! Likewise, these “souls” (people) are viewed as being resurrected in order to take part in the kingdom reign. They are not identified as being under the altar in heaven as immaterial beings. This was an earlier scene (Rev. 6:9).

The present scene is now earthly as John envisions these people being physically resurrected for the kingdom reign. The prophecy teaches the resurrection of martyred tribulation saints and the promise is given that they will share in the rulership of the world along with those already sitting upon the earthly thrones – the church. It must then be understood that the

placement of these “souls” (people) is on earth and not in heaven. This suggests that the word “souls” is used in a sense to indicate the physical bodies of people who have been beheaded but now resurrected for the kingdom reign. In essence, John is saying that these people, who were beheaded, are now resurrected to participate in kingdom rulership and blessing. The fact is clearly stated that John understood that these souls (people) were also resurrected to reign with Christ for 1,000 years.

Other amillennial interpreters stress how the first resurrection must be a spiritual resurrection of the soul because it is contrasted to the second death, which is a spiritual death (Rev. 20:6). But this is a misunderstanding about the nature of the second death or the final judgment of the lost in hell. The second death not only involves the separation of the spirit from God but also contains physical ramifications of suffering for the resurrected human body. In fact, Revelation 20:13 tells us that the human spirit in “hades” will be joined to the resurrected body which is taken from the realm of physical “death.” In actuality, the second death then includes the resurrection of human bodies that will be judged by God throughout eternity. Jesus even alluded to this in the gospel accounts (Matt. 10:28).

The second resurrection of Revelation 20:5 is implied by the words, “the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished.” This resurrection is taken in a literal fashion by the amillennialist since they must get some kind of physical resurrection into their eschatological scheme. Amillenarians agree that this second resurrection of physical bodies will occur when Christ returns on the last day.

It never ceases to amaze me how amillennialists can spiritualize the first resurrection by making it refer to regeneration and then turn around and make the second resurrection physical – the final resurrection on the last day. According to amillennial eschatology, there will be a physical resurrection that follows a spiritual resurrection. The first spiritual resurrection implies that the church has received a resurrected soul (regeneration) as indicated by the words “they lived” (vs. 4) Likewise, this first resurrection and the words “they lived” may also point to the already regenerated saints who are living again in heaven, after their earthly death and departure. And it’s in heaven where Christ is seen reigning over them (a heavenly spiritual millennium). The second resurrection (“lived” – vs. 5) refers to the final physical resurrection of people on the last day, even the unsaved.

This is once again a serious case of huckstering the Word. The word “lived’ (dzaho) in verses four and five, which is used in connection with both resurrections, is the exact same Greek word. There is no logical or linguistic reason to differentiate between them. Both of these Greek verbs understandably and sensibly apply to physical and literal resurrection. John uses this Greek word no less than a dozen times in the book of Revelation where it always refers to physical resurrection (Revelation 1:18; 2:8; 3:1). Nothing in the context of Revelation chapter 20:1-6 would indicate a reason to make a distinction in the thought and progression about physical resurrection.

Alford writes these words about Revelation 20:4-5:

“As regards the text itself, no legitimate treatment of it will extort what is known as the spiritual interpretation now in fashion. If in a passage where two resurrections are mentioned, where certain souls lived at the first, and the rest of the dead lives only in the end of a specified period after the first – if in such a passage the first resurrection may be understood to mean spiritual rising with Christ, while the second means literal rising from the grave; then there is an end to all signification in language, and Scripture is wiped out as a definite testimony to anything.”

It’s clear that the martyred dead of the future tribulation period will be part of a multifaceted resurrection program of God when God’s saints will be physical raised in their appropriate order or rank and at their appropriate times (1 Corinthians 15:20-23). The first resurrection includes the resurrection of all the just (Acts 24:15). Additional revelation reveals how the first resurrection will occur in separate phases or timetables and with different ranks or battalions of people. The church will be resurrected prior to the tribulation period in the rapture (1 Thess. 4:16; 1:10; 5:9; Rev. 3:10) whereas the tribulation saints and tribulation martyrs (Daniels 12:2; Rev. 20:4) will be raised during another phase of the “first resurrection” following the tribulation period. Every person who is saved will be raised in their own battalion of troops and at their appropriate time. But the first physical resurrection only encompasses the saved whereas the second physical resurrection only involves the unsaved. The “rest of the dead” (Revelation 20:5), who will be raised after the literal 1,000-year reign of Christ, will be the unsaved and wicked at the Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:11-15).

