

Eschatology

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A: Eschatology and the Structure of Theology

“In my beginning is my end...In my end is my beginning.” (T.S.Eliot, *Four Quartets*, “East Coker”, I, 1, 14, V, 209)

“This is the end- for me the beginning of life.” (Bonhoeffer)

The cross was the end of everything that was false. Jesus’ end was his true beginning.

1. Prolegomenon (Prefatory Remarks)

- a. it must not be assumed that we can speak of the End (goal) of all things, and so of humanity, in a way we can speak of other things
- b. that is, the epistemology of a subject must be determined by the subject matter under discussion
- c. if our discourse is to be non – speculative, it assumes that the End has been reached already in and for humanity
- d. for the Christian this is a claim to do with Jesus Christ
- e. the New Testament estimation of the status of Jesus is a presupposition for meaningful conversation about the future of humanity; “¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; ¹⁶ for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.” (Col 1:15- 18)

2. The Eschatology of the Human Person

1. In the Beginning

- a. eschatology must begin with protology, the study of “first things”.
- b. whilst this could be taken as the beginning of creation, this is not the Bible’s own starting point. “In the beginning the Word already was, and the Word was with (*pros* – indicating direction of relation) God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God.” (John 1:1 - 2). This means a trinitarian starting point. Cf. Gen 1:1- 3; 1:26; 1 John 1:1 etc.
- c. Paul’s statement in Colossians 1:18, “he is the beginning”, places Christ outside of the cosmos and creation. Jesus is the principle standing outside of all time as the origin of all created being.
- d. the Revelation of John states the same, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” (Rev 22:13); “The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the origin of God’s creation.”(Rev 3:14). As these are parallel with God’s own statements about his eternity (Rev 1:8; 21:6) extra- temporal

existence must be meant.

- e. this is a radically different starting point from any ancient cosmogony or modern cosmology, for it makes the universe contingent on the person of the Logos; implicitly, it means that the universe is contingent on humanity, rather than vice-versa. That is, it depends for its existence on the humanity of Jesus, whose Person is the Logos.
- f. this perspective on beginnings is in the realms of the mutual loving knowledge of the Father and the Son in the Spirit in eternity cf. Matt 11:25 – 27; Luke 10: 21 – 22; John 15:10,16; 17:20, 23,2,6,9
- g. the possibility of our personhood, in the fullest sense, is contained within the completely realised relations within the trinity. Anything less than this would be a denial of divine (and consequently human) freedom.

2. Created Being

- a. the reality of created being correlates with the pre –temporal nature of the election of Christ. “Jesus Christ was the choice or election of God in respect of this reality (which is distinct from himself)...In the beginning with God, i.e. in the resolve of God which precedes the existence, the possibility and the reality of His creatures, the very first thing is the decree whose realisation means and is Jesus Christ.” (Barth) (John 1:1 – 18; Rom 8:29f; Eph 1:4; 3:11; Col 1:15)
- b. the content of God’s gracious act of election is the elected human Jesus Christ. He is the relation between God and humanity.
- c. in this way God has ordained himself to be the person called Jesus. This is the God who loves humanity as he has eternally loved himself (John 17:24)
- d. our election is included in the election of Christ in eternity (Eph 1:4, 6; 3:11; 2 Thess 2:13; 2 Tim 1:9).
- e. Adam’s task was to be God’s priest in creation. “man... can be spoken of as *the priest of creation*, whose task it is to interpret the books of nature, to understand the universe in its wonderful structures and harmonies, and to bring it all into orderly articulation, so that it fills its proper end as the vast theatre of glory in which the Creator is worshipped and praised. Nature itself is dumb, but it is man’s part to bring it to word, to be its mouth through which the whole universe give voice to the glory and majesty of the living God.” (T.F. Torrance)

3. The Fall

- a. this can be interpreted in two very different ways
- b. the dominant interpretation in Western theology (following Augustine) is to emphasise the loss of the original righteousness and glory which belonged to humanity in the beginning (Rom 3:23)

- c. death (in any form) is seen as a tragedy of an unnatural sort introduced into creation by human sin (Gen 2:17; 3:19; Rom 6:23)
- d. Eastern Orthodoxy however interprets the biblical material in terms of the introduction of a *form* of death that is due to disobedience (Rom 5:10ff.)
- e. without sin, people would still have died, but such death would have been a natural thing as part of human growth into perfection. Immortality cannot be imparted from a beginning but only from an end.
- f. sin is not deviation from an original state, but deviation from what will be. This interpretation involves an “eschatological ontology” (Zizioulos)
- e. evil is deviation from the goal, rather than the origin. It is a movement towards things other than the end – dysteleology
- f. Adam failed to be a faithful priest and order all things towards their end in God, in so failing he lost his own purpose in the world

4. Incarnation and the Plan of God

- a. there are multiple reasons (apart from those discussed above) for believing that the Incarnation was always a part of God’s plan.
- b. Incarnation is not an expedient to meet a contingency (sin), as if the greater could be conditioned by the lesser; the circumstances of the Incarnation relate to the Fall and add to the glory of Christ, but the idea of Incarnation relates to the absolute purpose of the love of God
- c. humanity could only ever find its fulfillment and perfection by union with the Son of God who is the Mediator between humans and God (1 Tim 2:5); from the beginning the sons of God were made in the image of the second person of the trinity (his relationship with the Father in the Spirit). This means that the constitution of humanity was from the beginning oriented to Incarnation. “When God wants to be what is not God, man comes to be.” (Karl Rahner).
- d. this explains why all things in heaven and earth find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ, without Jesus the creation could never reach its absolute unity (Eph 1:10)
- e. the revelation of God as trinity is not only the necessary presupposition for the knowledge of the fulfillment of the destiny of humanity but its actuality
- f. this requires the Son to come in the Spirit to reveal God as the Father; without this we could not share in the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4)
- g. Jesus relates the whole of creation back to God in a way that Adam refused to do, this is his high priestly service
- h. “Man and the world are no longer imprisoned in their past, in sin, decay and death. The past is affirmed in so far as it contributes to the end, to the coming of the kingdom.” (Zizioulas)

i. The notion of an absolute Incarnation “Presents to us the highest manifestation of divine love as answering to the idea of man, and not as dependent upon that which lay outside the Father’s Will.” (Wescott)

5. Christ and Consummation

a. Jesus own *telos* as the eschatological human being can only be realised through his acts which relate to universal human destiny

b. these are the actions that constitute his glorification and the condition of the new humanity in him

c. this is particularly the complex of cross – resurrection – ascension - session (John 12:27 -32; Acts 2:23 -33; Phil 2:5 -11)

d. the one outstanding action that is revelatory of the glory of humanity and deity in the person of Jesus is his return

e. the return of Jesus is accompanied by the general resurrection and the final judgement

f. until these sovereign acts of God in Christ (Matt 25:31 – 46; John 5:21 -28; 11:25 etc.) the fullness of the identity of a human person cannot be revealed because it can only be known when the sum total of the purpose of God in all the acts of humanity is revealed

g. when all this takes place we will know (1 Cor 13:12) that eschatology not only recapitulates protology but escalates it

h. I worship Jesus Christ because in him I see what I will be (1 John 3:2)

B: Hope

“In the judgement of fire the light of his salvation shines forth.” (Eberhard Arnold).

“Judgement is a sign of hope. Only downfall and end is hopeless.” (Moltmann)

The Fact of Hope

“What oxygen is to the lungs, hope is to human existence.” (E.Brunner) “Without hope, faith falls to pieces.” (Moltmann)

Human beings are constituted by creation in the image of God to seek the eternal (Eccl 3:11; Acts 17:27). In hope they reach beyond themselves to a state without limit – the reality of this is God. Where an absolute character is denied to the present state of affairs, idolatry is negated. Hope becomes real by constantly questioning and transforming the framework of secular life. This entails dissatisfaction with every finite achievement. Where this stance is not taken, the future will be sacrificed for the present.

The Loss of Hope

Humanity was always called to live on the basis of the divine promises. It is these promises (that include warnings e.g. Gen 2:17) that reveal the character of God. Promises of God that create a space for obedience or disobedience, this was first entailed in the command to fill the earth (Gen 1:26- 28) but not eat of the tree of knowledge. That humanity keep looking forward from the beginning to the consummation was always God’s intention.

Since God is the only absolute future, apart from God, humanity has no hope (Eph 2:12; 1 Thess 4:13). In the biblical framework, there is no eternal hope other than that to which humanity is called in Christ (Ephesians 1:18; Col 1:5; 2 Thess 2:16; Heb 6:18, 19; 1 Pet 1:3, 21; 3:15; 1 John 3:3). There can be no assurance of immortality in the human conscience apart from the gospel. “This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began,¹⁰ but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” (2 Tim 1:9 -10).

To say that the lost are already “dead in their sins” (Eph 2:1, 5; Col 2:13; 1 Tim 5:6; Jude 12; 1 John 3:14) means that fallen people are dysteleological. The ultimate fate of the wicked had no part in God’s original purpose for humanity, for hell was a place ‘prepared for the devil and his angels’ (Matt 25:41). No-one therefore ‘belongs’ in hell. It is an emergency measure (2 Pet.3:9), an end without a goal i.e. not an eschatological realisation.

No matter how desperately humans try to create a vocation for themselves (as in idolatry, Rom 1:18- 32), because they are created in the image of God this is impossible.

“It is not that we are mortal that creates the ultimate fear of death, but rather that we have lost our eternity...by sinful separation from the eternal; and that we are guilty of this separation....In the fear of death, it is not merely the knowledge of our finiteness that is preserved, but also the knowledge of our infinity, of our being determined for eternity, and of having lost eternity. We are slaves of fear, not because we have to die, but because we deserve to die.” (P.Tillich)

“If we can’t say, ‘To die is gain – to die is future grace! We will feel the compulsion to deny the truth of dying and to maximize the kind of pleasures we can get now without God.’” (John Piper)

“Man is one of your creatures, Lord, his instinct is to praise you. He bears about him the marks of death, the sign of his own sin....The thought of you stirs him so deeply that he cannot be content unless he praises you, because you have made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in you.” (Augustine)

“When the Titanic sunk, the orchestra played *Nearer My God to Thee*. If the Titanic sunk today, who knows what the band might play.” (*The West Australian* Easter editorial 8/4/1993 p.10)

“The belief in the inevitability of the future serves as a gyroscope to stabilize behavior. The loss of a future makes...an immersion in sensory experience a necessary adjustment.” (William Moore) Loss of eschatology inevitably leads to despair. (1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men in Australia suffer from depressive illness some time during their lifetime. This is our leading cause of suicide and 4% of population suffers from clinical depression in any one year.) Only the hope born of the death and resurrection of Jesus prevents the suffering of this world from ending in nothing.

The Ground and Goal of Hope

The Old Testament history of Israel coheres around the covenant promises to do with land, descendants and fellowship with God e.g. Gen 12:1- 3. The exodus made the faith of Israel into a historical religion oriented to the future faithfulness of the LORD e.g. Ex 19:1 -6. Failure to keep covenant, and subsequent exile, drew out new promises for the future of the covenant relationship e.g. Isa 2:1- 5; 11:1- 9; Jer 31:31 -34; Ezek 40- 48; Joel 2:28- 32 etc. This expands the horizon of expectation to include the nations and recapitulates the first state of creation. Since the returnees from Babylon do not inherit these promises, the already and “not yet” tension remains without a solution in the Old Testament. (There is no eschatology as such in the Old Testament period.)

This tension is resolved within the history of Jesus, by his death and resurrection into glory. It is in Jesus that God’s faithfulness is proved true, “For in him every one of God’s promises is a “Yes.””(2Cor 1:20) This is because he is the seed of the woman, the second Adam and the seed of Abraham (Gen 3:15; 1 Cor 15:45; Gal 3:16; Rev 12:5). As the one who completely fulfils the law (Rom 10:4) is the inheritor of all the covenant promises and starts them off on a new history. The path of hope leads from his historical uniqueness to universal transformation.

“The person and history of Jesus Christ provides it (Christian eschatology) with the touchstone by which to distinguish the spirit of eschatology from that of utopia.” “The believer becomes essentially one who hopes....for he has staked his future on the future of Jesus Christ.” (J. Moltmann)

New Testament hope is Christologically oriented in form and content. Christian eschatology is Christology in an eschatological perspective. It is directed as a result of the proclamation of Jesus towards the parousia and the kingdom of God as the embodiment of the common future of God, humanity and the world. The ground and content of our hope is Jesus Christ. “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope” (1 Tim 1:1).

The difference between the present and the future is the mode of the presence of Christ (Calvin). “Christ is not only the object of hope, he is its subject; it is his power we have.”

(Doyle) This means Christian hope is not extrapolation from present circumstances (as in extra – biblical approaches) but the anticipation of the promised future itself that is already at work in the present and the hope.

All the parameters of hope are concentrated in Christ,

First in his work in the general creation (Heb 1:2). Then in the creation of humanity. Adam as the protological human is created with a view towards the eschatological humanity of Christ (Rom 5:14; 1 Cor 15:44 -46). It follows that Adam was a creature of hope.

Second, hope is grounded in the incarnation and atonement of Christ (Rom 5:2). The hope that is born of the cross distinguishes Christian hope from superstition and unbelief. No one imagines this route to the future. Just as faith ties a person to the crucified Christ, hope opens faith to the all –embracing future of the risen Christ. The content of hope is the future of Jesus Christ. The resurrection of Jesus gives us a living hope (1 Pet 1:3 -4; 1 Cor 15:12- 23; Rom 6:1- 14). All the Father’s purposes have already been realised in the Son (2 Cor 1:18 -22).

The resurrection of Jesus is not a possibility within the world and its history, but a new possibility for the world and history. This is the generative eschatological – rupture that grounds the Christian faith, reveals the loving nature of God and discloses our ultimate destiny. It is a hope for the future of this world, not the eternity of heaven. It means eschatology has priority over history.

The sending of the Spirit by Jesus is also a source of hope for victory (Rom 5:5). The Christian hope rests on the visible return of Christ (Tit 2:13). It is the indwelling Christ who assures us of the hope of the glory of God (Col 1:27; 2 Cor 13:5).

“By the *doxa tou theou* is meant here (Rom 5:2 cf. 3:23; 8:17, 18, 21, 30; 9:23) that illumination of man’s whole being by the radiance of the divine glory which is man’s true destiny but which was lost through sin, as it will be restored (not just as it was, but immeasurably enriched through God’s own personal participation in man’s humanity in Jesus Christ – cf. – 8.17), when man’s redemption is finally consummated at the parousia of Jesus Christ.” (C.E.B. Cranfield *Romans* I, 260)

This is Paul’s perspective, “¹⁶ So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, ¹⁸ because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal. **5** For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ² For in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling— ³ if indeed, when we have taken it off^a we will not be found naked. ⁴ For while we are still in this tent, we groan under our burden, because we wish not to be unclothed but to be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵ He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.” (2 Cor 4:16- 5:5)

Resurrection hope encompasses not only humanity but all the creation (Rom 8:18- 25; 1 Cor 15:20 -22; Gal 5:5 -7; Eph 2:5 -7, 11 -19; Col 1:19- 23). History cannot be completed from within history but only (as in the beginning) by divine fiat.

“⁶The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. ⁷The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. ⁸The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder’s den. ⁹They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.” (Isa 11:6-9)

The goal of hope is the eternal presence of the glory of God in the new heavens and earth. This means unlimited fellowship with God and the consummation of the Fatherhood of God (1 Cor 15:20-28) in the glorification of his children in Christ (Eph 1:14 [cf. Deut 32:9]; 17-18; Col 1:27; [cf. 1 Thess 2:20]; 2 Cor 8:23; Rom 5:2)

“The consideration of this judgement ...is most desirable and comfortable to the righteous and the elect; because then their full deliverance shall be perfected, and there they shall receive the fruits of their labour and trouble which they have borne. Their innocence shall be known to all...the faithful shall be clothed with glory and honour; and the Son of God will confess their names before God the Father...the Lord will cause them to possess such a glory as never entered the heart of man. Therefore we expect that great day with a most ardent desire...” (Belgic Confession 1561)

Self - Transcending Hope

Eschatological reality shatters the continuities of our life. Regeneration ruptures the experiential and linguistic structures of our previous orientation in the world and establishes a fundamental difference between the old self-centred life and the God-centred new life in accord with God’s destiny for humanity. This is a rebirth and a new creation.

Because faith sees the promises of God have already been fulfilled outside of us and for us in Christ, hope must also be affirmed as outside of us, in Christ. By grounding hope in Christ we remove it from the realm of human desire and from being a comforting narrative by which the community sustains itself. It grasps us. It compels us in the direction of the eschaton.

The revelation of the risen Lord to his disciples identifies them with the mission of Jesus – which is the coming renewal of all things (Matt 19:28). “The gospel is understood as announcing the preactualization of the future consummation of all things in Jesus Christ.” (Ted Peters) Since the future is “that God may be all in all” (1 Cor 15:28), it is impossible for hope-filled Christians to resign from concern for the world. This entails the universal mission of the church to the nations.

Hope is heavenly: it is an inheritance “kept in heaven for us” (1 Pet 1:4) to be revealed on the last day (2 Tim 4:8; Rom 8:18-25). After the Fall, heaven is needed. Before this, humanity needed only the earth. In the End, heaven and earth are one.

“ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” (Rev 21:1-2)

This theology of hope is intrinsically opposed to a therapeutic model of life that sees the healing of the bruised as the means of self-discovery. Self-improvement, self-understanding

and self – fulfillment are not the axes of meaning in scripture. In our culture, the goal of being righteous has been replaced with one of being whole and happy. We extend our conceptions of God to find out what will occur at the culmination of life in the world.

The hope of dying well – in old age and prosperity, surrounded by family and friends - has replaced the hope of the resurrection. This “domesticates and individualizes heaven, making it the mere continuation of victorious Christian living now.” (Doyle). God does not promise we will “die well” but that we will share the sufferings of Christ (Rom 8:17- 18; 2 Cor 1:5 -7; Phil 1:29; 3:10; 1 Pet 2:21) as we await a crown kept in heaven (1 Pet 5:4; Rev 2:10).

Hope is not static but dynamic. Tested character results in an increase in hope (Rom 5:1- 5; 1 Pet 1:3- 9) because suffering purifies faith. This means faith is set increasingly on God (1 Pet 1:21), and not on the passing things of this world. “Hope and holiness are inseparable partners” (I. Pennicook)

Christian hope brings disquiet. It draws believers into solidarity with the whole of suffering creation (Rom 8:18 -25). This hope makes the Christian church a constant disturbance where human society seeks to stabilise itself into a “lasting city” (Heb 13:14). Christian hope is the determinant of Christian living (Col 3:1- 4; 1 Pet 2:11- 12).

The Certainty of Hope

“As long as we are depending on something other than hope we are not yet as empty as we ought to be if we are to correspond with the truth; we are still trying to fill up the hole which God alone can fill. But we can only say, “all we can do is hope”, if there is really something to hope for.” (Brunner)

This is not a subjective statement, it has nothing to do with either pessimism or optimism. hope is based on the relationship of the covenant people with God. Hope is certain because God’s promises are certain (2 Pet 1:4) and he “cannot lie” (Heb 6:18). Hope is animated by the experience of the glory of God (Col 1:27). This is a work of the Spirit (Rom 5:1 – 5).

Christians will experience defeat in this world without being defeated (Rom 8:35- 39; Rev 12:11). “We are like ill people under the care of a physician – we are ill in fact, but healthy in hope.” (Luther) Prophetic hope is hope in action. Apocalyptic hope is hope in the midst of danger. Reading the biblical apocalypses keep hope alive for God’s faithfulness in the terror of the times.

The Motivation of Hope

“You will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next....it is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this one.” (C.S. Lewis)

“The urgent intensity of the eschatological goodness of God should confer a *cognitive and behavioural expectancy* evoking in us awe, attraction, challenge and responsibility....this should manifest itself in a lively participation in the Spirit by which God moves all creation to final goodness.” (Daniel W. Hardy)

C. Practical Dimensions of Eschatology

Eschatology and Theology:

“Christianity which is not entirely and completely eschatology ... is entirely and completely contrary to Christ.” (Barth, *Romans*, 314). Revelation, without which no theology of the Word of God is possible, is not an epiphany of the eternal present (Platonism, Kant) but an apocalypse of the promised future. This is an eschatological disclosure.

If the theology of the present time seems inadequate to deal with the crises of the age then it must have abandoned a biblical eschatology. One of the problems here is that eschatology has been side – lined into a topic to do with the “last things”. The whole of Christian life and reflection is eschatological.

The Need for an Eschatological Restoration

“Where Christianity loses its ability to recreate the world, other powers will take its place.” (Bosch)

Modern secular and western faith in progress (postmodernism is an ideological objection to this) is a form of salvation- history millenarianism. That is, technology and democracy will ensure things keep getting “better and better”.

At the end of the Cold war, American political scientist Francis Fukuyama declared that the collapse of communism marked the end of history, the final triumph of capitalism and liberal democracy. This spelled the end of conflict between global political and economic systems. We were entering into an era of “the globalisation of everything”. (Islamic terrorism is in part a rejection of this vision).

This is in effect a “monetary- eschatology” – an unlimited pursuit of additional wealth by those who already have it through the power of exchange. This has produced a human society with values conceived in terms of what is produced and consumed. It is only the person who has power that is interested in the progress and prolongation of history on a smooth course. The person who is powerless and oppressed is interested in a speedy end and an alternate future.

Most Western Christians are acculturated into this vision of ever increasing prosperity. We are heirs of a form of realized eschatology that has made peace with the world allowing the dominant popular culture to set the agenda.

Horizontal and Vertical Eschatology:

This is due to a shift from a balanced “already- not yet” eschatology (future oriented and horizontal) to an “over- realized” eschatology (vertical in approach) A biblical eschatology ties together the present and the future, this world and the next, as such it embraces both reformation and affirmation (cf. revolution or renunciation). This is visible, for example, in the attitude of the New Testament to the institutions of patriarchy and slavery.

A thoroughgoing vertical eschatology understands the relationship between creation and redemption. The interplay between these themes determines attitudes towards various social roles. For example, conservatives stress creation orders and so focus on issues such as

submission, subordination and headship. Radicals or progressives emphasis redemption, and so focus on freedom, mutuality and equality Both categories are in fact united in Christ. . Creation isn't transcended but transformed in Christ – this is the biblical theme of fulfillment rather than a return to or negation of the protological state. Scriptural apocalyptic, which will bracket the resurrection and parousia of Jesus, renders to reality its due and resists pious illusion.

The primary eschatological problem for the church is not the delay of the parousia but a more fundamental distortion of eschatology. Both ecstatic groups and institutional Christianity can believe in imminent parousia because they replace future eschatology with a (vertically) realised one. For example, the likes of the “eschatological women” in Corinth (dualistic, world- denying, separatist, private cf. focus of Revelation) and modern dispensationlists (essential goodness of creation, spirit can be incarnated in human institutions, public cf. focus of Paul on marriage, family, government etc.)

Historically, we see this influence in the development of Augustinian amillennialism. The church becomes identical with the first stage of God's reign itself. The apocalyptic elements of hope in the New Testament became domesticated into the thousand year reign of the Roman state church.

“The strictly transcendental view of the new eon, as a renewal that was to be miraculously brought about by God, that caused the critical attitude towards the old existing eon to be in practice extremely conservative. The existing order of things, as being the temporally final order, was felt to be historically speaking the conclusively final order....” (H. von Soden). Since this age was the final one, it needed to run its course undisturbed.

This happened, not so much because of the delay of the parousia, but because the presence of eternity was upheld in the cultus e.g. in the eucharist. Jesus as Pantokrator replaced the awaited apocalyptic Christ. This was necessarily accompanied by a waning of interest in the cross as the key – signature of Jesus' lordship in the world. The cultic presence of Christ replaces his “not yet”.

“Instead of citizens of the coming kingdom we have a people redeemed from heaven. Instead of the citizens of the passing aeon we have those that are earthly and of the world. And finally, the cross becomes a timeless sacrament martyrdom which perfects the martyr and unites him with the heavenly Christ.” (Moltmann) This is an *eschatologia gloriae*. The biblical (especially Pauline) eschatological presence of future participation in Jesus resurrection e.g. Phil 3:10 -11, becomes a cultic presence of the eternal. (The biblical material however is not only a matter of “Become what you are” but “become what you will be.” E.g. Rom 8:11.)

Hope became individualized for most of the history of European Christianity – Augustine, Aquinas, Luther. E.g. during the Middle Ages hope became reduced to the beatific vision and the soul's enjoyment of God. The all embracing expectation of the kingdom of God is neglected. For example, if the German church had paid attention to the eschatological structure of Romans 9- 11 the holocaust could not have happened. (Liberalism following Schleiermacher and existentialism had reduced spirituality to an internal experience.)

This distortion of biblical framework has continued down to the present. Chris Hall, for example, speaks of the situation in the 70's. The Jesus movement under the influence of Hal Lindsey's dispensational premillennialism stressed the imminent return of Christ, but

“We wanted our cake (Jesus to return) and to eat it too (to live however we wanted until he came back). Finally, this divorce between eschatology and ethics blew up in our faces.” Most of the movement witnessed moral collapse. This lesson has not been learned by the popularizing successors of Lindsey (e.g. the *Left Behind* series). Any theology that seeks to discover the eschatological progressiveness of salvation history from the signs of the times and not the cross and resurrection turns history into a substitute for God. The preserving power of the gospel (Rom 1:16) is necessarily lost.

This is a crisis situation for the majority Western church because of its emotional immaturity. A mature adult is able to defer self-gratification in favour of a higher purpose, whereas a child’s needs must be met immediately with no thought for the cost. Only a mature future orientation facilitates the embrace of ethical responsibility for our society and world. “To resist God’s call forward and fixate ourselves in the present is the essence of evil. Sin is the assertion of the part against the whole and the present against the future... What we think of as missing the mark is less a matter of falling away from a perfect past than a matter of failing to reach the ideal of a healed future.” (Ted Peters).

Eschatology and Moral Exhortation

An eschatologically grounded ethic is always relevant because it is anchored in eternal principles. The current moral collapse in the Western church is an area of major present concern and can be traced back to a failure to enact a biblically grounded eschatology. Although the following statistics are from the U.S., they reflect a trend across western cultures.

Ronald J. Sider, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004). The stats here are from a synopsis of the book, “The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience,” *Books and Culture* 11 (January/February 2005), pp. 8-9, 39-42.

- ◆ **Divorce:** 33% of all born again Christians had been divorced compared to 34% of non-born again Americans, and 25% of evangelicals as 25% of the total population have been divorced (“evangelicals” are more fluent in faith than those merely “born-again”).
- ◆ **Giving:** Evangelical giving decreased from 6.15% of total income in 1968, to 4.74% in 1985, to 4.27% in 2001. In 2002, 6% of born again Christians and 9% of evangelicals tithed.
- ◆ **Sexuality:** Evangelical youth are 10% less likely to engage in pre-marital sex than nonevangelicals.

Since the True Love Waits program began in 1993, 2.4 million teens pledged sexual abstinence until marriage, but in 2004, 88% of those that pledged among a sample of 12,000 reported having sex before marriage; 12% kept their promise. 25% of born again Christians have cohabited with a member of the opposite sex prior to marriage, compared to 33% of non-Christians. 26% of traditional evangelicals deny that premarital sex is wrong, and 13% believe that extra marital sex is acceptable; 46% of moderate evangelicals say that premarital sex is acceptable, and 19% believe that adultery is morally permitted.

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There is no basis for paranesis (moral exhortation) without eschatology (Mark 13:32 - 36; 1 Cor 15:17- 19; 29- 34; 58). Jesus unashamedly spoke of the role of rewards (Matt 6:4, 6, 18; 16:27; Luke 14:8- 11; 19:17, 19) and punishments (Matt 5:22, 29, 30; 7:19; 10:28; 13:49-50; 18:6; 25:30; Luke 12:47- 48) as motives for the moral life. “You will be repaid on that day when the good rise from the dead” (Lk 14:14 REB).

Issues of obedience and disobedience are directly linked to one's eternal destiny. Faith is attested by works. "Man is confronted by the kingdom of Jesus Christ in both its present and future aspects" (C.F.Henry). This is clear in the case of the rewards in the beatitudes. It is impossible to rid ethics of this eschatological orientation e.g. the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit relates to an "eternal sin" (Matt 12:31). The negative sanction of punishment is more prevalent because of the precarious human situation.

In the letters, the Christian moral life points forward to resurrection and the judgement (Rom 14:10; 2 Cor 5:10). We are to work out "our salvation in fear and trembling" (Phil 2:12), making "holiness perfect in the fear of the Lord" (2 Cor 7:1 cf. Heb 12:14 etc.) Paul appears to warn his hearers of the possibility of final loss (1 Cor 3:17; 9:27; 10:6ff; Gal 6:8; Eph 5:5). Eschatology therefore appears as a sanction to moral earnestness. "The eschatological is the vindication of the ethical." (C.F.Henry)

The ethics of the New Testament project a total demand on the Christian, as if we were already in the world to come. In the Sermon on the Mount, for instance, Jesus insists not only that we do differently but that we be different e.g. in how we think. This is humanly impossible. Hence, all our ethics is challenged eschatologically. This cannot be separated from the mystery of new being, that a believer is in fact part of the new creation (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 2:20; 6:15). The actions of the Christian are called to be sacramental of the new aeon. They challenge the nature of the existing (perishing) order. "Theological ethics is eschatological or it is nothing." (H. Thieliicke.)

Traditionally, the appeal to eschatology as a foundational for ethics has been explicit e.g. in the second century Justin Martyr states that Christians should be, "marked out from the rest of pleasure-loving human society...by their conviction that the wicked will be punished in eternal fire, and the Christ-like just united with God, free from suffering. This is the reason Christians are truthful in affirming their faith, as well as the ground of their good citizenship and their ultimate fearlessness before the threat of persecution."

Much of contemporary Christian eschatology fails to spell out the implications of its themes for present living. The contemporary "born again" movement seems to reduce salvation to an experience, with little understanding of the kingdom of God as a present and future reality. Eschatology, ethics and assurance are separated from one another.

What is most striking in the teaching of both Jesus and Paul is how they envision the ultimate future as happening in this world, not in heaven. Jesus barely mentions the state of heaven (Luke 16:19-31; 23:43), and Paul sees it as a state of nakedness, an interim condition that is less desirable than experiencing the resurrection body here on earth. Redemption was only final and fully complete if it entailed the human body and the space-time world in which we live.

Salvation "is not to be conceived as the rescue of favoured individuals out of a doomed world to participate in an otherworldly existence totally unrelated to life on earth. Man's personality is so intimately linked with his environment that he must be saved in the context of all the corporate relationships and loyal ties, achievements, and aspirations, which constitute a genuinely human existence." (Caird)

In North America this separation of the present and the future can be traced back to the late nineteenth century abandonment of the optimistic postmillennial holistic understanding of mission (Edwards, Finney) that intentionally spawned political action and social reform, and

the adoption of a dichotomistic premillennialism. The vision was now one of rescuing as many as possible as quickly as possible from a fallen world. "I look at this world as a wrecked vessel. God has given me a lifeboat, and said to me, 'Moody, save all you can. God will come in judgement and burn up this world... The world is getting darker and darker; its ruin is coming nearer and nearer. If you have any friends on this wreck unsaved you had better lose no time in getting them off.'" Mission became equated with evangelism and social structures were left unchanged (e.g. Billy Graham).

The old Calvinistic (Puritan) vision of a transformed culture was replaced by political action as no more than a pietistic means to restrain evil. For example, in the arena of prohibition (1930's) and gay marriage (today). Premillennialists generally waited for the second coming to transform a world that would be given over to Satan before Jesus returned. "God didn't send me down here to clean up the fish bowl but to fish in it." (Hal Lindsey). Why be concerned for worldly structures if God will destroy the earth?

Conversely, if we acknowledge the final goodness of God, we must question all differences that are currently alien to God's work, whether ecological, social, political or economic. Eschatological norms are needed. Without these, the social conscience atrophies and we are left without a final universal theodicy.

The ethics of Jesus is neither world conforming nor world denying. The parable of the talents (Matt 25:14- 30) stresses that followers of Christ must "do business" in this present world whilst all along waiting for the return of their Lord. The parable of the sheep and the goats (Matt 25:31- 46) predicates eternal reward and punishment according to service to the needy (Christian) in this world.

If the final renewal of all things (Matt 19:28) is an extension of the resurrection event, in which we participate by regeneration and union with Christ (Titus 3:5), then there must be significant elements of continuity between this world and the next. "The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it." (Rev 21:24) No effort a Christian makes in this world is in vain (1 Cor 15:58).

This coheres with the biblical images such as sowing and reaping, ripening and harvest, kernel and ear. The works of believers somehow follow them (1 Cor 3:14; Rev 14:13; 21:24, 26). Grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it. Anticipation of the soon return of Christ is not a biblical basis for exclusion from present day responsibilities but for engagement (2 Thess 3:6 - 14).