## D. The Throne of David

The Scripture clearly reveals that Jesus Christ will literally rule the earth from the throne of David during the 1,000 years (2 Sam. 7:11-17; Mark 11:10; Luke 1:32). However, within the framework of this amillennial interpretive scheme, the future throne of David, where the Messiah is prophesied to sit (Isaiah 9:7; Micah 5:2), is also spiritualized. The prophecies about Christ's future reign upon the throne of David are not taken literally. The preposterous claim is made that Christ is sitting upon the throne of David today while He rules as King over His people (the church). Only in this sense has the Messiah sat on the throne of David. Of course, this conclusion is false in every way. The prophecies about Christ's future kingdom must be taken literally even as the prophecies about his birth (see Luke 1:31-33). Furthermore, Christ's present throne in heaven is distinguished from His future throne on earth (Rev. 3:21). But this is something that the amillennarian refuses to accept.

Amillennialists spiritualize the future promises about the kingdom. They shift from their literal interpretation about the first coming of Christ to their spiritualized or figurative interpretation about the kingdom, which in the Scripture is connected with the Second Coming of Christ. They conveniently practice a hermeneutical shift to accommodate their allegorical interpretation of the kingdom. But how can a passage of Scripture like Isaiah 9:6-7 mean something literal in one half and something figurative in the other half? The prophecies of the Messiah's birth are given a normal and literal interpretation and fulfillment. Likewise, the coming of Christ to earth to establish a kingdom is also literal and must be given a normal and literal fulfillment.

Most future prophecies in the Bible, such as the tribulation period, the kingdom and the eschatological events in the book of Revelation, are spiritualized by the amillennialist. The amillennialist does not believe that there will be any literal and future fulfillment to prophecy other than the Second Coming of Christ, the final resurrection and judgment, and the eternal state. The rest of the prophecies in the Bible have already been fulfilled, relatively soon after the prophecy itself, or they are said to be symbolically fulfilled in the church and her present day tribulations in the world.



## E. The Regathering of Israel

When it comes to Israel's regathering for the millennium, or the 1,000-year reign of Christ upon the earth, many amillennialists believe that this regathering was something already fulfilled historically in Israel's return to the land. But in another symbolic sense, there is a spiritual regathering occurring today among the church or New Testament Israel of God, as people are being saved and added to the church. The Mosaic church of the Old Testament symbolically points to the visible church of Christ and this picture of regathering becomes a way to illustrate how the mystical church is being formed today. Of course, this is a fanciful dream of Covenant Theology. National Israel is to be regathered back to her land in a literal way as the plain sense of Scripture tells us (Jer. 31:10-11; Ezek. 36:24-25; 11-14; 38:21-22). The future reign of Christ with those Jews who have positions of authority and administration in the millennium (Matt. 19:28) is also spiritualized by the amillenarian, while in the same pen stroke the claim is made that the twelve tribes of Israel in the New Testament refer to the new restored Israel (the church) and all those who have been regenerated. Barnes says that the 144,000 from the twelve tribes in Revelation 7:4 are nothing more than a symbolic reference to the entire church - "the Israel of God."

As stated earlier, those who reject the future prophetic teachings of the Bible are called preterists, which is a Latin word signifying something that is past. As mentioned earlier in this study, the most extreme view of preterism holds that the entire book of Revelation has been fulfilled in past history and the Second Coming of Christ has already occurred when Christ came to judge Israel through the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. His coming in judgment was witnessed through the agency of the Roman army that destroyed Jerusalem. This extreme view is rejected by the conservative amillennialists since to spiritualize the Second Coming of Christ and the eternal state of the believer is unorthodox. However, because of the allegorization of Augustine many today teach that the book of Revelation has in some measure been fulfilled historically. This keeps amillenarians from a literal hermeneutic of the prophetic word and allows the preterist to spiritualize the Old Testament prophecies concerning national Israel and the future kingdom. It seems to give the preterist permission to conclude that the New Testament spiritually or figuratively replaces the Old Testament covenant promises and prophecies given to Israel.

## Amillennialism and Daniel's Seventy Weeks

This non-literal hermeneutic is seen in how amillenarians treat Daniel's seventy weeks. The Augustinian student of allegorization claims that this prophecy does not have a futuristic interpretation during the seven-year tribulation period. They reject the notion that there is a prophetic gap or "great parenthesis" of time between the 69<sup>th</sup> and 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel's prophecy. Rather, the amillennialist concludes that the final seven years began immediately after the termination of the first 69 weeks and refers to an indefinite period of time beginning with Christ's death upon the cross and extending to the end of the age or Christ's Second Coming. Young and Leupold both espouse this view.

After viewing the first 483 years as literal years and giving them a termination point, amillenarians then turn around and view the final "week" or period of seven years as an indefinite period of time extending to the Second Coming of Christ. But this defies the literal progression of thought in this prophecy. It maintains a dual hermeneutic of literal and spiritual interpretation and spiritualizes the text where the literal is clearly indicated. The question must be asked. Where is the middle of the week that Daniel talks about ("in the midst of the week" – vs. 27) if one does not view this final week of seven as literal years? And what does this middle of the week mean? Some amillenarians stress that this is simply a reference to time ("in the midst of the time period"). They make the claim that Daniel is only talking about an undetermined time period and it's during this time period that Christ will cause the sacrificial system to cease. In other words, they are telling us that Daniel is simply saying that during this undetermined period of time, Christ will cause the Jewish sacrifices to cease. This will take place when He actually dies upon the cross and fulfills the Old Testament typology.