Christians should be living a life style that critiques the current state of the world. This means embodying eschatological values that are characteristic of the kingdom of God: love, joy, peace, justice, equality, unity etc. This is living anticipatorily, from a hope of the consummation. A proleptic gospel and eschatology provide a positive hope, unlike the life denial or life avoidance all too often generated by dispensational and apocalyptic eschatologies.

A biblical eschatology rules out a gospel of wealth and consumption. Materialism is excluded because humanity cannot solve the problems of the world that flow from its own corruption (Rom 8:18- 25). Jesus warns us not to lay up treasures on earth but in heaven (Matt 6:19- 21). Hedonism is excluded; God will judge the immoral (Heb 13:4).

In the twenty-first century there is the danger of false church triumphalism that exempts the church from the judgment of God and from the cross of persecution. A proper approach to biblical apocalyptic neither de- eschatologises history nor de- historicises eschatology.

Ecclesiology:

The church is the primary sign of the kingdom and a colony of heaven. Eschatological Christianity (which is simply faithfulness to the biblical vision) is an antidote for “playing church” (Kierkegaard). This calls for a serious critique of prevailing structures. For example, it is possible to see denominations as a compromise- seeking to bring together the inclusive vision of the church and the exclusive claims of the sect.

A prophetic church brings the judgement of God to bear on both church and society. It keeps alive the distance between the already and the not yet. It is the biblical alternative to an acculturated church. The church serves the eschatological kingdom of God not itself.

Prophetic hope is hope in action. Apocalyptic hope is hope in the midst of danger. Biblical apocalypses keep hope alive for God’s faithfulness in the terror of the times.

“Saints ...constitute an eschatological category: are the transforming leaven within the institutional structures of the church that enable the church to rise above the pressures of the culture and become a vanguard of the ever advancing kingdom of God” (Bloesch).

1. INTRODUCTION TO ESCHATOLOGY

1.1 The Nature of Eschatology

(a) Literally ‘the doctrine of the last things’

eschata = last things

eschaton = the end.

(b) Deals with questions concerning the completion of God’s work in the world, the consummation of history.

(c) Can be regarded as the completion of the doctrine of the person and work of Christ. Focus on Jesus’ liberating kingly rule. Eschatology, as the consummation of God’s work in Christ, is the key to all the other doctrines. God’s purposes in creation and salvation become clear in relation to his goal.

(d) This leads on to the thesis that eschatology is not an attempted description or theological science relating to some future period of time, but stages in the life of the person of Jesus Christ. (Konig, A. 1989. *The eclipse of Christ in eschatology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.) To think otherwise is to depersonalise eschatology. Eschatology is not a subset of God’s historical providence, with Jesus as the divine revealer of the plan. This tends to make the impersonal events of history rather than the person of Christ the theme of eschatological discourse.

The proper object of eschatology is not the “last things” (*eschata*) but the “last one” (*eschatos*, Rev 1:7; 2:8; 22:13). Since Jesus came in “the fullness of time” (Gal 1:4) this means he is the beginning of “the last days” (Heb 1:2; 2 Clem 14:2; Hermas, *Sim*, 9.12.3). The whole of Christian theology is eschatological, for the dominant note of the New Testament is fulfillment in Jesus.

The real strength of this view is that it is founded on the entire structure of the Bible, that is, everything leads up to Christ, flows from Christ and culminates in Christ.

This means there is no eschatology in the Old Testament, but from the time of the coming of Christ the whole action of God in his kingdom through the Church and by the Gospel is eschatological.

(e) from a perspective ‘in Christ’ the end of the world is not a far off distant time, for the future of the world under the Lordship of Christ is a mode of time closer to God’s eternity than the present. Viewed from eternity, world – reconciliation and world – fulfillment are but a single moment. This means that eschatology is not futuristic, in some mysterious sense.

1.2 Eschatology as Goal Directed Christology

1.2.1 Jesus as the Goal of Creation

Jesus is the “Alpha and Omega” (Rev. 1: 8; 21: 6; 22: 13), the “beginning and the end” (Rev. 22: 13), the “first and last” (Rev. 1: 17; 2: 8; 22: 13). As the “beginning of God’s creation” he is its starting point, and as the “end” he is its goal. In the purpose of the Father creation moves from Christ to Christ,” all things have been created through him and for him” (Col. 1:16).

As the “firstborn of all creation” he is its leader, chief, Lord and pilot (Col. 1: 17). To say that “in him all things hold together” (Col. 1: 17) is to state that he is the source of the inner ordering of the cosmos, the basis of all its true relationships. Since the beginning and end of creation is a **person** then the coming of this last one means that the last days have come. This is to note that the New Testament nowhere uses such expressions as “last days” and “end of the ages” to refer to some indefinitely future period. See, for example, Acts 2: 17; Heb. 1: 2; 9: 26; James 5: 3; 1 Pet. 1: 20; 2 Pet. 2: 3. According to 1 John 2: 18 this is already “the last hour”.

The single undivided expectation of the New Testament is the person of Christ, not future events. “The promise of the future is not the religious counterpart of secular fortune telling.” (Berkouwer) .

1.2.2 Jesus as the Content of Eschatology

Eschatology can be described in terms of three moments in the life of one person, Jesus Christ. These three, as episodes in his life, are equally eschatological.

- 1) The first of these is Christ **for us**. This consists in the objective atonement and reconciliation achieved by God in Christ through his representative humiliation and glorification. Since this is already completed **in** Christ as God’s faithful covenant partner it is already complete for the Church in Christ. The End has been reached in Jesus. The cry: “It is finished.” (John 19:30) means a real transformation of all things in Christ.
- 2) The second stage consists of Christ being **in us** by his Spirit applying to us what has already been achieved in him. This is a reality being reached **by Jesus** as he incorporates us with himself as faithful covenant partners of God. In this the Church is being created. It cooperates with him in its sanctification.
 - i) The prophetic promises of the coming Messiah who will inaugurate the new creation, e.g. Is. 9: 1ff, have begun to be fulfilled in Jesus.
 - ii) The Old Testament expectation of a universal knowledge of God amongst His people (Jer. 31:34) through forgiveness and the gift of the Spirit (Ezek. 36: 26) is in the process of being realised from the day of Pentecost on.
 - iii) The power of the Kingdom of God has come with Christ and His Spirit (Matt. 12: 28; Rom. 14: 17 etc.) so that the anticipated ‘last days’ have arrived (Acts 2: 16, 17).
- 3) Finally, Jesus will come again **with us** at the End. This stage will be reached **through** Jesus as he brings to fulfilment all of God’s covenant purposes for creation. At this point the Church will be perfected, Jesus will complete in us what is complete in him and has been in process in us. This will not require any activity on our part.

1.3 The Dimensions of Eschatology

1. Present and future - the ages overlap cf. time and eternity.

Christians live in the overlap between ‘the present evil age’ and the fullness of the ‘age to come’ (Gal 1:4).

This is the state of the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’, the so-called ‘time between the times’.

We wait with anticipation the Second Coming of Jesus, for then what we know in part we shall know in full (1Cor 13:9ff).

2. Individual and cosmic - the work of Christ encompasses not only the salvation of the individual but the status of angels, the redemption of the race and the new heavens and earth.
3. This worldly and other worldly - the kingdom of God is a reality now and must impact all dimensions of human existence, e.g., social justice.
4. The Church and the world - the hope held out in the Gospel of the Kingdom is offered to all people. The Church exists for the Kingdom and is the vehicle of this hope.
5. Natural and supernatural - the coming of the kingdom of God cannot be realised by any immanent process of social reform but only by the supernatural operation of God's Spirit.
6. Jews and Gentiles-the Jewish people have a unique status and place in God's plan.

NOTE: Responsibility vs Escapology e.g., 2Pet 3:10-13

Since this world will be judged and transformed:

- (i) don't identify with it as it is passing away.
- (ii) don't scorn it for it will be redeemed.
- (iii) live in it as if you were in the new one.

1.4 Eschatology and Doxology

Even if all true Christian doctrine is to be grounded in the worship of the church, this is especially true of eschatology. It is as we aware that we are gathering together around the exalted Lord in heaven with the angelic host and the church triumphant that eschatology becomes realised in our midst. Any doctrine which pertains to the End and which does not lead to praise must be questioned.

2. APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

2.1 What is Apocalyptic

1. The Meaning of Apocalyptic

Greek **apokalypsis** = revealing that which has been hidden; unveiling. An attempt to reveal divine mysteries concerning the future.

“ ‘Apocalypse ‘is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework in which a revelation is mediated by an other worldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.’” (Collins)

2. The Period of Apocalyptic

Approximately 200BC - 100AD.

3. The Provenance of Apocalyptic

Jewish writings - may be in Aramaic or Greek, e.g., Ethiopic Enoch, Jubilees, Apocalypse of Adam, Psalms of Solomon, Apocalypse of Baruch.

4. The Genesis of Apocalyptic

- (a) The emergence of a ‘righteous remnant’ - powerless but devoted minority (visionary cf. hierocratic).
- (b) The problem of evil - post exilic Judaism was relatively righteous but oppressed e.g., Antiochus Epiphanes.
- (c) The cessation of prophecy - ‘the prophets have fallen asleep’ (2 Baruch 85:3). Apocalyptists wrote their books to fill a spiritual vacuum, i.e., to bring a word of God to the people of their day.

5. Characteristics of Apocalyptic

- (a) Pseudonymous - revelations are placed in the mouth of a famous Old Testament saint to validate the message.
- (b) Pseudo - predictive - only appear predictive because written from the perspective of the Old Testament saints. Written to assure their contemporaries that God’s deliverance was at hand.
- (c) Imitative - imitated the visions of prophets, e.g., Daniel, recorded in Old Testament.
- (d) Revelatory - relate the content of dreams, visions and heavenly voyages.
- (e) Symbolic - e.g., beasts for people, horns for kings, stars or men for angels, use of numbers. Symbols were necessary because of the nature of their material.
- (f) Dualistic - ‘the Most High has made not one world but two’ (2 Esdras 7:50).
This age is evil, the age to come will be God’s kingdom. Temporal and historical Antitheses, e.g., light versus darkness, God’s people versus the heathen, evil versus good.
- (g) Pessimistic - there is no hope for this world. God has withdrawn, the righteous must endure patiently as they await the end.

- (h) Deterministic - the evil age has a set course to run, at an appointed time God will sovereignly intervene to change the course of history. This led to a preoccupation with dates, calendars and so on.
- (i) Ethical Passivity - no call for God's people to respond. The righteous are consoled.

2.2 Biblical Apocalyptic

1. Old Testament

Daniel; Isaiah 24-27; (Ezk 38-39; Joel; Zech. 9-14)

- closer to prophetic eschatology than apocalyptic, i.e., part of the background to apocalyptic, e.g. not deterministic, not pessimistic or ethically passive. The dualism is more complex, God's kingdom is already at work.

2. The Book of Revelation

- (a) Not pseudonymous - the author is known to the recipients.
- (b) It is written as a prophecy (Rev 1:3; 22:7,10,18,19).
- (c) The visions are not literary devices but genuine.
- (d) Not pessimistic - history is the scene of the Lamb's redemption.
- (e) Deep sense of moral urgency.
- (f) Existence of pastoral letter to actual churches.

2.3 Apocalyptic Psychology

The violent nature of the imagery in apocalyptic literature is deliberately evocative. It speaks to the "poor man", righteous before God but oppressed by the power of the wicked. There is a longing for God to vindicate his saints, and his own character, by decisively acting to end injustice. The language of apocalyptic seeks to engender a catharsis, a purification and an empowerment of the soul so that a healthy life can be lived. Alien loyalties, temptations and despair are purged away by repeated images of the destruction of the wicked and the elevation of the persecuted. These evoke commitment to an alternative to the prevailing world view.

3. SOME NOTES ON PROPHECY

Beale, G.K. 2004. *The temple and the church's mission*. Leicester: Apollos, 376 - 385

Konig, A. 1989. *The eclipse of Christ in eschatology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 182-189

Travis, S.H. 1982. *I believe in the second coming of Jesus*. London: Hodder & Houghton, 135-143.

Principles of Interpretation

1. Prophetic language is frequently poetic and therefore symbolic, even extravagant: 'the hills will become a plain (Isaiah 40:4), 'the hills were rocking to and fro' (Jeremiah 4:23f.).
2. Old Testament prophecy is normally addressed to Israel as God's covenant people. Its concern is not primarily with the nations. If we ask, "Who is God's covenant people?", the New Testament's answer is that the church of Jesus Christ shares this role.
3. Prophecy is addressed to a particular historical situation. For example Ezekiel 37, Isaiah 7:14. To see Isaiah 7:14 as *primarily* a prediction of the virgin birth is to do violence to its intention in Isaiah's message. It came to be applied to Jesus in Matthew 1:23 because the early Christians saw Jesus as fulfilling a pattern of which the Isaiah passage speaks. Because prophecy is tied to a particular historical situation, it uses terms appropriate to those times. Abraham is promised a land. Exiles from a ruined Jerusalem are promised a new Temple (Ezekiel 40-48). A different historical situation at the time of fulfilment may require that the fulfilment should go beyond the literal meaning of the original prophecy. And it is because the prophecies address one particular situation that, once they are fulfilled (for example, in the return from exile), we cannot apply them in detail to another, later historical situation (for example, the Middle East today). At most we can draw general parallels, as the New Testament does, between the situation addressed by the prophet and the situation of today's 'Israel', the church.
4. Biblical prophecy is conditional. When prophets predict the future, they predict so that something can be done about it. Prophets address situations with words of condemnation and hope, seeking thereby to influence men's actions. Conditions are often implied in the Bible even when they are not actually stated. For example, Amos 3:12 predicts the destruction of Samaria. An unconditional prophecy, it seems. But elsewhere Amos says destruction can be avoided, if only the people will turn to God (Amos 5:14). So the same condition must be implied in the earlier prophecy of Amos 3:12. Only by special pleading can the promise of the land to Abraham be said to be unconditional. Immediately after the promise of the land in Genesis 17:8, God says to Abraham, 'You also must agree to keep the covenant with me, both you and your descendants in future generations. You and your descendants must all agree to circumcise every male among you' (Genesis 17:9f). Circumcision is here a specific example of the general response of obedience (Genesis 18:17-19; 22:18; 26:5).
5. Prophecy is not always literally fulfilled. Jeremiah and Isaiah predicted that Babylon would fall to the Medes (Jeremiah 2:11, 28; Isaiah 13:17), and Isaiah described the merciless killing of its people (Isaiah 13:14-22). But, Babylon fell to the Persians, who had gained control of the Medes, and Babylon surrendered without a struggle. The prophecy was fulfilled substantially, but not literally. Cf. Isaiah 10:28-34. At Pentecost Peter quoted Joel which spoke of the sun darkened and the moon turning red as blood (Acts 2:16-21). Peter says the prophecy is fulfilled, but we are given no hint that the whole prophecy was fulfilled literally.

6. In the goodness of God the fulfilment of a prophecy frequently goes beyond the original prediction. Who, reading the Old Testament, foresaw an incarnation, a crucifixion and a resurrection as God's precise way of accomplishing our salvation? The essentially new can never be predicted. Those who looked for a military and political Messiah failed to see that Jesus had more, not less, to offer. Those who accused him at his trial could not get beyond a literal understanding of his prediction that within three days he would rebuild the ruined Temple (Matthew 26:61; cf. John 2:18-22).

In the New Testament we find Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in surprising ways. Ezekiel 40-48 describes the new Temple which God has in store and expects people of all nations to come and share in its worship and sacrifices. The prophecy of the new Temple is already fulfilled in the Christian church. In 2 Corinthians 6:16 Paul again speaks of the church of God's temple, citing a passage from Ezekiel 37:26f. Other examples of a more than literal or physical fulfilment include Amos 9:11-12 → Acts 15:15-17. The details of such fulfilment could only be revealed eschatologically.

(This involves the notion of "extended meaning"; original meaning is open to recontextualisation. Meaning is not restricted to verbal meaning but has wider significance. Divine intentions exceed authorial intentions of the OT writers. This is the world Jesus inaugurates. This concept is not restricted to prophecy e.g. Jesus as the "fulfilment" of the Passover sacrifice (John 19:36; Ex 12:46; Num 9:12; Ps 34:20) is a movement from "shadow" to "substance".

7. If the fulfilment of a prophecy can be progressive, and realised at different levels, it follows that there can be multiple fulfilments of Old Testament prophecy without contradiction. Here are some examples.