Amillenarians are quick to point out that the "he" in Daniel 9:27 refers to Messiah or Christ and the stopping of the sacrifices refers to when Christ died upon the cross and ended the sacrificial system of worship (Daniel 9:27). This assumption is made in order to try and find historical fulfillment, instead of prophetic fulfillment in this passage, since a literal prophetic fulfillment would wreck their eschatological program of end-time events and their spiritualized approach to the tribulation period and future kingdom. However, as we study this passage (vs. 27), it's worthy to note that

nowhere in Scripture does it tell us historically that the Messiah made a covenant with people for seven years.

The extreme preterist will search in vain to find any historical account that would fulfill this statement by Daniel. The earthly ministry of Jesus was only three years in length. How could Jesus make a covenant during His earthly ministry that would last seven years? These questions are unanswerable. The prophetic significance in these verses must be embraced and clearly teach that Antichrist will stop Israel from sacrificing during a future seven-year time period known as the tribulation period (Matthew 24:15; 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). Of course, many amillenarians read their covenant of grace into the picture of this future covenant trying to desperately find a way out of any prophetic context where a seven-year covenant is made to the Jews. In other words, they claim that Jesus Christ extended His covenant of grace to the church (new Israel) during this undetermined period of time between the 69<sup>th</sup> and 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel.

Edward Young states:

“In what sense, however, may it be said that the Messiah causes a covenant to prevail for many? The answer to this question, it would seem, is to be found in the fact that the Messiah during His earthly ministry and by means of His active and passive obedience to the Law of God, did fulfill the terms of that covenant which was in olden times made with Abraham and his seed. Romans 15:8 speaks of this covenant as the promises made to the fathers. This covenant which was made with the fathers is generally called the Covenant of Grace.”

Young comes to the conclusion that the covenant being spoken about here is the covenant of grace, which the Son and Father agreed upon in eternity past. After making this covenant the Messiah would then cause the Jewish sacrifices upon the altar to cease by dying upon the cross. Now, during this final week of undetermined period of time, known as the 70<sup>th</sup> week, Christ is ruling over His church as the spiritual kingdom but the present temple (the church) is full of idolatrous worship, which is abominable (“overspreading of abominations”). This interpretation seems so far-fetched that you would think few would embrace such a fanciful conclusion in light of the clear teaching of Scripture. Nevertheless, many do spiritualize this prophecy in order to keep a future program away from national Israel and transfer the prophetic to the present day church, which has supposedly replaced Israel and received her kingdom promises in a spiritual way.

We must note that Daniel had already pointed out how the Messiah would be “cut off” or killed (vs. 26). It would be strange for Daniel to now say that Messiah would stop the sacrifices (vs. 27). Also, the nearest preceding antecedent to the pronoun “he” (vs. 27) is the word “prince” (vs. 26) and not the word Messiah (Christ). The normal rule of grammar is to look back to the nearest antecedent in order to find correlation. Thus, the prince in verse 26 refers to a Roman Prince, which would one day arrive on the scene, be identified with the Roman people, and who would destroy Jerusalem (Matt. 24:1 with Zech. 14:2).

This “prince” of verse 27 is not referring to the Roman general Titus, since Titus did not make any seven-year covenant with the Jews as Daniel envisions (vs. 27). Rather, the prince in verse 27 must be a direct reference to the Antichrist who will make a covenant with the Jews in the future, during the seven-year tribulation period upon earth, and then break this covenant in the middle of the week of seven years. This is the only logical conclusion to this portion of Scripture. The eschatological time marker in this prophecy (“unto the end” – vs. 26 – the end of Daniels prophecy or 490 years) indicates that this section belongs to an eschatological period of time known as the “time of the end” (Dan. 12:4, 9, 13) or tribulation period when all of these future tribulation events would be fulfilled. Daniel is referring to the far off future and not to past history when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans (preterism). Nor is Daniel somehow indicating that the final seven years of this 490-year prophecy are changed into non-literal symbolic years, after interpreting the first 483 years as literal years.

It’s absurd to conclude that the final seven years refers to an indefinite period of time (spiritual millennium or kingdom) that is occurring today. This passage is teaching that the future Antichrist (“prince that shall come”) will make a future covenant with the Jews (national Israel) for seven years (tribulation period) and will then stop the Jewish sacrifices from taking place in the rebuilt Jewish temple during the middle of the seven years (“in the midst of the week”) or the middle of tribulation period (Rev. 11:1-2). This is the only fair and sane approach to this passage of Scripture.