1. Exodus – Egypt, Babylon (Isa 42:16ff; 48:20-21; 49:8-13), Jesus (Mt 2:15)
2. Zion – Jerusalem, Church, new Jerusalem (2 Sam 5:7; Ps 2:6; Heb 12:22; Rev 14:1)
3. Day of the Lord (Amos 5:18-20)
 - i) Fall of Jerusalem (Ez 13:5; Lam 1:12; 2:1,22)
 - ii) Ministry of John the Baptist (Mk 1:2 = Mal 3:1-2)
 - iii) Jesus (Lk 4:16-21 = Isa 61:1-2)
 - iv) Pentecost (Acts 2:16-21 = Joel 2:28-32)
 - v) Second Coming (2 Pet 3:12, Rev 16:14)
 - vi) Weekly worship (Rev 1:10)
4. Zech 12:10 → cross (John 19:37); Second Coming (Mt 24:30; Rev 1:7)
5. Immanuel (Isa 7:14), → 7:15-16; Mt 1:22-23 (Jesus)

(This involves a principle of greater fulfilment with time. If this principle were contradicted e.g. the construction of a physical "temple" in Jerusalem after the resurrection of Jesus (John 2:18-22), redemption would go backwards.)

8. Much of what is taken as prediction is really promise. Predictions seem limited by a literal fulfilment, promises are charged with the rich possibilities which God holds for them.
9. Because of this tendency of prophecy to be fulfilled in ways which could not be precisely foreseen, we must read the Old Testament in the light of the New. Time and again we see in the New Testament that the expectations of the prophets reach their goal not in political, historical events but in the person and work of Jesus and in the life of his church.

10. These principles also apply prospectively. Since biblical prophecy is theology and not history written in advance, the book of Revelation does not give us a detailed plan for the future. John is not interpreting the future. John is interpreting the *significance* of the cross and the resurrection *for the future*. John is not looking at a sneak preview of history down through the corridors of time to the end; he is declaring God's revelation of *the meaning* of the cross-resurrection *for time and history until the end*. It is because we live in this same end-time as the first Christians (post cross and resurrection), that the book of Revelation is immediately relevant to us.

4. REVELATION

4.1 Principles of Interpretation

4.1.1 The Centrality of Christ

Tenney discusses the various schools of interpretation, and then says “the real key to the interpretation of Revelation does not lie in any one of these theories, however great its merits, but in the structure of the book itself as it represents the person of Christ. The very title of the book, ‘the Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show unto his servants, even the things which must shortly come to pass...,’ indicates that the central theme is the person of Christ as he reveals the future. There is some question as to whether ‘the Revelation of Jesus Christ’ means the revelation of his person, or the revelation that he gave, which came from him. If the former interpretation of the title sets the topic, then Revelation is an unfolding of the person of Christ as he is related to the future. If the second interpretation is taken, the main topic is the programme of the future as mediated through Christ. Either is grammatically possible, and either makes Christ the central figure of the book.” (Merrill C Tenney. 1985:390 *New Testament survey*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.)

Revelation is primarily a revelation *of Jesus* (1:1). This book gives us the most complete picture of who Jesus is following His resurrection and ascension. He is revealed as God 1:8 cf 1:17, glorious 1:14-16, the Lion and the Lamb 5:5-6, still human 1:13, having great authority 2:26-27, and the mighty conqueror 17:14. The secondary purpose of Revelation is to bring encouragement by outlining things which were soon to take place (1:1). This outline is given as visions, encoded in rich symbolism, which we must seek to decode or interpret.

Tenney presents the following Christ-centred approach to Revelation (pp 391-393):

OUTLINE

Using the clues thus provided by the book itself, the following outline is proffered:

THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

in “the things shortly to come to pass”

1. Prologue: Christ Communicating 1:1-8
 - Title 1:1
 - Agent 1:2
 - Commendation 1:3
 - Destination 1:4-5a
 - Dedication 1:5b-6
 - Motto 1:7
 - Imprimatur 1:8

2. Vision 1: Christ in the Church: The Living 1:9-3:22
 - Place: Patmos
 - The Portrait 1:9-20
 - The Messages 2:1-3:22
 - To Ephesus 2:1-7
 - To Smyrna 2:8-11
 - To Pergamum 2:12-17
 - To Thyatira 2:18-29
 - To Sardis 3:1-6
 - To Philadelphia 3:7-13
 - To Laodicea 3:14-22

3. Vision 2: Christ in the Cosmos: The Redeemer 4:1-16:21
 - Place: Heaven
 - The Scene in Heaven 4:1-5:14
 - The seven Seals 6:1-8:5
 - The white horse 6:1-2
 - The red horse 6:3-4
 - The black horse 6:5-6
 - The pale horse 6:7-8
 - The souls of martyrs 6:9-11
 - The signs in heaven 6:12-17
 - Parenthesis: The sealing of the 144,000* 7:1-17
 - The silence in heaven 8:1-5
 - The Seven Trumpets 8:6-11:19
 - Hail, fire, and blood 8:7
 - Sea turned into blood 8:8-9
 - Star falling on waters 8:10-11
 - Sun, moon, and stars darkened 8:12-13
 - Opening of bottomless pit 9:1-12
 - Loosing of four angels 9:13-21
 - Parenthesis: The little book*
 - Measuring of temple 10:1-11:14
 - Two witnesses
 - Announcement of consummation 11:15-19

The Signs	12:1-16:21
The personages	12:1-14:20
The woman	12:1-2
The dragon	12:3-4
The man-child	12:5-6
Michael, the archangel	12:7-17
The beast from the sea	13:1-10
The beast from the earth	13:11-18
The Lamb on Mt. Zion	14:1-5
<i>Parenthesis:</i> The angelic messages	
The call to judgement	14:6-7
The fall of Babylon	14:8
The warning of wrath	14:9-12
The blessing of the dead	14:13
The call to harvest	14:14-16
The reaping of grapes of wrath	14:17-20
The Seven Bowls	15:1-16:21
The scene in heaven	15:1-8
The judgements 16:1-21	
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Turning of sea into blood	16:3
Turning of fountains into blood	16:4-7
Increase of heat of sun	16:8-9
Darkness	16:10-11
Unclean spirits	16:12-16
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4. Vision 3:Christ in Conquest: The Warrior	17:1-21:8
Place: Wilderness	
The Destruction of Babylon	17:1-18:24
The Rejoicing in Heaven	19:1-10
The Overthrow of the Beast	19:11-21
The Binding of Satan	20:1-3
The Millennial Reign	20:4-6
The Final Rebellion	20:7-10
The Judgement of the Dead	20:11-15
The New Heavens and the New Earth	21:1-8
5. Vision 4: Christ in Consummation: The Lamb	21:9-22:5
Place: A Mountain	
The City of God	21:9-21
The Worship of God	21:22-27
The Blessings of God	22:1-5
6. Epilogue: Christ Challenging	22:6-21
To Obedience – Will	22:6-9
To Reward – Intellect	22:10-15
To Fellowship – Emotions	22:16-20
Benediction	22:21

4.1.2 Parallelism

William Hendricksen (1982. *More than conquerors*. Grand Rapids: Baker) suggests nine propositions for interpreting Revelation:

1. The book of Revelation consists of seven sections. They are parallel and each spans the entire new dispensation, from the first to the second coming of Christ.
2. The seven sections may be grouped into two major divisions. The first major division (ch 1-11) consists of three sections. The second major division (ch 12-22) consists of four sections. These two major divisions reveal a progress in depth or intensity of spiritual conflict. The first major division (ch 1-11) reveals the Church, indwelt by Christ, persecuted by the world. But the Church is avenged, protected and victorious. The second major division (ch 12-22) reveals the deeper spiritual background of this struggle. It is a conflict between the Christ and the dragon in which the Christ, and therefore His church, is victorious.
3. The book is one. The principles of human conduct and divine moral government are progressively revealed; the lampstands give rise to the seals, the seals to the trumpets, etc.
4. The seven sections of the Apocalypse are arranged in an ascending, climatic order. There is progress in eschatological emphasis. The final judgement is first **announced**, then **introduced**, and finally **described**. Similarly, the new heaven and earth are described more fully in the final section than in those which precede it. (Progressive parallelism). In the seven seals we see things from the perspective of the suffering church. In the seven trumpets we see things from the perspective of the world under judgement. In the seven bowls we see things from the perspective of the temple, from the throne of God.
5. The fabric of the book consists of moving pictures. The details that pertain to the picture should be interpreted in harmony with its central thought. We should ask two questions. First, what is the entire picture? Second, what is the predominant idea?
6. The seals, trumpets, bowls of wrath and similar symbols refer not to specific events, particularly happenings, or details of history, but to the principles - of human conduct and of divine moral judgement – that are operating throughout the new dispensation.
7. The Apocalypse is rooted in contemporaneous events and circumstances. Its symbols should be interpreted in the light of conditions which prevailed when the book was written.
8. The Apocalypse is rooted in sacred Scriptures. It should be interpreted in harmony with the teachings of the entire Bible.
9. The Apocalypse is rooted in the mind and revelation of God. God in Christ is the real Author, and this book contains the purpose of God concerning the history of the Church.

4.1.3 Literalism

Dwight Pentecost approaches Revelation (and prophecy in general) from a quite different perspective, insisting on a literal interpretation which leads him to expect actual beasts and the like. (This approach inevitably fits best into a futurist framework, since nothing like that has happened yet. Thus the events of Revelation chapters 4-22 are all seen as future, during or after a short but intense period of great tribulation.)

Pentecost endorses the rule given by Clinton Lockhart: “If the literal meaning of any word or expression makes good sense in its connections it is literal; but if the literal meaning does not make good sense, it is figurative... Since the literal is the most usual signification of a word, and therefore occurs much more frequently than the figurative, any term will be

regarded as literal until there is good reason for a different understanding.” (Quoted in Pentecost, JD. 1958:4 *Things to come*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.) Pentecost defines the literal method of interpretation as:

“that method that gives to each word the same exact basic meaning it would have in normal, ordinary, customary usage, whether employed in writing, speaking or thinking”.(Ibid p.9).

The problem with this approach seems to be that it ignores the literary genre of the Apocalypse, where the “normal, ordinary, customary usage” of some terms is quite different from the way the same terms are used in other forms of communication.

4.2 Symbolism

4.2.1 Symbolism and prophecy

Symbolism is used in prophecy in much the same way as visual aids may be used in modern communication, and understanding how to relate to symbols is an important key in interpreting prophecy. Green suggests some helpful principles for interpreting symbolism.

(Green, JB. 1984. *How to read prophecy*. Leicester: IVP. p.74ff).

1. Approach symbolism with humility.
2. Recognise the primacy of imagination over reason. (Learn to **see** the pictures before you try to analyse them.)
3. Find the meaning in context.
4. Look for the prophet’s pastoral concern.
5. Look for the main point.

4.2.2 The General Purpose of Symbolism in Revelation.

1. Symbolic parables appear in scripture where ordinary warnings are no longer heeded eg, in the ministries of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Jesus. They signal judgement.
2. They serve to harden the majority, shock the remnant of true believers into their proper spiritual senses, and jolt a remnant of unbelievers into true belief. Cf. the plagues of Egypt (Ex 11:38; Ps 95).
3. This is expressed in the hearing formula, “the one who has ears to hear, let him hear.” Rev 1:3; 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 13:9 cf. Isa 6:9-10; Ezek 3:27; 12:2; Matt 13:9-17, 43.
4. The visionary parables reveal the horrific nature of evil, shocking and evoking a separation from idolatry and compromise.

4.2.3 The Symbolism of Revelation

1. Apocalyptic literature is distinguished by the use of conventional symbols. These were used as a means of describing other worldly and future phenomena.
2. Practical reasons existed for the book of Revelation to be written in a sort of code language. This decreased the likelihood of Roman authorities recognising the seditious nature of the book.
3. The book itself indicates that it uses sign language.
 - (a) 1:1 says that the revelation was ‘made known’ to John. This verb is a form of the word translated ‘sign’ in John’s Gospel (e.g., 12:33; 18:32).

- (b) John uses 'sign' to refer to events described in the book e.g., 12:1,3; 15:1.
4. A sign is not to be identified with what it signifies. It points beyond itself to the reality e.g., John 2:11, the sign at Cana points to the replacement of the old wine of Judaism with the new covenant.
 5. Symbols are not to be taken literally e.g., Rev 1:15, the sword in Jesus mouth is not physical, it stands for the Word of God.
 6. The material of the book is at times said to be a 'mystery' (1:20; 10:7; 17:5,7). That is something previously hidden which is in the process of being revealed.
 7. Symbolism does not allow uncontrolled interpretation e.g., as in some allegorical exegesis. Many of the symbols of Revelation are already set.

4.2.4 Symbols of the Book of Revelation

Colours

White is the symbol of victory; Red is the colour of aggression; Black indicates famine or starvation; Pale Grey is the colour of death.

Numbers

4 is the number of the created world, indicating the four points of the compass.

7 is the number of completion, often referring specifically to the work of God.

10 is the round number, meaning the generalization 'all of...'

12 is the number of the people of God. It probably retains this meaning even when John's source indicates the 12 signs of the zodiac.

6, just short of 7 is the number of man, meaning 'imperfect'.

3 1/2, half of 7 means 'definitely limited'.

24, double 12 means both the Old and New Covenant people of God.

The meaning of a number is intensified when it is squared or cubed.

When one number is multiplied by another, both meanings are included.

Visual Symbols

Lampstands, or candelabra, are symbols of gathered churches.

A book or scroll indicates the heavenly record. The concept behind the symbol is that everything which is to happen on earth has already been recorded in the eternal sphere. It is almost an astrological concept.

A seal sets something apart as private property of the one who does the sealing. When a record is sealed, it is closed off from human consideration.

A trumpet announces an event.

Eyes indicate knowledge; horns represent power; heads mean rulers.

Incense is the symbol of prayer.

A bowl carries some aspect of heaven to earth, or earth to heaven.

The sea represents evil human government, the land represents organised religion, distinct from the Christian faith.

Harlotry or fornication means idolatry, falsifying the truth of God.

Jewels represent glory.

Flowing water indicates life or truth.

The master symbols of the book i.e., seals, trumpets, bowls do not refer to specific events or details in history alone, but to principles that are operating throughout the history of the new dispensation.

(a) The events initiated cover vast areas of the earth e.g., the third part of the sea (8:8).

(b) Vast multitudes of people are involved e.g., 9:20 'the rest of mankind'
cf. 16:16.

(c) The symbols usually come in groups of seven, which indicates completeness.

4.3 Schools of Interpretation

4.3.1 Praeterist

Latin : **praeterire** = 'to go by', i.e., the events of Revelation have already passed by.

(a) Outline

Revelation produced by a church fearful of Roman persecution. The beast is the Roman Emperor, the false prophet is the cult of emperor worship etc. Though great martyrdom may ensue, Christ will shortly return, destroy Rome and set up his kingdom on the earth.

(b) Evaluation

(i) Positively - roots the book in its historical context.

(ii) Negatively - ignores the prophetic claim, treats the book like Jewish apocalyptic, implicit denial of inspiration, book is mainly irrelevant.
see T.R. 119.

4.3.2 Historicist

(a) Outline

The book is an historical overview of history from Christ's first coming up to his second. Specific events, nations, persons, etc., are sought in history that fit the seals, bowls, trumpets etc. The 7 churches of Rev 2-3 represent the 7 ages of the church. The beast and the false prophet represent political and religious aspects of the Papacy (Luther etc.).

(b) Evaluation

(i) Positively - makes at least part of the book relevant to all generations, and strengthens faith in that the whole of history is seen to be under the control of God.

(ii) Negatively - most of the letter becomes irrelevant to the original recipients.

- confusion over time line and which events are covered in the book; this makes the book pointless.

- tends to focus on events in the writers sphere of interest e.g.,

W. Europe, N. America.

- each author tries to work out a scheme that finishes in their own day.

- depends on historical knowledge not available to all believers. see T.R. 120

4.3.3. Futurist

A. Moderate Futurism

(a) Outline

The seven letters are to seven real churches, but these are representative of the entire church (not symbolic of such). The seven sealed scroll contains God's inheritance for his people founded on Christ's death. The kingdom of God comes through judgement on evil. The first five seals (conquest, war, famine, death, martyrdom) are agencies of God preceding the end. The sixth seal brings us to the end of the age, the coming of the great day of the Lord and the wrath of the Lamb (6:16-17). The seventh seal is not accompanied by a woe, from 8:1 on the contents of the scroll are revealed. This describes the judicial and redemptive events that constitute the future consummation.

(b) Evaluation

(i) Positively - makes dimensions of the book relevant to every generation.

(ii) Negatively - could lead to indifference about the time of the end e.g., in a 'Christian' civilization.

B. Extreme Futurism (Dispensationalism)

(a) Outline

Chapter 2 and 3 represent seven periods of church history leading up to the rapture of the church (4:1). The rest of the book deals with events approaching the Second Coming. The events described by the bowls, trumpets and seals belong to the time of 'Jacob's trouble' (Jer 30:7) i.e., the great tribulation. The people of God on earth are converted Jews (144,000) who evangelise the nations. They are persecuted by the head of a restored Roman Empire (Beast). The conflict is between Anti-Christ and Israel. (All this is tied to the numbers in Daniel.)

(b) Evaluation

(i) Positively - creates expectation.

(ii) Negatively - makes most of Revelation irrelevant to all but the last generation, and to Jews.
- makes many exegetical assumptions.

see T.R. 123

4.3.4 Idealist (Symbolic or Poetical)

(a) Outline

Abandons historical and prophetic elements. Book sets out in poetic form certain basic theological conceptions, the principles by which God acts throughout human history. The symbols represent spiritual powers at work in the world. The emphasis is on the ultimate triumph of good over evil.

(b) Evaluation

(i) Positively - assures the suffering believers of each age of God's final victory for them.

(ii) Negatively - encourages subjective interpretation.
- apocalyptic symbols refer to real historical events.

- relativises the importance of revelation as the book can only illuminate already existing truths

see T.R 126

4.3.5 Conclusion

No single view is completely satisfying. Elements from all the schools of interpretation need to be combined.

An eclectic or redemptive-historical form of modified idealism:

- (a) the symbols in the book are transtemporal, applicable to events during the “church age” (“last days”)
- (b) the only specific historical event in the book is the second coming of Christ.
- (c) preterists, historicists and futurists are all right in identifying various events with symbols in Revelation, but wrong in limiting this to precise historical episodes.

‘While the first century constitutes the immediate frame of reference, while subsequent church history affords material that fits the imagery used, and while the emphasis is on the final events in the realization of the divine purpose, yet the central content of the book can be seen only from the point of view of the remarkable coherence of the acts of God from the beginning to the end of his self - disclosure. “Only those investigators,” concludes Tiilila, “who do not see the great consistency of the acts of God or who do not believe that history moves toward the realization of his purposes, can treat the book of Revelation as if it were some kind of curiosity which for a reason incomprehensible to us came to be attached to the end of the Bible.”.’ (Kantonen)

The approach suggested above is Christological. The central limitation of the preterist and futurist views is that they seem to isolate the contemporary believer from the reality of the goal that God has already realised “in Christ”.

4.3.6 Summary.

INTERPRETATIONS OF REVELATION

Revelation	1-3	4-19	20-22
Preterist	Historic Churches	Symbolic of Contemporary Conditions	Symbolic of Heaven and Victory
Idealist	Historic Churches	Symbolic of Conflict of Good and Evil	Victory of Good
Historicist	Literal Historic Churches	Symbolic of Events of History: Fall of Rome, Mohammedanism, Papacy, Reformation	Final Judgement Millennium (?) Eternal State
Futurist	Seven Stages Of Church History	Future Tribulation Concentrated Judgements on Apostate Church And on Antichrist Coming of Christ	Millennial Kingdom Judgement of Wicked Dead Eternal State

Merrill, C. Tenney 1985:389 *New Testament Survey*. Grand Rapids.

4.4 The Theology of Revelation.

4.4.1 The Glory of God.

1. This is the major theological theme of the book.
2. Glory is due to God because he has accomplished full salvation and final judgement (1:6; 4:11; 5:11-13; 19:1, 5, 7)
3. All things, including the death of the saints, outwork the wisdom of God and bring him glory.
4. The saints are called to glorify God (4:11; 5:12-13; 19:7-8) because of the redemptive power of his plan through the Lamb.
5. Worship is drawn out of the saints as they behold the glory of God (4-5; 7:9-12; 11:15-19; 15:2-8; 19:1-8)
6. Idolatry is the opposite of true worship, it fails to attribute honour and glory to the Lord of all (2:14, 20, 9:20; 21:8; 22:15).
7. The new Jerusalem (God's people) will be filled with his glory (21:22-23; 22:5). All will share in full fellowship with God and Christ, reflecting their glory.

4.4.2 The Sovereignty of God.

1. 17 references to God's throne in chs 4-5.
2. Sovereignty activates glory (4:9-11; 5:12-13)
3. 6:1-22:5 are consequences of God's sovereignty.
4. God and Christ are in ultimate control of the woes of both believers and unbelievers.
 - (a) God is the power behind the symbols of seals, bowls and trumpets drawn from the Old Testament (Lev 26:18-28; Ezek 14:21; Zech 6:1-8)
 - (b) this is expressly stated.
(Rev 6:2-8; 7:2; 8:2; 9:3; 11:2; 13:7)
5. The woes refine the faith of believers and punish unbelievers.
6. The crucified and resurrected Lamb (Chs 4-5) has transformed the power of evil into an agency for purifying his people and punishing the stubborn in their wickedness (6:1-8).

4.4.3 Suffering and Death.

1. The death of Christ is the defeat of the power of evil (5:5-6)
2. To endure through tribulation is to reign as he did (1:6,9).
3. Christians are to live as more than conquerors by emulating in their own lives the archetypal triumph of Jesus.
4. As Jesus bears testimony to the Father (1:1-2, 5; 3:14; 19:10; 22:16) so believers are to bear faithful witness to Jesus (1:9; 6:9; 11:7; 12:11, 17, 17:6; 20:4).
5. The final outcome for faithful believers is the same as that for Christ, resurrection glory (20:8-22:5)
1. Persecution of the saints brings about the spiritual defeat of their opponents, in the same way as Satan was defeated by the cross (cf. Col 2:14 – 15).

2. Oppression of the church leads to a judgement of hardening upon unbelievers , and an increasing foundation for wrath at the final judgement. (8:2-11:19).

4.4.4 The True Home of Christians

1. The death and resurrection of Christ ushers in the power of the rule of God into the present world.
2. The heavenly perspective of the book is that from which believers are to see both their present and future existence (44 references to the heavenly realm, “God of heaven” etc in N.I.V.)
3. Christians are pilgrims through a transient world, their true home is heaven (14:3).
4. Unbelievers are “inhabitants of the earth” (3:10; 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 12,14; 17:2, 8), dominated by the visible, material, sensual world of idolatry.
5. Angels occupy an important position in the book as a bridge between the earthly dimension of the life of the church and its heavenly existence (cf. 1:20; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14; 19:10; 22:9, and the approximately 60 references in the visionary part of the book).
6. The worship scenes in heaven throughout the book connect the church to its purpose while on earth: worship of the one true God.
7. The total framework of the book presents the dissolution of the corrupted cosmic order and the coming of the new creation in which the righteous dwell forever.

4.4.5 The New Creation.

1. Five major O.T. themes: new covenant, new temple, new Israel, new Jerusalem, new creation, form the foundation for the prophetic climax of the book.
2. Together, they are metaphors for the one reality of God’s intimate glorious presence with his people.
3. This glorious presence culminates in 21:1-22:5.
4. This is the fulfilment of what God in Christ has already begun in the church, eg. new creation (3:14), new temple (1:12-13, 20; 6:9-11), kingship (1:5-6, 9, 13; 2:27; 3:21, 5:10).
5. The concluding visions of 21:1-22:5 lead into the admonishment of 22:6-21. Endurance is required in order to obtain the inheritance.

4.4.6 The Main Idea of the Book of Revelation.

1. “The sovereignty of God and Christ in redeeming and judging brings them glory, which is intended to motivate saints to worship God and reflect his glorious attributes through obedience to his word.”

(G.K. Beale, 1999: 174 *The Book of Revelation* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

2. This means the book is anchored in the condition of the churches in chapter 2-3.
3. The bride is contrasted with the prostitute in 17:1-22:5 in order to halt compromise with the harlot. The church is to reflect in greater measure its coming consummated existence.

4. A framework (*inclusio*) is set for the book by the opposite (antithetical) parallels between the imperfection of the church in the old creation (Chs 2-3) and its corresponding perfection's in the new creation. (21:9-22:5)

False prophets (2:2)	Twelve true apostles (21:14)
False Jews (2:9; 3:9)	The names of the tribes of true Israel (21:12)
Christians dwell where Satan's throne is (2:13)	Christians dwell where God's throne is (22:1)
Some in the church are dead (3:1)	All in the new Jerusalem are written in the Lamb's book of life (21:27)
The church is a faltering, temporal lampstand (1:20; 2:5)	God and the Lamb are the eternal lamps (21:23-24; 22:5)
The church is filled with idolatrous impurities (2:14-15,20) and liars (2:9; 3:9)	There will be only purity and truth in the new creation (21:8, 27)
Christians face persecution, hoping in God's promises to overcomers (2:8-10, 13)	In the new creation they reign, having inherited these promises (2:7 = 22:2; 2:17 = 22:4; 3:5 = 21:27; 3:12 = 21:10 and 22:4; 3:21 = 22:1 and 22:5)

(Beale 1999:134)

5. Each of the promises made to the "overcomers" is completely fulfilled in the final vision of the consummated new creation:

food: 2:7 and 22:2.

the temple: 3:12 and 21:22ff.

identification with an eternal city: 3:12 and 21:2, 10.

a great name: 3:12 and 22:1.

eternal security: 3:5 and 21:27.

incorruptible clothing: 3:5 and 21:2, 9ff. (cf. 19:7-8).

a bright stone and a luminary: 2:17, 28 and 21:11, 18-21, 23; 22:5, 16.

a share in Christ's kingly power: 2:26-27; 3:21 and 22:5.

exclusion from the "second death": 2:11; 21:7-8.

(Beale 1999: 135)

6. "The book of Revelation is not merely a futurology but also a redemptive-historical and theological psychology for the church's thinking."

(Beale 1999: 177)

5. INDIVIDUAL ESCHATOLOGY

5.1 Death

“The clamour of sex drowns out the ever-waiting presence of death...Death is the symbol of ultimate impotence and finiteness. What would we see if we cut through our obsession with sex? That we must die.” (Rollo May)

“When a civilisation denies death and hems its members in with cars and amusements, science and organ transplants, against the mystical elements of life that reach their zenith in death, we should not be surprised if young men and women create their own mystery through consciousness-expanding drugs and Eastern religions. Nor perhaps, should we be surprised if that civilisation has a high rate of mental illness and suicide” (Joseph Bayly)

5.1.1 The Origin of Death

This is to be found not in biological necessity but in the will of God. Its origin lies in God’s judgement upon sin (Gen 2:17; Rom 5:21). It seems that humanity was created in the image of God naturally (but contingently) immortal.

5.1.2 Death is a sign of condemnation

The Bible makes a distinction between the death of the body and eternal death. The visible death of the body must be taken as a tangible sign to humanity, and the conscience, of the coming judgement. cf. Heb 9:27. Dissolution of the human body is an unnatural indignity.

5.1.3 Death is an experience of God’s wrath.

The sentence of death is an expression of divine disapproval e.g., Ps 90:5-7; Rom 1:32; 5:16; Gal 3:13.

5.1.4 Death holds humanity in bondage to Satan through fear.

As the conscience of man witnesses to him of inevitable judgement the devil holds power over man through accusing his conscience (Heb 2:14-15). So men and women live in constant fear of death. It stands for eternal separation from all their this-worldly hopes.

5.1.5 The potency of death is sin.

‘The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law’ (1Cor 15:56).

The impossibility of pacifying the conscience continually reminds men and women that they are marked for death, or more accurately, that they are dead even while they live cf. Eph 2:18; 1 Tim 5:6. It is not that they must die which brings fear to men and women, but that they deserve to die.

5.1.6 The full meaning of death is revealed in the Cross.

It is only in the agony of Gethsemane and the cry of dereliction from the Cross that the full terror of death is exposed. Here it becomes clear how fearful a thing it is to fall into the hands of a living God who is a consuming fire. It is God, not death that we need to fear cf. Matt 10:28.

5.1.7 A Christian need not fear death.

Since Christ fulfilled the law and took its curse upon the Cross (Gal 3:13) the power of death is removed. Having undergone the pains of hell on the Cross, Christ has delivered us from the fear of the second death. Justification means death has lost its meaning as an instrument of wrath (Rom 5:1). A Christian has died already with Christ and risen with Christ (Rom 6:1ff). Death now means an entry into eternal glory (Phil 1:20-23; Acts 7:56 ff.). It is the point of the victory of Christ's union with the believer in his removal of individualism and separation. Nature gives way to grace. This will be the completion of the Christian's sanctification.

5.1.8 A Christian must still die.

A believer is still materially joined to a world that is subject to frustration and decay (Rom 8:20ff.). Only at the resurrection will Christ's complete victory for the believer be manifested. Here the body will be revealed as a body of communion.

5.2 The Intermediate State

This deals with the state of the human person between physical death and the resurrection of the body. The following elements need to be considered:

5.2.1 The Old Testament

The Old Testament expectation of life after death is limited.

1. The older material suggests a shadowy life in **sheol** separated from the historical dealings of Yahweh. All persons descend to the same place e.g., Num. 16:30; Ps 49:15-16; 88:3; Isa 5:14.
2. Other texts suggest a place of order and relative vitality e.g., Isa. 14:9-20; Ezek 32:18-32.
3. The doctrine of the resurrection emerged only late in the Old Testament period i.e., Ps 16:10; Isa 26:19; Dan 12:2.

5.2.2 The New Testament

The New Testament is not concerned to teach directly on the content of the intermediate state.

1. Since in Hebrew thought one could not be a whole person without a body the focus necessarily falls upon the resurrection of the dead. More significantly, the principal object of attention is not the salvation of the believer as such but the person and work of Christ. The singular expectation of the New Testament therefore falls upon the Second Coming of Jesus.
2. The New Testament teaches that at death people pass to **hades** or paradise.
 - (a) This is located at the heart of the earth (Matt 11:23; Luke 10:15; 13:40).
 - (b) It is a prison or underground keeping place for the ungodly (Rev 20:2,3,7; cf. 2Pet 2:4; Jude 6).
 - (c) The unrighteous exist in **hades** in a state of torment (Luke 16:19-31; 2Pet 2:9).
 - (d) Other passages suggest that the godly are located in a heavenly paradise in close proximity to God (Luke 16:9; 23:43; Heb 12:22, Rev 6:9, 7:9, 14:3). This means a state of blessedness.

3. The material in Paul is the clearest and most comprehensive.

- (a) Phil 1:21-23 - 'to die is gain' for it is to be 'with Christ'.
- (b) 2Cor 5:1-10 seems to teach the following:
 - Paul prefers not to be found 'naked' i.e., disembodied at death v.3.
 - He speaks of death as being 'unclothed' v.4.
 - 'We would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord' v.8.
 - Paul anticipates a 'particular judgement' before Christ in relation to Christian service v.10.

5.2.3 Soul Sleep.

1. In various places the New Testament speaks of Christians 'falling asleep' or of those who have 'fallen asleep' (John 11:11; Acts 7:60; 1Cor 7:39; 11:30; 15:6,18,20; 1 Thess 4:14-15). Does this teach a 'soul-sleep' before the resurrection?
2. This contradicts the data above.
3. (a) 'Sleep' was a popular euphemism for death in Greek literature and the L.X.X. (1King 1:21; 2:10).
- (b) Nothing in these passages implies death and unconsciousness.
- (c) All of these uses refer to the death of believers, because the power of death has been abolished by Christ.

5.2.4 Purgatory

1. Those who are in a state of grace but imperfect need to go to a place of cleansing to be freed from their sins. This is purgatory. Here souls fully pay the satisfaction due for their sins - this they do by passive suffering.
2. Texts cited include 2 Maccabees 12:43-45; Matt 12:32 (taken to imply that some sins can be forgiven in the world to come) and 1 Cor 3:15 'if any man's work is burned up...'.
3. 2 Maccabees has no force as it is not canonical. Matt 12:32 does not relate to sin in the age to come. 1 Cor 3:15 refers to a fire which attacks works and not persons; the fire is not to be literalised, the loss is a loss of reward at the Last Judgement.
4. The doctrine of purgatory denies the complete nature of Christ's atoning sacrifice and the reality of justification.

5.2.5 Instantaneous Resurrection

1. This doctrine comes in two forms:
 - (a) All believers who die before the coming of Christ are immediately embodied at death.
 1. This contradicts much of the data above.
 2. It is incompatible with the singular focus the New Testament places upon the return of Christ for all believers.

- (b) That when Christians die they are immediately involved in the general resurrection of the dead.

This implies that when a believer dies he or she immediately passes out of the space-time realm of history as we know it. The general resurrection occurs not in space-time as we know it but in another realm. As such there is no time gap between the death of the believer and their resurrection. All the people of God are raised together at the end of time i.e., there is no intermediate state.