Liberals, who reject the miracle of predictive prophecy, teach that the seven years was immediately fulfilled in the events following the Maccabean persecution of history. Extreme preterists attempt to make the prophecy fulfilled in history so that they can shy away from a literal tribulation period and other literal prophecies that deal with the millennium. The average

amillennialist, who is a mild preterist, makes the seven years an unknown duration of time. One again, this is simply an ingenious plan to try and stop all futuristic interpretations of Bible prophecy that deal with national Israel as a people, the tribulation period and the kingdom. Amillennialists want to get rid of a future seven-year period for planet earth because they don't believe in a literal future tribulation period or any other literal prophecies that deal with earthly kingdom blessing for national Israel. They need to spiritualize the prophecies to support their thesis that the tribulation is only a picture of the present day tribulation that the church\kingdom faces while Christ is ruling in her heart.

### Amillennialism and Matthew 24

Many amillenarians with their preterist (historical) teaching stress that Matthew 24 has been already fulfilled in God's judgment upon the nation in A.D. 70. Some amillenarians (not all) go so far to say that the coming of Christ is not discussed in this passage of Scripture. Instead, these events are simply symbolic descriptions of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. In this way the entire discourse is already fulfilled historically. First, it is assumed that the generation that would pass away is not some future generation of Jews but the generation of the disciples, which Jesus was talking to in the Olivet Discourse. Amillennialists conclude that the entire discourse does not make sense in relationship to modern Israel. Second, it is assumed that verses 5-31 apply to first century Judea. Third, the tribulation that Jesus spoke about has already occurred as an historical event. This tribulation occurred when the people were persecuted in the judgment of A.D. 70. Fourth, the text should not be seen as a reference to Christ's coming in judgment in the future but to His coming in the A.D. 70 Roman judgment upon Jerusalem. The whole scene is simply a symbolic historical description of divine judgment instead of prophetic future judgment.

It must be stressed that not all amillenarian preterists refuse to see the actual prophetic coming of Christ in this passage. Only those who press historical fulfillment to its absolute extreme will come to this false conclusion. Mild preterists teach that most of the events in Matthew 24 occurred during the first three centuries but still cling to a literal coming of Christ in Matthew 24. Moderate preterists believe that every prophecy was fulfilled in the A.D. 70 judgment but they still believe that the Bible teaches a future Second Coming in other passages (Acts 1:9-11; 1 Cor. 15:51-53; 1

Thess. 4:16-17). Extreme preterists teach that all Bible prophecy, including the prophecy of Christ's Second Coming, was fulfilled when He ordered the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. They believe that if there is a future Second Coming the Bible doesn't talk about it in any clear fashion. The extreme amillennialist preterist will normally claim that all references to Christ coming "quickly" (Rev. 3:11; 22:6, 7, 12, 20) refer to the sudden cataclysmic judgment, which came upon Israel through the Roman army, in the events surrounding the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem. Thus, the book of Revelation, with its multiple references to the coming of Christ, is given a past historical fulfillment to fit this interpretive scheme of amillennialism. The amillennial timing interpretation, which connects Christ's Second Coming with the historical destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, allows them to escape any futuristic interpretation of prophetic texts. This is done by assigning a past historical fulfillment to all of these texts.

It must be understood that the way Matthew 24 is interpreted will reflect the way various parts of the book of Revelation are interpreted and other portions of the prophetic word. For instance, extreme preterists view Revelation 1:7, "Behold he cometh," as having occurred in the A.D. 70 judgment. The preterist then assumes that this would allow one to understand "they who pierced Him" as meaning the actual generation that crucified Christ. This is coupled with the fact that the coming of Christ was announced elsewhere in Revelation to be impending at the time of writing (Rev. 3:11; 22:20). The fact that "all tribes of the earth will mourn" would be interpreted as meaning all the tribes that mourned when the Romans overthrew Jerusalem. Other preterists view this statement (Rev. 1:7) as referring to how Christ continually comes in the clouds of judgment throughout history. As you can see, this kind of fanciful spiritualized interpretation defies all natural understanding of the Scripture and proves the absolute deficiency of the allegorical hermeneutical approach to Scripture.

The meaning of Matthew 24 simply depends on how far each amillenarian wants to spiritualize the passage, as they read it without eschatological eyes. The meaning is at the mercy of the spiritualizer of Scripture. There is a uniform opinion among amillennialists that much of this passage has a historical fulfillment attached to it. This is necessary in their interpretive scheme so that they might keep the tribulation as only possessing a past, or at best, present day fulfillment. Great attempts are made to give no prophetic fulfillment to this passage lest a future program for national Israel

is seen during a final seventieth week of Daniel. This is something that every amillennialist will vehemently deny. Therefore, the historical fulfillment of this passage is necessary to maintain their theological dogma. This is why they associate Matthew 24 with a providential coming of Christ in historical judgments instead of an actual literal return of Christ. To support a futurist interpretation of Christ's coming in this passage would upset their scheme of historical interpretation. Therefore, the "clouds" associated with Christ's coming (Matt. 24:29-30) are explained as symbols of divine wrath based upon observations of other texts where clouds are used in connection with God's wrath and judgment (2 Sam. 22:8, 10; Psalms 18:7-15; 68:4, 33; 97:2-39; Isaiah 13:9; 26:21; 30:27; Joel 2:1, 2; Micah 1:3; Nahum 1:2; Zeph. 1:14-15).