2. The doctrine is far too subtle philosophically to match the New Testament material.
3. It implies creatures can become 'supratemporal'.
4. It does not seem compatible with the real time delay between the death of Jesus and his resurrection.

6. THE SECOND COMING

The return of Jesus should not be seen as discontinuous with Old Testament expectation. Broadly speaking, the church took over the doctrine of the theophanic Advent/Day of the Lord, recognising that the Lord was Jesus. Some relevant texts are Pss 50:3; 68:1-7; 80:1; 82:8; 107:20; Isa 26:19; 42:13; 63:9; 64:1; 66:18; Hab 2:3; Zeph 1:15; Mal 4:1. (Full details can be found in Meredith G. Kline, *Images of the Spirit*, Wipf and Stock, 1999 ch.4, around the themes Spirit- glory, the voice of God, light of god, judgement on idolaters, the hiding of the wicked etc.)

This is the centrepiece of cosmic eschatology. It is the basis of Christian hope and the event which marks the beginning of the completion of God's plan. It has been estimated that one in nine New Testament verses refers to the return of Christ. It is therefore a major item in Christian theology.

The return of Christ is continuous theologically with his death and resurrection. The One who comes to us at Easter, at Pentecost and at the End is the same person (Barth).

(The avalanche has *not yet* reached the valley/ once the lightning has flashed the sound of thunder must come [Heim].)

The key terms here are important:

(1) **apocalypsis** (unveiling) - it points to the removal of those things which now obstruct our vision of Christ (1 Cor 1:7; 2 Thess 1:7; 1 Pet 1:7,13; 4:13).

(The picture is of the raising of a curtain. The children know there will be presents under the Christmas tree, they just don't know what is in all of the pile.)

(2) **epiphaneia** (appearance, manifestation) - Christ's coming forth out of a hidden background with the rich blessings of salvation (2 Thess 2:8; 1 Tim 6:14; 2 Tim 4:1,8; Tit 2:13).

(3) **parousia** (presence) - the coming which precedes the presence or results in the presence (Matt 24:3,27,37; 1 Cor 15:23; 1 Thess 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess 2:1-9; James 5:7-8; 2 Pet 1:16; 3:4,12; 1 John 2:28).

6.1 Events Attending the Parousia

6.1.1 The parousia is necessarily impending.

1. Jesus urged his disciples to be ready (Matt 24-25).

- redemption is 'near'. (Luke 21: 28).
- the end is 'soon'. (Rom. 13: 20; 1 Cor. 7: 29; Heb. 10: 37).
- the end is 'at hand'. 1 Pet. 4: 7).
- the Judge is 'at the door'. (James 5: 8-9).
- Rev. 1: 1 'shortly'; 3: 11 'coming soon' cf. 22: 7, 12, 20.
- Rev. 1: 3 'near'.

2. The New Testament emphasises eager expectation (Rom 8:19-25; 1 Cor 1:7; Phil 4:5 etc.). The parables of 'delay' – idle servant (Luke 12: 45-46); ten virgins (Matt. 25: 5); talents (Luke 19: 12); vine dressers (Luke 20: 9) – do not teach non-imminence, but conscientiousness. cf. 2 Thess. 2: 7; 2 Pet. 3: 12ff.

The return of Jesus is unexpected. (Mark 13: 33; Matt. 24: 4; 1Thess. 5: 2ff; 2 Pet. 3: 10).

3. We are to await our blessed hope, the coming of the Lord (Tit 2:13).

This is to be understood not so much chronologically but theologically. Since Messiah has come, died, risen and the Spirit has been poured out nothing which is essential to the salvation of humanity needs to take place, except the parousia. We are in the 'last days' (Acts 2:17) awaiting the Last Day.

'Up to Christ's coming in the flesh, the course of things ran straight towards that end, nearing it by every step; but now, under the Gospel, that course has (if I may so speak) altered its direction, as regards His second coming, and runs, not towards the end, but along it, and on the brink of it; and is at all times near that great event, which, did it run towards it, it would at once run into. Christ, then, is ever at our doors; as near eighteen hundred years ago as now, and not nearer now than then, and not nearer when He comes than now'. (John Henry Newman).

In a sense death involves a personal parousia of the Lord (Luke 12:20). Likewise the preaching of the Gospel is a presentation of the reality of judgement. Christians must live as if Christ were coming tomorrow.

6.1.2 The calling of the Gentiles.

1. The Gospel must be 'preached to all nations' 'as a witness' (Matt 24:14; Mark 13:10; Rom 11:25). The New Testament considers this to be fulfilled.

(Rom. 15: 19, 23; Col. 1: 16, 23; 2 Tim. 4: 7).

2. i.e., to all people groups in such a way that they have opportunity to accept it

6.1.3 The conversion of the fulness of Israel.

1. Zech 12:10; 13:1; 2 Cor 3:15-16; Rom 11:25-29.

2. This does not entail a national restoration and conversion of Israel, i.e., 'all Israel' (Rom 11:26) means all the elect out of Israel.

(This interpretation is denied by dispensationalists.)

6.1.4 The great apostasy and the great tribulation.

1. Matt 24:9-12,21-24; Matt 13:9-22; Luke 21:22-24; 2 Thess 2:3; 1 Tim 4:1; 2 Tim 3:1-5; Rev 6:9; 7:13-14.

2. Futurists see this as a literal seven years preceding the parousia (Matt 24:21,29; Dan 9:26,27).

3. This ignores the context of Jesus eschatological discourses which is the Jewish War of A.D. 66-70 (Luke 21:23).

4. This ignores the ongoing suffering of God's children (John 15:18 f, 2 Tim 3:12; Rev 7:14 ff; Rev 13:10), i.e. persecutions are fulfilled. cf. 1 Cor. 7: 26; Rev. 1: 9; 2: 9-10; 3: 10.

5. It complements, especially in the case of 'rapture' teaching, a view that suffering is dispensable in the Christian life.

6. It ignores the symbolic language of the book of Revelation; '7' means a total period, 3 1/2 a limited time. cf. TR 140-141.

6.1.5 Signs of the End

Jesus addressed this to the disciples: "you" (Matt. 24: 4,6,9,15,20,23,26,32,33).

1. Wars, famines, earthquakes - the beginning of the pain of the rebirth of the universe at the time of the Coming of Christ (Luke 21:10-11; Lev 6:12; 18:8). N.B. Acts 11:28, a great famine.
2. False prophets and false Christs, who will show great wonders and signs to lead many astray, if possible, even the elect (Matt 24:10-11,24; 1 Tim 4:1; 2 Tim 4:3-4; 2 Thess 2:3,9).
3. Fearful astronomical portents involving sun, moon, stars and the shaking of heavenly powers (Matt 24:29-30; Mark 13:14-25; Luke 21:25-26). N.B. Acts 2:18-20 fulfilled.
4. A revival of the occult (1 John 2:18; 1 Tim 4:1; Matt 24).
5. An unprecedented increase in lawlessness (Matt 24:12; Luke 21:9).

Many of these are naturally occurring signs, or given to repetition. We must suppose that a conjunction of them and an increase in intensity will signal the end. ‘When you see **all these things**, know that he is near, even at the door’ (Matt 24:33). The crises of the present time are prefigurements of the end. e.g. the judgement of A.D. 70, the localised comings of Rev. 2: 5,16.

Theologically however we must remember that: ‘The Kingdom of God can no more be the final point of an evolution of apocalyptic disasters than it can be the product of an imminent evolution in history.... The signs are not the first acts in a dawn which will develop eschatologically in the same style. They are signals of something dreadful which goes far beyond the symbols used for it’. (H. Thielicke).

“As for the signs of the kingdom and of the end, they suggest that a delay can occur, nevertheless without contradicting its imminence and suddenness. They are indeed **signs**, not merely ‘signals’; wars, famines, earthquakes, lawlessness, immorality, apostasy – the function of these is not primarily to signal the exact moment of the final phase, but to indicate the decrepitude of the old world, surviving on a precarious reprieve”. (H. Blocher)

6.2 The Time of the Second Coming

1. Jesus explicitly taught that the precise time of his return would be unknown (Mark 13:32-33; Matt 24:36-44).
2. Mark 13:30 “this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place” refers to the generation which will witness the signs (vv5-23) of the second coming, but “these things” does not refer to the return itself. The second coming is “near” from the first century on. (“This generation” refers to the generation of Jesus’ time: Mark 8:12, 38; 9:19).
3. All attempts to calculate the time have failed (see T.R. p71ff).
4. The impact of the prophetic passages of the New Testament is two-fold:
 - (i) Sufficiently applicable to our time to promote hope: (Luke 21:12-18; 1 Thess 4:13ff; 2 Pet 1:19). Paul expects to be alive at the Parousia. (1 Thess. 4: 15; 1 Cor. 15: 51, but note 1 Thess. 5: 10.)
 - (ii) Sufficiently general to provoke watchfulness and holiness (Matt 24:42-51; 25: 13; 1 John 2:28; 2 Pet 3:11-14; 1 Cor.15: 52; 1 Thess. 5: 2-3, 8.)
5. Attempts to work out an eschatological calendar means we are losing touch with Christ the Head. ‘Not the slide rule, then, but folded hands (Revelation 22:20b) express trust in the Lord of time and eternity. The signs are dumb if we do not look to him who

gives us signs' (Thielicke). "Paul – the prophet of God's glory – does not deduce from a variety of historical events the date of God's coming reign; rather he deduces from God's promises, confirmed by Christ, the impending nearness of the vindication of those promises." (Beker). Calculability negates dependency.

The hermeneutic principle for the Second Coming is the person of Jesus himself; in him time and eternity are already combined.

6.3 The Character of the Coming

1. Personal - Acts 1:11; 1 Thess 4:16 etc., i.e., Jesus will return in person, not as some life-force or cosmic principle.
2. Physical - Acts 1:11; 3:20-21; Heb 9:29; Rev 1:7. A visible bodily return is indicated. The parousia is public.
3. Unexpected - it will take people by surprise (Matt 24:37-44; 25:1-12; Mark 13:33-37; 1 Thess 5:2-3; Rev 3:3; 16:15). This is because it is the return of someone who is known by faith through love.
4. Cosmic in scope – earthquakes, celestial bodies, heavens.
(Matt. 24: 7, 29; 2 Pet. 3: 10ff; Rev. 6: 12-17, 8: 5).
5. Glorious and triumphant - it is the final stage of Jesus' exaltation. It is the expression of his triumph over evil expressed cosmically. He will come on the clouds of heaven (Matt 24:30) with hosts of angels (1 Thess 4:16; 2 Thess 1:7) accompanied by the saints of God (1 Thess 3:13; 2 Thess 1:10). He will come as King of kings and Lord of lords, judging the nations and putting his enemies under his feet - forever (1 Cor 15:25; Matt 25:31-46; Rev 19:11-16).

6.4 How should the Second Coming Impact our Present Living

1. Expectancy
(Matt 24:44; Luke 12:35 – 36; 1 Cor 1:7; Tit 2:13)
2. Hope
(1 Pet 1:13; 1 John 3:3)
3. Alertness
(Matt 24:4; 1 Pet 4:7)
4. Readiness
(Matt 24:44; 25:10; Luke 12:35; 1 John 2:28; Rev 19:7)
5. Patience
(1 Cor 1:7; 4:5; 1 Tim 6:15; Tit 2:13; James 5:8)
6. Stewardship
(Luke 12:20; 19: 12 – 27)
7. Service
(Luke 12: 35 – 38; John 9:4)
8. Discipline
(1 Thess 5: 4 – 8; Tit 2:12; 1 Pet 1:13; 4:7)

9. Obedience

(1 Pet 1:13 – 14; Rev 3:3)

10. Steadfastness

(James 5:8; Rev 3:3)

11. Watchfulness

(Matt 25:13; 26:41; Mark 13:35 – 37; Acts 20:31; 1 Cor 10:12; Col 4:2; 1 Thess 5: 4 – 6; Rev 16:15)

12. Tolerance

(1 Cor 4:5; James 5:9)

13. Godliness

(Phil 4:5; 1 Thess 5:23; 1 Tim 6:14; 2 Tim 2:21; Tit 2:12; 1Pet 1:15; 2 Pet 3:11; 1 John 3:3; Rev 22: 10 – 11)

14. Awe

(Joel 2:1; 1 Peter 1:17)

6.5. The Unity of the Second Coming (The Rapture)

Latin: **rapere** = ‘to snatch’ or to seize i.e., the taking away of believers from the earth at the return of the Lord.

1. All Christians believe in a rapture e.g., Matt 24:31; 1 Thess 4:17.
2. Futurists of a dispensational sort teach a ‘secret rapture’ either seven years or three and a half years before the parousia. There is an invisible rapture ‘for’ saints (Matt. 24: 40; Luke 17: 34; John 14: 3; 1 Thess. 4: 15-17; Heb. 9: 28) prior to the visible Parousia ‘with’ the saints (Matt. 24: 30; Luke 17: 24; 1 Thess. 3: 13; 2 Thess. 1: 7-8; Rev. 1: 7). All the believers will suddenly be snatched up to heaven unexpectedly. Appeal is made to Matt 24:36-41 where ‘one will be taken and another left’. When Jesus returns he will bring **back** with him his resurrected and glorified Church (1 Thess 3:13; 4:14). In this way the Church is removed from the world before the ‘wrath to come’ (1 Thess 1:10; Eph 2:1ff), i.e., the time of the Antichrist and the great tribulation.
3. It should be noted that this position does not predate a prophecy given in 1830.
4. The texts used by dispensationalists do not support their position:
 - a) The sequence is not biblical – in Matt.24: 29-44 the “rapture” is mentioned **after** the Second Advent. There is only one event described. Verses 29-31, 36 describe the Parousia, verses 42-44 refer back to verse 36. In Luke 17: 34 the “rapture” follows the visible descent of v. 30.
 - b) Matt 24:36-41 - unbelievers are taken **in judgement** at the coming of the Lord. cf. Matt 13:30,40ff. Matt. 24: 45- 25: 13 refers to a visible separation at the judgment.
 - c) The ‘wrath to come’ is not temporal suffering but the Last Judgement (2 Thess 1:7-9).
 - d) It is the New Testament expectation that Christians will experience the days of distress (Matt 24:22) and the time of Antichrist (2 Thess 2:15).

- e) The vocabulary of the New Testament does not allow for a secret parousia in contrast to a visible **apokalypsis** and **epiphaneia**.
 - (i) The parousia of 1 Thess 4:15-17 is hardly hidden ‘...a loud command ...the voice of an archangel...the trumpet call of God’, i.e., the **last** trumpet (1 Cor 15:52) after which no further display of God’s power will occur.
 - (ii) The parousia, Jesus said, will be as visible as lightning (Matt 24:27).
 - (iii) Christians are to set their hope for glory on the **apokalypsis** and **epiphaneia** (1 Cor 1:7; 2 Thess 1:6-7; Tit 2:13 etc).
- f) 1 Thessalonians 4:14 focuses on the return with Jesus of those who have already **died** cf. been ‘raptured’ as believers.

6.6 The Identity of the Antichrist

1. **antichristos** (1 John 2:18,22; 4:3; 2 John 7) but also equated with the ‘man of lawlessness’ (2 Thess 2:3ff) and the beast (Rev 13:1ff).
anti
 - (a) ‘instead of’; ‘in place of’. He brings the Adamic claim to be equal to God to its peak by imitating Christ.
 - (b) ‘against’; ‘opposed to’.

Since he is a satanic substitute for Christ he is ‘against’ Christ.
2. Idealists and others deny the individual identity of the Antichrist. The figures in Scripture are descriptions of the ungodly and anti-Christian principles which manifest themselves in the opposition of the world to God and his kingdom. This opposition varies throughout history, but intensifies towards the end of time.
3. A majority view is that ‘Antichrist’ denotes an eschatological person, who will be the incarnation of all wickedness and therefore represents a spirit which is always more or less present in the world.
 - (a) The delineation of Antichrist in Daniel 11 is more or less personal, and seems to refer to a definite person as a type of Antichrist (Antiochus Epiphanes).
 - (b) Paul calls Antichrist ‘the man of lawlessness’ and ‘the son of destruction’ (2 Thess 2:3).
 - (c) His actions e.g., going into the temple of God and proclaiming himself to be God (2 Thess 2:4) are personal.
 - (d) John can use ‘Antichrist’ in the singular (1 John 2:18) referring to a future coming, or in the plural (1 John 2: 18, 23; 2 John 7).
 - (e) In Revelation the Antichrist has personal properties e.g., Rev 19:20 he is cast into the lake of fire.
 - (f) Since Christ is a person, but of a representative and inclusive sort, it is best to think of Antichrist in these terms.
4. There have been various figures in the course of history who have been identified with the Antichrist. These include Nero, The Pope, Napoleon, Hitler, Mussolini, Jimmy Carter, Henry Kissinger, Bill Gates and so on.
5. The development of the Antichrist imagery.