It's assumed that the coming of Christ in Matthew 24 was a prophecy about Christ's coming judgment upon Israel in A.D. 70. This is because the Lord, who is seen in the familiar Old Testament clouds of judgment, brought judgment upon Israel through the Roman army in A.D. 70. It's explained that the coming of the Lord is used in many contexts that do not appear to be referring to the Second Coming of Christ to earth (Rev. 2:5; 3:20; Deut. 33:2; Isa 19:1; Zech. 1:16; Mal. 3:1-2; Matt. 10:23). This leaves open the possibility of another meaning in Matthew 24 and other texts. It's assumed that Jesus placed the time of His "coming with the clouds" within the lifetime of some of His contemporaries (Matt. 16:28; 24:30, 34; 26:64) which would suggest that Jesus would come in judgment during their lifetime and "generation" (Matt. 24:34). Hence, the passage in Matthew 24 cannot refer to His Second Coming to earth at a future time. Instead, the coming of Christ actually took place when Jesus came in providential judgment upon Jerusalem and was witnessed by the generation of Jews that were living at that time.

It must be noted that preterists commit the unpardonable interpretive sin of "illegitimate totality transfer" which takes the meaning of words in one context and pours them into the same mold everywhere that they appear. The fact that clouds of judgment are figuratively associated with God's judgment in various passages does not necessitate that the description in Matthew 24:29-30 is figurative and that Jesus is not referring to His actual visible return to earth in Matthew 24:20-30. The clouds may be mentioned to highlight this particular truth about judgment but this in no way undermines the actual literal, physical and visible return of Christ to earth in this passage of Scripture. Just because a word has a figurative connotation

in one passage in no way means that a figurative meaning must be assigned to that word in another passage. Nor does the use of a particular word, which was used in a figurative way, justify turning the entire passage into a figurative description. When a word is used in a figurative sense in one section of the word of God, it does not necessitate that in every section, where the same word appears, that it must be used in the same symbolic way. Figures of speech must be controlled by their specific context. Birds may be interpreted as the devil in one passage of Scripture (Matt. 13:4, 19) where in other passages they are literal birds (1 Cor. 15:39). Dogs may refer to false teachers in one passage (2 Pet. 2:1, 22; Phil. 3:2) whereas in other passages they are literal dogs (Luke 16:21).

The preterist must take this into account when trying to assign a figurative meaning to the “clouds” in Matthew 24:30 in order to spiritualize the Second Coming of Christ. One must wonder why many moderate preterists do not spiritualize the “cloud language” in other passages dealing with the coming of Christ in order to do away with the return of Christ (Acts 1:9-11; 1 Thess. 4:13-17). It would seem that the grounds which are used in Matthew 24:29-30, to eliminate a literal and visible return, should be equally applied to other passages that associate clouds with Christ’s coming. It’s clear that this biased interpretation is done in order to escape the inevitable conclusion of a literal future end-time scenario on planet earth called the tribulation period. The preterist does not accept the fact that God’s national people (Israel) are going to be judged during a future tribulation period (Jer. 30:7) and brought back to the Messiah, so that they might experience the fulfillment of their national earthly promises in the millennial kingdom.

Amillennialism wants to avoid placing themselves into this mold and will go to great lengths to disprove the literal return of Christ in Matthew 24. This is because if one accepts the literal return of Christ in this Olivet Discourse they are prone to accept the other literal prophetic scenarios in this passage – the tribulation period, a future Antichrist that is against national Israel, Israel’s future and rescue from judgment, and the Lord’s regathering of His people into the kingdom. Of course, these literal interpretations of prophecy are not accepted by the amillenarian and because of this the literal coming of Christ is usually discarded in this prophetic passage of the Olivet Discourse to accommodate their spiritualized scheme of Scripture and rid the passage of any literal future fulfillment of end-time world events. To surrender to a literal coming of Christ in Matthew 24 places the amillennialist on literal eschatological ground, which speaks against their



position about literal future events dealing with the tribulation period of seven years, Israel and the earthly kingdom.

It can be clearly seen that Matthew 24 is prophetic in its outlook in every way. The futurist position, instead of the historical position, must be maintained. The argument that “this generation” must refer to the disciples is simply faulty. This is because the entire context of this passage is prophetic in its overtones. It is highly probable that the writers were not referencing the A.D. 70 judgment of Jerusalem but the far off judgment under the regime of the Antichrist and the end-time events associated with Jerusalem (Zech. 14:1-3). Luke clearly identifies the Jerusalem destruction with the future armies of Antichrist and the abomination of desolation (Luke 21:20-24). Matthew 24 and Zechariah 12-14 are parallel passages that refer to the same events. Zechariah envisions a time when Jerusalem will be surrounded by her enemies and plundered (Zech. 14:1-2). The point is this. The future destruction of Jerusalem that Jesus spoke about may very well have reference to the end-times, or the actual seven-year tribulation period, when Jerusalem will be ransacked by the Antichrist and his armies.

In A.D. 70 Israel was judged but not delivered, as the Matthew 24 prophecy, along with Zechariah 14 passage, envisions. Thus, the end-time interpretation of this judgment on Jerusalem is very probable. Even if one understands Jesus as speaking about the A.D. 70 judgment, the interpretive principle of “double fulfillment” would have to be applied to this text, which clearly unfolds a futuristic return of Christ and end-time events that will be occurring on planet earth before Christ arrives (Zech. 14:1-2). Jerusalem will evidently be surrounded by armies in the future and experience great devastation. Both the near and far view of prophetic fulfillment can be seen in the statement of Jesus. In other words, Jesus may have used the A.D. 70 judgment as a springboard to launch them into a greater panoramic prophetic program, which would fall upon Israel. In this future prophetic program, the misfortunes as well as the blessings would fall upon Israel as a nation. The primary emphasis in this entire discourse is then futuristic. And the best understanding of the Jerusalem judgment deals with the future tribulation period, since this is the subject matter that Jesus addresses in the entire prophetic discourse. In other words, it is best to take the Jerusalem catastrophe as referring to a future destruction that will occur during the end-times.

The point is this. The use of the word “generation” and “you” (Matt. 24:34; 24:2, 6, 9, 15, 20, 26, 33) can point to a future class of Jewish believers, since the entire thrust of the passage is future and will occur in the future seven-year tribulation period. The use of the words “generation” and “you” have reference to this future time period and does not indicate historical fulfillment in the days of the disciples. Jesus was talking about Israel as a whole, when He spoke to the disciples, who represented the future nation. The other words such as “them” (vs. 16, 19) and “the elect’s sake” (vs. 22) and “his elect” (vs. 31) would all indicate ethnic people who would be like the disciples. When all is taken into consideration, it can be said that the “fig tree” illustration (Matt. 24:32), which Jesus gave in connection with a specific “generation” (vs. 34) that would experience His return, has to do with a future company of Jews during the tribulation period on earth, who will actually see the “abomination of desolation” take place (Matt. 25:15). This sign, among many other signs, will be signs that precede the Second Coming of Christ to earth, and will occur during the seven-year tribulation period. Signs are for Israel – not for the church.

The Olivet Discourse is given to Israel – not the church. It parallels many of the details of the tribulation period as found in Revelation 6-19. The Rapture is not found in this discourse. Furthermore, the judgment on Jerusalem may very well be completely prophetic in its anticipation, extending far beyond the A.D. Jerusalem judgment by the Romans. The entire passage may be best understood as having a futuristic fulfillment attached to the events in the seven-year tribulation period, which Jesus was describing in this chapter. The disciple’s questions concerning “when” these events would take place and “what” would be the sign of Christ’s return (Matt. 24:3) are answered within an eschatological context and seem to fit into a futuristic interpretive window.

### Amillennialism and the Rapture

This interpretive scheme does not view the Rapture as a prophetic event separate from the Second Coming. Instead, it is assumed that those who are caught up in the air (1 Thess. 4:13-18) will meet with their loved ones in the air and then immediately descend with Christ when He returns to earth. Thus, the amillennialist views the Rapture as an event, which is actually part of the Second Coming. It is taught that the Rapture and Second Coming are a single event since Jesus never said He was coming twice. The amillennialist suggests that a “yo-yo” type of Rapture will take place

where raptured believers are intercepted and carried back to the earth by the Lord following this present spiritual rule of Christ over His kingdom – the church.

This teaching is faulty for several reasons. First, this conclusion sidesteps the promise that Jesus gave about returning to the house that He has prepared in heaven for the believer (John 14:1-3). Believers will not be escorted back to earth at the time of the Rapture but back to heaven. Second, if all believers are raptured then who are the sheep, seen upon the earth, which enter the eternal state, as amillennialists teach (Matt. 25:31-46)? Furthermore, why are there so many contrasts between the Rapture passages (John 14:1-3; 1 Cor. 15:51-53; Phil. 3:20-21; 1 Thess. 1:10; 4:13-18; 5:9; 2 Tim. 4:8; Titus 2:13; 1 John 2:28-3:2; Rev. 2:25; 3:10) and Second Coming passages (Dan. 2:44-45; 7:9-14; 12:1-3; Zech. 14:1-15; Matt. 13:41; 24:15-31; 2 Thess. 1:6-10; Jude 14-15; Rev. 1:7; 19:11-20:6) if there is no time difference in these events?