- (a) The ungodly nations and their kings which are hostile to Israel and whose future is to be judged by God e.g., Assyria, Babylon (2 Ki 15:19; Hos 5:6; Nahum; Isa 13-14 etc).
 - (b) The ungodly kings of Israel who persecuted the faithful remnant and introduced idol worship e.g., Ahab (1 Ki 17-18).
 - (c) The 'little horn' of Daniel 7:8, 23-26 whose kingdom is world-wide, who commits blasphemy, who tries to change the sacred calendar and the law and persecutes the saints. In Daniel 11:35ff this is described in both political and religious terms.
 - (d) The 'false prophets' and 'false Christs' of the Gospels (Matt 7:15; 24:5, 24 etc).
 - (e) The 'man of lawlessness' of 1 Thess 2:3-4 whose activity is described using the imagery of Daniel. His description as 'the son of destruction' (v.3) uses the language of John 17:12 applied to Judas Iscariot. Likewise, as this 'lawless one' operates by the power of Satan (2 Thess 2:9) we are told that 'Satan entered into' Judas (Luke 22:3; John 13:27).
 - (f) The Johannine literature (1,2 John, Revelation) brings together all the above elements - royal power which opposes God, false religion, false prophecy etc.
6. Identifying characteristics:
- (a) In John's letters:
 - (i) Pseudo-Christianity (1 John 2:19).
 - (ii) Liar (1 John 2:21).
 - (iii) Denies Jesus is Son of God (1 John 2:22f).
 - (iv) Denies the physical incarnation (1 John 4:1ff; 2 John 7).
 - (b) In Paul (2 Thess 2:3ff):
 - (i) Will be revealed prior to the parousia (v.3).
 - (ii) Lawless by nature (v.3).
 - (iii) Doomed to destruction (v.3).
 - (iv) Opposes everything godly (v.4).
 - (v) Installs himself in the Church and proclaims himself to be God (v.4).
 - (vi) Performs counterfeit signs (v.9).
 - (vii) Deceives those who refuse to love the truth (v.10f).
 - (viii) Is held back by a person or power who will be removed (vv.6-7).
Is this entity: Paul? Government? The Holy Spirit? Satan?
Repeated restraint and release? Restrained in A.D. 60 (2 Thess.) – released in 90 A.D.(Rev.)?
 - (c) In Revelation:
 - (i) see TR 176ff.
In Paul and John the anti-Christ is in the church; in Revelation it is a civil power.
 - (ii) 'The mark of the beast and the number of his name' (Rev 13:16-17).

- Most likely represents an attempt to control human employment (hand) and human thought (forehead).

This is supported by the observation that the followers of Jesus have his name on their foreheads in heaven (Rev 14:1 (immediately set in contrast with the beast's people); 22:4), and this is hardly to be taken literally.

The number 666 is literally translated as 'the number of man'. As the numerical value of the digits in the name 'Jesus' comes to 888, each digit being one more than the number of perfection, so the digits 666 yield the opposite phenomenon. They represent a persistent (triple) falling short, which is the essential characteristic of evil. The beast can never complete his attempts to image God and exalt himself above God.

This is also arguable from the fact that throughout Revelation the number 7 refers to the completion of God's work in Christ.

Believers are being urged to resist the deception which is inherent in the nature of the beast (v.18).

Problems with attempts to find an actual name to fit the number 666:

- (i) assume generally a knowledge of Hebrew and its numbering system (gematria)
- (ii) overlook the multiplicity of names that can be made to fit this system (Nero, Domitian, Kaiser, Hitler etc.) by picking one language or another e.g. Latin
- (iii) ignore that numbers are not used elsewhere in Revelation in this way, but are figurative of spiritual realities
- (iv) presume that John is calling for a mathematical calculation rather than spiritual discernment. This is at odds with the nature of wisdom and understanding in apocalyptic literature (Dan 11:33; 12:10).

6.7 The Identity of the Restrainer

“And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. 7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed.” (2 Thess 2:6- 8)

- a. various interpretation shave been offered as to the identity of “the restrainer”
- b. one is human government, righteous government or “law” holds back the manifestation of evil until it is removed in God's timetable. Paul was assisted by Roman law in Acts and some early Christians saw the restraining as the role of the Roman Empire.
- c. pretribulationists favour the removal of the Holy Spirit at the time of the rapture, this has several major problems:
 - (i) the restrainer is not identified as the Holy Spirit nor does the Holy Spirit have a direct, restraining-of-sin ministry either in the Thessalonian context or anywhere in the Bible.
 - (ii) the expression "until he be taken out of the way" (2 Th. 2:7) can literally be translated "become out of the midst." In no sense does 2 Thessalonians 2:7 say that He leaves the environment of earth and goes to Heaven, as normally taught by those who identify the Holy Spirit as the restrainer.
 - (iii) the contention that the restrainer "hitchhikes" on the removal of the Church is superimposed on the text. It places the restrainer's withdrawal into the category of being a by-product of the Church's removal.

(iv) if the Holy Spirit is the restrainer and He is removed pretribulationally from the earth's scene to Heaven, how does one account for His active and dynamic ministry during the seventieth week of Daniel = 7 literal years according to this view? We are told that the "gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world" (Mt. 24:14). Cf. Matt 10:19-20; Mark 13:11

d. others hold that the following evidence indicates the restrainer is the archangel Michael, since the manifestation of antichrist is due to a fallen angelic operation of iniquity, the restrainer is also angelic.

(i) Michael has special guardian relationship to Israel (Dan. 10:12-13). In relation to Israel, he is called "Michael, your prince" (Dan. 10:21) {of whom it is said, he " contends " so that Michael has a restraining (or hindering) ministry on behalf of Israel. He withstands the evil patron angels of Persia and Greece (Dan 10:13- 14, 20- 21)

(ii) Daniel records " At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. " (Dan.12:1). The preceding verse indicates this is the time of antichrist, symbolized by Antiochus Epiphanes.

(iii) it is also the time preceding the resurrection of the dead (Dan 12:2-3), thus complementing the sequence is 2 Thess 2 where the manifestation of the man of lawlessness precedes "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him" (v.1.)

(iv) the expression, " shall arise" (Hebrew, *amad*) can literally mean "stand still" in Daniel 12:1 cf. Job 32:16; Neh. 8:5. Michael, the guardian of Israel, had earlier fought for her (Dan. 10:13, 21), but now he would "stand still or stand aside." He would not help; he would not restrain; he would not hold down. (This interpretation is a minority view.)

(v) Jude 9 tells of Michael contending with the devil over the body of Moses

(vi) Revelation 12:7 ff. identifies Michael as the angel that cast Satan out of heaven

(vii) this is consistent with the role of the angel in Rev 20:1ff.

7. APOCALYPTIC TERRORISM

Migliore, D.L. 1991. *Faith seeking understanding*. Grand Rapids:Eerdmans. 235-236.
Responding to: Hal Lindsey. 1970. *The late great planet Earth*. Grand Rapids:Zondervan; see also Grant Jeffries. 1990. *Armageddon-appointment with destiny*. New York:Bantam Books.

1. Features

1. Highly predictive – exact timetable of events
2. Focus on contemporary events in Middle East
3. Focus on crises and disasters
4. Focus on pre-tribulation rapture of Church.

2. Faults

1. It is a crass manipulation of biblical texts. The life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ become quite secondary. Faith becomes depersonalised.
2. If biblical apocalyptic teaches us that secular history is under the judgement of God, this also applies to the schemes of the modern apocalyptists.
3. The apocalyptic timetable is highly deterministic. Produces no sense of responsibility for the future.
4. What Christians really hope for in this eschatology is the rapture. This is nothing less than ‘apocalyptic terrorism,’ entirely lacking in any sense of solidarity with creation and with humankind groaning for emancipation from sin, suffering, and death.
5. This rendition of Christian hope lacks a theology of the cross. Eschatology and the cross are torn apart. Suffering and hope are severed. The church will be safe in heaven when all hell breaks loose. Witnessing for God on the earth in these coming awful days will be the task of Jews. The signature of New Testament hope is not the rapture, but the resurrection of the crucified Jesus.
6. The above approach needs to be rejected as the product of human projection.
7. The danger exists both of other – worldly escapism or some form of fanaticism.

8. ISRAEL

8.1 JESUS AND THE IDENTITY OF ISRAEL

8.1.1 Jesus is the true Israel

1. He fulfils the prophecies spoken to Israel in the Old Testament. For example, he receives the gifts of Gentiles (Matt. 2: 11) predicted to Zion (Isa. 60: 1-6), and he is the one called out of Egypt (Matt. 2: 15 = Hos. 11: 1).
2. He applies to himself Old Testament texts related to Israel. For example, the angels descend upon him (John 1:51 fulfils Gen 28:10- 17 and its foundation in Genesis 17:5-6); his (faithful) use of Deuteronomy 6-8 in Matthew 4: 1-11 and his use of Israel's national lament (Matt. 27: 46 cf. Ps.22: 1).
3. Jesus and the Gospel writers appropriate to him titles used of Israel. He is Isaiah's Servant (Matt.12:15-21 cf. Isa. 42:1-4), Daniel's Son of Man (Matt.26:64; cf. Dan.7:13), and the rejected stone that becomes foundational (Matt.21:42; cf. Ps.118:22).
4. He performs functions associated with Israel. The gathering from east and west (Matt.8:11-12), and of the elect (Matt.24:31) is exclusively in relation to himself.
5. John's Gospel contains many replacement motifs showing Jesus is the fulfilment of Israel: ch. 1:17- 18 – Jesus not Law is final revelation of Father; ch. 2 – Jesus revelation is to Judaism is wine to water (1- 12) ; Jesus is the true temple (19- 22); ch.3 – new birth by the Spirit through belief in Jesus replaces natural birth into Israel as the condition for entry to the eschatological blessings of God's reign (1- 16); the immeasurable gift of the Spirit to Jesus transcends the limited revelation in Law and Prophets (33 – 34); ch.4 - Jesus teaching and not Law are living water (13 -14), *true* worship is in the Spirit mediated through acceptance of his revelation and not merely available through the temple (24); ch. 6 – Jesus in his act of sacrifice is the *true* manna (32); ch.7 the Spirit that Christ gives is the true water in the wilderness (37 -39); ch. 8 – his day is the joy of Abraham (8:56); ch. 8 and 9 - if Judaism claims the Law and her tradition are a lamp to guide people's feet to life, Jesus is the *true* light and life (12 cf. 1:9), and in ch. 14 the way and truth (14:6); ch. 10 - he and not the Jewish leadership is the fulfilment of God's promise of a Shepherd to the flock (11); ch. 15- in him, the vine, the symbol of Israel; *truly* inheres (15:1); ch. 11 – as the resurrection and the life (25) all the OT hope for a future life is met.

n.b. Jesus is the only revealer of the *true* God (3:33; 17:3).

6. He fulfils the destiny of Israel in himself. Israel's rejection of Jesus is anticipated (Matt.23:29-32) and means the formation of a new people of God (Matt.21:23-22:14). Yet it is through this rejection by old Israel as true Israel that Jesus dies as rebellious Israel, the covenant curses fall on him (Gal.3:13; 2 Cor.8:9; Isa 53:8; Dan.9:26). (This means disinheritance). He thus atones for Israel as the Servant of the Lord. By dying as Israel he dies representatively for the world, whom Israel had represented by her call (cf. Gen.12:2-3; Exodus 19:5-6). His resurrection reconstitutes Israel, he is the new Temple (Matt.26:61; John 2:19; 4:24-26) where true worship is offered (Hebrews 12:18-24).

7. Jesus is the one who fulfils the mandate given to Adam and Eve as the sons of God to rule the earth on his behalf. (Gen.1:26-28; Luke 3:38). He is the true seed of Abraham (Gal.3:16), the heir of all things (Heb.1:2; 2:5ff). As the Messianic King (Ps.2:7; Matt.3:17) all the promises of God find their “Yes!” in him (2 Cor.1:20). He is now heir of heaven and earth (Matt.28:18ff; 1 Cor 15:24; Heb.2:6ff) set over every rival power (Eph.1:20ff).
8. The resurrection and ascension of Jesus takes the land of Israel, incorporated into his earthly body through the normal processes of nutrition, onto a new plane. The first fruits of soil and land now point to a spiritual harvest that has been secured in the person of Christ.
9. According to Paul, “the hope of Israel” is not political liberty but the resurrection that has come in Christ (Acts 26:6 -7, 21- 23).
10. This theme finds confirmation in Revelation e.g. “the new name” of Jesus (cf. 14:1; 22:4) is drawn from the future of Zion in Isa 62:2; 65:15. All the blessings promised to Israel are now embodied in a relationship with Jesus as the ideal king and Israelite (1:13; 2:17- 18; 3:7; 7:4- 8; 12:5, 17; 21:27).

8.2 IS THE RETURN OF THE JEWS TO PALESTINE THE FULFILMENT OF BIBLICAL PROPHECY?

(See T.R. 180-207).

8.2.1 Arguments in favour of this conclusion

1. God promised the land to Abraham and his posterity:
‘the whole land of Canaan will belong to your descendants forever’. (Genesis 17:8)
2. The promises to Abraham (Gen 12:1) and David (2 Sam 7:4-17) are unconditional.
3. These promises are not yet fully realised in perpetuity, therefore they must be in some future time yet. Besides which, ancient Israel never possessed the entire land of promise.
4. There are many texts which refer to a restoration of Israel to the land. e.g. Deut 30:3; Isa 1:26; 11: 11 – 12; 27:13; Jer 16:15; 23:3; 30:18; Ezek 20:41; 36:1 – 38; 37:1 – 28; Zeph 3:20; Zech 1:17; 14:1.
5. The prophets predict a return from an exile among the **nations**.
e.g. Isa.11:12; Ezek. 11:16-17; 12: 14; 17: 21.
6. This is distinct from the restoration from exile in the **nation** of Babylon.
e.g. Jer. 29:10; Ezek. 37: 11f; Zech. 8: 1-9.
7. The nature of the return from exile under Cyrus’s decree of 539 B.C. is a poor imitation of the glory described in the prophetic predictions.
e.g. Isaiah 40-55 cf. Neh.1. (Only a minority return, there is poverty, Gentile rule, no glory in the temple, there is no Jewish feast to commemorate this event etc. This is despite the time frame of Jer 29:10; Dan 9:2). Jewish writings both after the return from exile (Neh 9:36; Tobit 14:5; Baruch 3:8) and the destruction of the Second Temple (Josephus; 4 Ezra; 2 Baruch) think of Israel as still in captivity. The fulfilment of the prophetic words of the Old Testament must yet be to come.
8. There are passages in the Gospels which indicate that at the return of Jesus the Jews will be in the land.

(Luke 13:35; 21:24)

9. This is a prerequisite for the operation of the Temple.
10. The entire argument of Romans 11 is based on the restoration of Israel.
11. The conditions under which the modern nation-state of Israel was formed, and how it has been preserved, are nothing short of miraculous.

8.2.2 Arguments against this conclusion

1. The promises to Abraham hinge upon his obedience to the divine command to depart Haran (Gen 12:1), walk blamelessly before God and undergo circumcision (Gen 17:1-14). This is confirmed by his faithfulness over the sacrifice of Isaac (Gen 22).

Moreover, the use of the term “forever” in the Old Testament does not necessarily carry the meaning of permanent e.g. Ex 12:23 -24; Lev 7:34; 10:15; 16:29; 23:41; Num 18:19; 19:9 -10; Deut 18:3- 5; 23:3).

2. This relational expectation continues into God’s covenant with the nation of Israel. (Deut 7:10 - 11 etc).
3. Although God’s covenant with David seems unconditional (2 Sam 7:1-17), David interprets the fulfilment of God’s promises in terms of obedience (1 Kings 2:1-4; 2 Chron 7:17-22).

This is the way in which God himself addresses Solomon (1 Kings 9:6-9). Israel will be cut off from land and temple, if unfaithful.

According to Joshua 21: 43 – 44; 2 Sam 8:3; 1Ki 4:23; 8:56; 2 Chron 9:26; Neh 9:7- 8, 24. Israel did enter and occupy the whole land of promise.