We can ask many more questions. Why is Jesus seen coming for His saints and coming with His saints? Why is Jesus seen descending to the earth in one scene and meeting His redeemed in the air in another scene? Why is no translation of believers seen in connection with some verses dealing with the coming of Christ whereas it is a main event in other verses dealing with this event? Why is the point made in some verses that only His redeemed will meet the Lord in the air whereas in other verses every eye shall see Him coming? Why is the earth and people judged in some end-time scenes, connected with Christ's coming, whereas in other scenes surrounding His coming, only His people are judged? All of these questions, and many more, become technically unanswerable when the Scriptures are exegeted honestly and without eschatological bias. Only fanciful and non-literal interpretation can ignore these clear distinctions and differences in order to try and unite two separate events or completely do away with one event – the Rapture.

Those preterists, who practice extreme spiritualization, suggest that the Rapture passages have to do with Christ's promise to come to those believers, who are His elect, when they die and are ready to be escorted to heaven (John 14:1-3 – "I will come again"). This popular view might be called "the death of the believer view." This view involves many comings of Christ every time a believer dies. But Jesus did not say, "I will come again,

and again, and again, and again!” And yet amillennials force this upon the text.

Henry Cowles writes:

“This must refer to Christ’s coming in the death of his saints. At and in their death he comes to receive their souls to himself, to bear them up to his Father’s mansions where he has prepared a place for them.”

In other words, it’s assumed that Christ comes to take His people to Heaven at the time of their death and those verses that seem to teach about a Rapture actually speak of the Lord’s promise to come to His elect, at the time of their death. John 14:3 and the promise of Christ’s coming for His own saints, in the Rapture, is construed to mean how Christ comes to every believer, at the time of their own death, and takes them home to be with Him into the mansions of Glory.

This argument is so far-fetched that time and space is not required to refute it. This amillennial view has serious flaws simply because Christ mentions only one coming and not many comings. Furthermore, it is the angels, not Jesus, who come to transport the souls of believers at the time of death (Luke 16:22). It can be easily understood that Christ is referring to one specific coming and not multitudes of comings. The fact that Christ takes these saints home to heaven to dwell with Him, following His literal return, cannot be supported by amillennialists, simply because this does not stack up with their end-time eschatology of Christ’s single return. In other words, they reject the idea of two literal returns - a Rapture coming in the air and a Second Coming to earth. Therefore, they must do away with Christ’s literal coming in the Rapture by spiritualizing it into oblivion.

Other amillennialists suggest that John 14:1-3 has to do with Christ’s return to His disciples after His resurrection (Acts 1:3). But this view has many problems. In verse three Jesus said that He would come again after He went away into heaven. Since Jesus already said that He was going back to heaven, it must mean that He would come again after His ascension and not after His resurrection. The resurrection took place before His ascension back to heaven and therefore could not be what Jesus is referring to in this section of Scripture. Second, Jesus said that He would “come again” meaning that His return would be similar to His first coming, which involved a coming from heaven and not a coming following resurrection.

Other amillenarians suggest that John 14:1-3 has reference to the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (John 14:18). But the Pentecost view does not take into account that on Pentecost believers were not taken from the earth in any way. We must also remember that the coming again is a counterpart of the going away. In other words, just as Jesus ascended physically to heaven, so He will physically return from heaven. At Pentecost, Jesus did not descend physically from heaven. In fact, the Scriptures teach that Jesus remained physically in heaven after the Holy Spirit came on Pentecost (Acts 7:55-56; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3). In addition, Jesus said in John 14:3 that He would receive believers – they would not receive Him. By contrast, when the Holy Spirit came the believers received the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; 2:38; 8:15-17; 10:47).

There are fatal flaws to all of these spiritualized approaches to this passage and other Rapture passages. This is because the literal and obvious meaning of Christ's coming is pushed aside for a supposed hidden meaning that cannot be extrapolated from these verses unless one tries to read a theological and eschatological system into the texts. The Bible believer, who interprets the Scripture literally, knows that the significant promise that Jesus gave in John 14:1-3, has to do with Christ's coming for His own people (the church) and their subsequent return to Heaven following His coming.

### Some Concluding Remarks

If I have sounded repetitive and redundant in this study, please forgive me. My repetition has helped me to learn and fully understand this difficult and very confusing position. Let me reiterate once again for emphasis. In regards to the millennial kingdom, amillennialism teaches that there will be no literal millennium or future reign of Jesus Christ on planet earth. In fact, the amillennarian assumes that the church today is the kingdom in the sense that Jesus is ruling over the church and in the hearts of His people as the King. They spiritualize or attach a figurative meaning to the literal kingdom covenants and prophecies and conclude that God's people today (the new spiritual Israel) inherits these kingdom promises by becoming a kingdom of people that Christ is presently ruling over. This is called "replacement theology" and indicates that the New Testament church has replaced Old Testament Israel, as the one people of God, and by a process of spiritual (figurative) transfer, the church has inherited Israel's covenant

promises, which take on new spiritual meanings, and has become a spiritual kingdom of people that Christ presently rules over.

This means the kingdom promises no longer apply to Israel but are transferred to the Christian church and are given a new spiritual dimension and fulfillment. The church is viewed as the “new” Israel and is nothing more than a continuation of the concept of Israel that began in the Old Testament. The church simply replaces Israel in God’s economy or working. In this view, the church is a refinement and higher development of the concept of Israel. As a result, the prophecies relating to the blessing and restoration of Israel to the Promised Land are spiritualized into promises and blessings given to the church, both in the present life, and in eternity. God’s promises to Israel are viewed as being fulfilled in the church (the new Israel of the new covenant). Therefore, amillennialists see no specific future for national Israel. Thus, the New Testament name for the church and the church’s identity is best explained as being Israel. The church is really Israel in disguise. The kingdom is not to be understood literally as one thousand years but as the perfection of God’s reign over His people in the present order on earth and ultimately in heaven.

The same method of spiritualization is applied to the imprisonment of Satan for the one thousand years. Amillennialism says this is not any more literal than the one thousand years. Rather, it refers to Satan’s defeat and Satan’s inability to thwart the Gospel from being propagated in the world. The first resurrection unto life is also spiritualized to mean regeneration or becomes a picture of the saints living in heaven. In addition, amillennialism skips over the great prophetic portions of the Bible that call for a literal Rapture, literal seven-year tribulation, and a literal period where Christ reigns upon the earth for one thousand years. According to amillennial theology, the next event on God’s prophetic calendar is His Second Coming, which is to be followed by a time of general judgment of the saved and unsaved. After this, the eternal state will commence. In this scheme of this prophetic interpretation there is clear determination to bypass and override future events that should be taken literally, such as the events of the tribulation, the earthly kingdom reign and Israel’s national future.

All of this is the fanciful dream of those who reject the clear meaning of Scripture. The kingdom is literal and is yet future (Rev. 19:11-15; Luke 1:32-33). The old saying is still true: “When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense.” The millennium is a literal

1,000-year reign upon the earth (Rev. 20:1-6). Any other interpretation is a denial of the clear facts and meaning of Scripture. The book of Revelation must be interpreted from a futuristic view or else it becomes a meaningless bunch of symbols that falls into the hands of man. Amillenarians have created mental gymnastics to try and make this book fit into history or when they try to parallel the book to the church today in some way. Thus, man makes up his own mind about what he wants the Bible to say instead of allowing the Bible to make up man's mind. The whole prophetic scene of the book of Revelation is to be understood in the future context. If it is not interpreted this way, then the book of Revelation becomes an impossible book to understand with any sane accuracy. This is why John Calvin, who followed the spiritualization of Augustine, refused to write a book on Revelation. He threw up his hands and confessed that he could not figure out the meaning. At least Calvin was an honest amillennialist.

Amillennialism employs a dual system of interpretation. They believe that some prophetic scriptures, such as prophecies relating to Christ's first and Second Coming, can be regarded as literal. But at the same time they selectively choose other prophetic passages dealing with the tribulation period, Christ's millennium and the kingdom, and regard them as having a figurative meaning. This enables the interpreter to arrive at amillennialism. When the interpreter is left to choose what passages to spiritualize, this allows the interpreter to become the final authority on Scripture, instead of allowing the Scriptures to become the final authority for the interpreter.

In conclusion, the student of Scripture must allow the Bible to say what it wants to say without allegorization. When one begins to spiritualize or allegorize the Bible they will become guilty of tampering with God's holy text and the plain sense of meaning that God wants to convey from Scripture. To take a literal meaning and give it a figurative meaning is a type of artificial and mystical exegesis, which handles the Word of God deceitfully.

2 Corinthians 4:1-2 says:

"Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

There is general agreement that when the kingdom prophecies are taken literally that they will lead to a premillennial position. The amillennial position is completely unconvincing hermeneutically, Biblically, eschatologically and logically. The spiritualizing of these wonderful and glorious passages of the Bible, which deal with the future kingdom, renders them meaningless. We must remember that the Bible was not written in hidden mystical codes and with deep hidden spiritual meanings. It was written in clear language that should be taken literally unless the contextual evidence indicates otherwise. The plain sense of Scripture must be followed today even in the realm of eschatology or else we will be left to an eschatological future shaped by man instead of God.

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