4. Exile to Babylon is exile to the nations e.g. Ps. 44: 12; Jer. 30: 10f; 31:10; 46: 27f; Ezek. 20: 34; 36: 19-20.
5. The New Testament applies the prophecies of a return to the building up of the church. i.e. the gathering of all nations to Jesus as Messiah. See Acts 15: 16-17 interpreting Amos 9: 11-12. Israel’s exile is defined by the absence of the presence of God that now constitutes the church.
6. Old Testament terms applied to Israel are transferred to the church. For example, Peter says that believing Jews and Gentiles are ‘being built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ’ (1 Peter 2: 5). The fulfilment of Ezekiel’s temple (Ezek. 40-48) is found in the church. He goes on to use the nation forming language of God at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19: 5-6) ‘you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people...’ (1 Pet. 2: 9). Finally he applies Hosea’s words of Israel (2: 23) to the new situation: “At one time you were not God’s people, but now you are his people, at one time you did not know God’s mercy, but now you have received mercy.” (1 Pet. 2: 10). Paul follows this course. Words addressed to Israel in the Old Testament are cited to Christians (2 Cor. 6: 2). Believers are the ‘true circumcision’ (Phil. 3: 3) who are inwardly Jews by the circumcision of the heart (Rom. 2: 29) through the Spirit (Acts 15: 9; 2 Cor. 3: 3). Abraham is their spiritual father (Rom. 4: 11; Heb 2:16) so that which was promised to him is pledged to them (Gal. 3: 24-29).

7. Old Testament restoration centres on recognition of the Messiah, something the modern secular state of Israel refuses to do. Only responsible covenant behaviour, that is, faith in Jesus, can ensure inheritance of the blessing of God.
 8. The promises concerning the inheritance of Abraham (Genesis 17:8) are transferred to the Christian community. Peter takes the word ‘inheritance’, which generally in the Old Testament referred to the promised land (e.g. Psalm 105: 11), and uses it to refer to the Christian’s inheritance in heaven (1 Peter 1: 3-5). The writer to the Hebrews speaks about the ‘rest’ which had been promised to Israel when they settled in the promised land under Joshua, but for him the ‘rest’ means all that Christians are invited to enjoy in their present experience and in heaven (Hebrews 3-4). Even for Abraham the promised land was only a symbol of the ‘better country’, the heavenly country which is God’s ultimate goal for his people (Hebrews 11: 8-16). Paul says as much when he declares that God promised to Abraham and his descendants not ‘the land’ but ‘the world’ (Rom. 4: 13).
- N.B. The promises are unconditional, the possession is conditional.
9. This approach is confirmed by the way the New Testament sees the Temple, the focus of Israel’s cultic life, as being replaced by the church (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:11 – 22; Heb 3:6; 1 Pet 2:5; Rev 3:2; 21:22).

Beale concludes his commentary on Revelation 21:14, “The present argument that the city and the temple of ch.21 are one and the same is in line with our prior identification of temple, altar, outer court, and holy city with the Christian community in 11:1- 2 and with our previous identification of the church with Israelite prophecies, names, and institutions (see on, e.g., 1:6 - 7, 12; 2:9, 17, 26 -27; 3:9, 12; 5:10; 7:2 -8, 14- 15.”

The following chart illustrates how the New Testament church has become the new Israel*:

Old Israel	New Israel
Holy nation — Ex. 19:5,6	Holy nation — 1 Peter 2:9; Matt.21:43
Kingdom of priests — Ex. 19:5,6	Kingdom of priests — 1 Peter 2:5, 9; Rev. 1:6;Rev.4:4;5:10
A peculiar treasure — Ex. 19:5,6	A peculiar treasure — 1 Peter 2:9
God's people — Hosea 1:9,10; Rom. 9:6-8	God's people — 1 Peter 2:9
A holy people — Deut. 7:6	A holy people — 1 Peter 1:15,16
A people of inheritance — Deut. 4:20	A people of inheritance — Eph. 1:18
God's tabernacle among Israel — Lev. 26:11	God's tabernacle among Israel — John 1:14
God walked among them — Lev. 26:12	God walks among His people — 2 Cor. 6:16-18
Twelve sons of Jacob	Twelve apostles
Twelve tribes	Twelve tribes scattered abroad — James 1:1
Christ married to His people — Isa. 54:5; Jer. 3:14; Hosea 2:19; Jer. 6:2; 31:32	Christ married to the church — James 4:4; Eph. 5:23-33; 2 Cor. 11:2

The term “new/true Israel” is not used in the New Testament or early Christian writings. This is because the people who are in a saving relationship with Jesus are simply “Israel”.

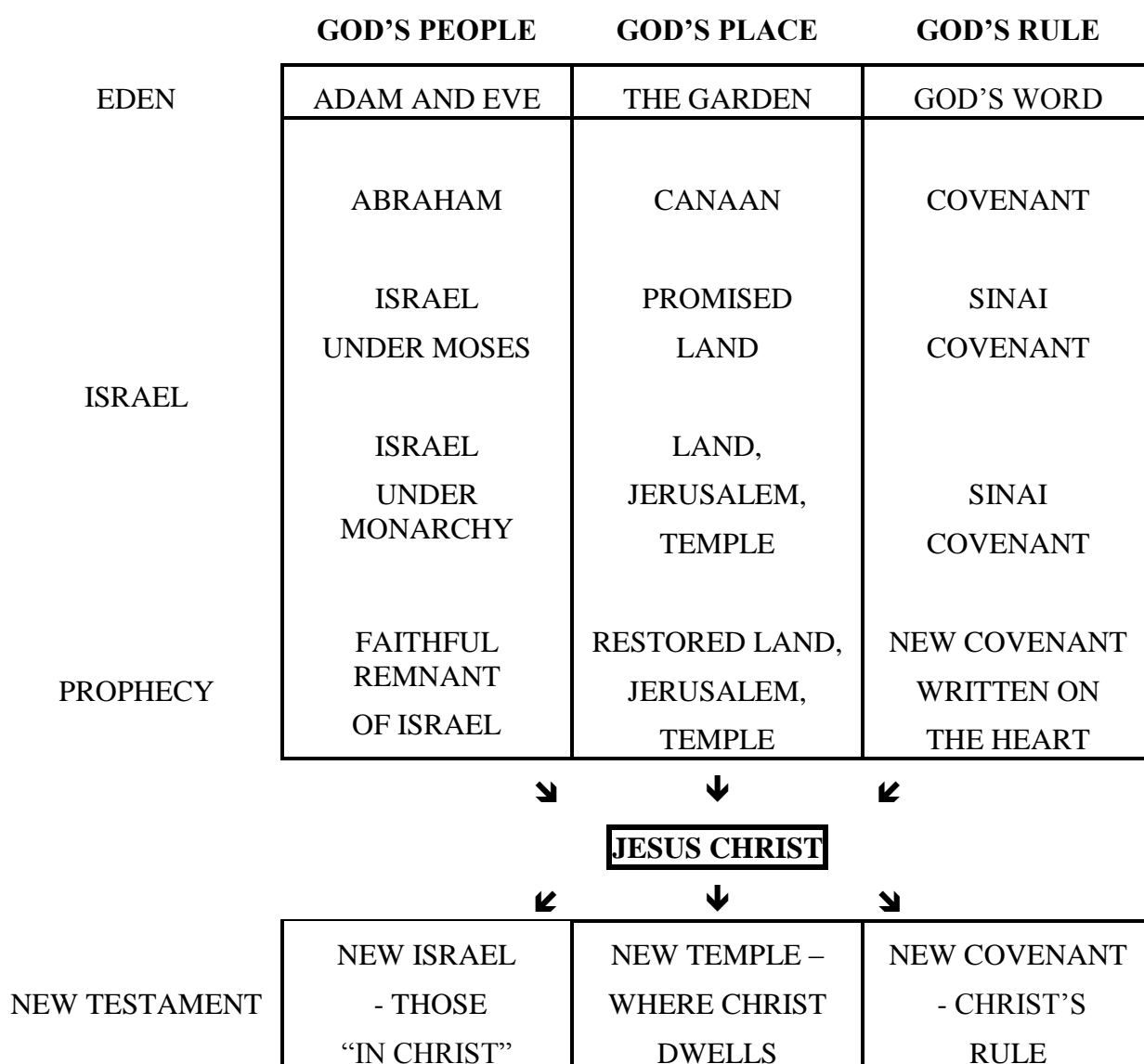
8.2.3 Jesus’ teaching on the future of Israel

1. Jesus never applied Old Testament prophecy to himself as a restorer of Jewish political sovereignty.
2. He never speaks of a time of political independence for Israel. The ‘times of the Gentiles’ (Luke 21: 24) does not contradict this. Nothing is said about events **after** this, for it terminates in the Second Coming. ‘Even now, as Israel occupies Jerusalem, it remains every bit but one of “the nations” because it is one with them in unbelief. So Jerusalem continues to be “trampled on by the nations” until this day’. (A. Konig)
3. He spoke of the permanent destruction of towns (Luke 10: 13-15) and the desolation of the Temple (Luke 13: 34) because he had not been recognised (Luke 19: 41-44).
4. Jesus taught that the role of the Jewish nation as the people of God was being transferred to the people who accepted him as Messiah. For example, in the parable of the Tenants in the Vineyard (Matt. 21: 33-46) ‘...And so I tell you the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people* who will produce proper fruits’ (verses 41,43) This parable is followed by the parable of the Wedding Feast, where the place of the invited guests (primarily the Jewish leaders of 21:23) is taken by all kinds of people brought in off the streets (Matt. 22: 1-10). The identity of these people* (*ethnei* in Matt 21:43 is singular = Jew and Gentile) becomes clear in the story about the Roman (Gentile) centurion’s expression of faith (Matt.8: 5-13). ‘I tell you ... I have never found anyone in Israel with faith like this. I assure you that many will come from the east and the west and sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob at the feast in the Kingdom of heaven. But those who should be in the Kingdom will be thrown out’. (verses 10-12) The description of people coming ‘from the east and the west’ alludes to passages such as Isaiah 43: 5f and Psalm 107: 3 which spoke of Jews returning from exile. Yet here it is applied to Gentiles. The Jews **exclusive** status as people of God is ended.
5. It must be noted that the texts of judgement directed against the Jewish leaders and people (Matt 8:12; 21:43; 27:25) are particularly focussed on those who had rejected Jesus in the flesh.
6. The teaching of Jesus in the parable of the Tenants in the Vineyard (Matt. 21: 33-46) does not however preclude a return of the kingdom to Israel at the time of the parousia. This seems to have been the understanding of apostles in Acts 1:6. This should be understood eschatologically in terms of Old Testament end time expectations (e.g. Zech 12:10- 13:1 is interpreted in the present in the New Testament Luke 23:48; John 19:37; Acts 2:37- 41; 1 John 1:7). Peter’s proclamation of “times of refreshing” (Acts 3:16- 21) seems based on this premise.

8.2.4 Jesus' treatment of his Disciples.

Jesus treated his followers as the real people of God. They are the flock (Luke 12: 32 cf. Ezek. 34) and he is the true shepherd (Mark 14: 27; John 10: 11). He is the real vine and his disciples are the branches (John 15: 1-5 cf. Hosea 10: 1). Jesus will build the community of God [**ekklesia**] (Matt.16: 18). The 12 apostles gathered around Jesus are the nucleus of the new Israel. God's new covenant with his people is enacted through the death of Jesus. (Matt. 26: 28 cf. Jer. 31: 31).

THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE GOSPEL



G. Goldsworthy. (1981). *Gospel and kingdom*. Homebush, Lancer.

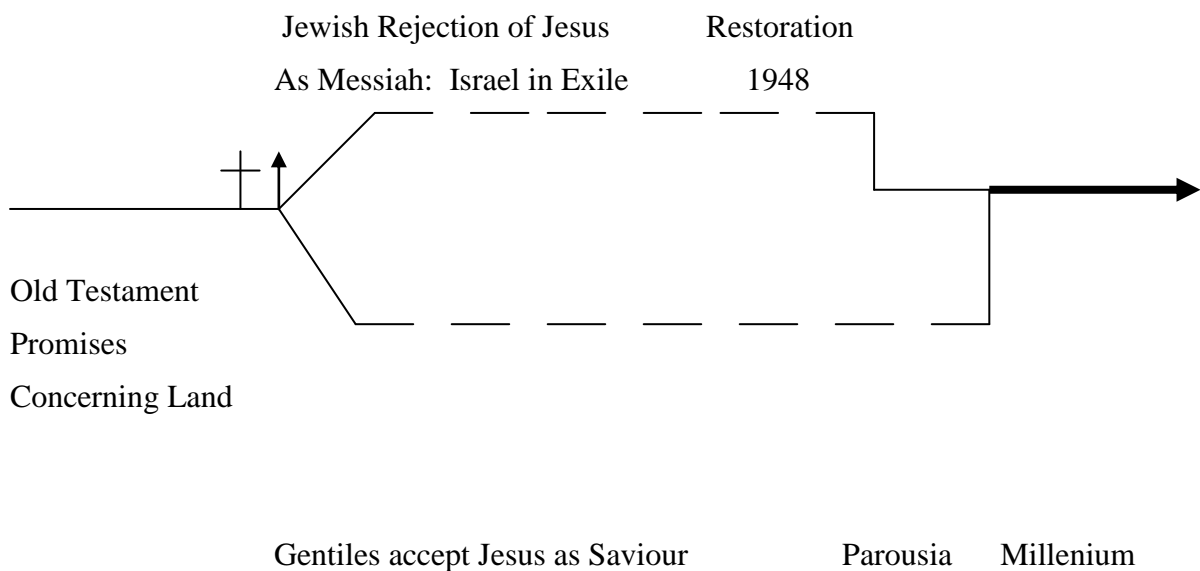
This may be expressed in a slightly different way. God promised Adam and Eve dominion over the world (Gen 1:28). Even if this was lost through sin the pledge of Gen 3:15 that the “seed of the woman” shall win victory over the serpent implicitly includes a triumph over death (cf. Rev 12:9;20:2). This would mean the restoration of paradise, and so the removal of the curse placed on the earth (Gen 3:17). A new earth must be in view.

The Abrahamic covenant represents a particularizing phase of the covenant of grace. Even if the promise is that his descendants will bless the nations (Gen 12:3; 22:18) this is not realised in Old Testament times. The occupation of the land of Canaan is not the goal of the covenant, but a means to its realisation. Canaan is a type of the sabbath rest that remains for the people of God (Heb 4). Abraham himself looked, with the patriarchs, to a heavenly homeland (Heb 11:9 – 10; 13 – 16).

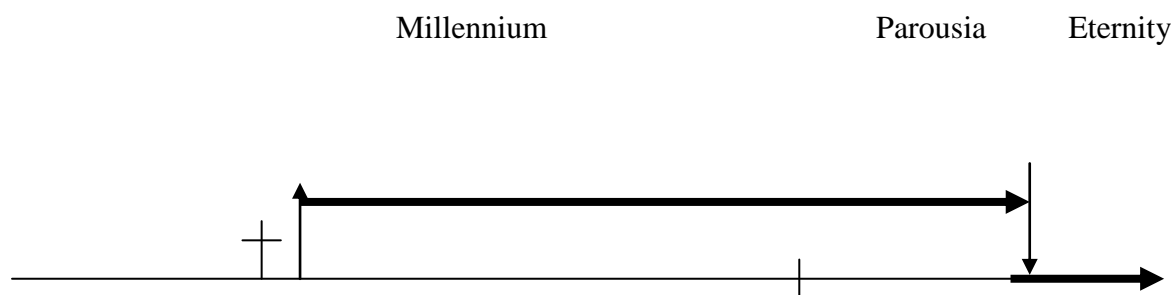
The New Testament era widens out the scope of the covenant to the ends of the earth and all peoples. As the seed of Abraham (Gen 3:16), Jesus shares with us the eternal and universal inheritance which he has effected as the “seed of the woman” through his death and resurrection. The promise of which we are heirs is the new earth (Gal 3:29; Rom 4:13).

Diverse Views of God’s Plan for the Jewish People.

(a) Futurist - Dispensationalist



(b) Reformed - Amillennial



Old Testament	Essential	Jew & Gentile	1948
Promises	Fulfilment	as New People	
Concerning Land	in Jesus	of God	

8.3 God's Present Purpose for the Jewish People

1. The State of Israel

‘Whereas the New Testament asserts that in Christ the temple and its sacrificial system have lost their literal significance, it makes no such explicit claim about the land. Perhaps in God’s plan for the Jewish people there is a continuing commitment to the land - for identity and security of any people is bound up with their being rooted in a particular area of land.

Hence it seems that, to be biblical, our conclusion must be a paradoxical one. Since the coming of Christ, his followers are the people of God, inheritors of his promises to Abraham. Yet the Jews remain his people, though they fulfil their true destiny only by coming to faith in Jesus. The promise to Abraham of a land where God would work out his plans in history has given way since Christ’s coming to the vision of a whole world where Jew and Gentile together may know the blessing of God in Christ. Yet God is not indifferent to the Jews’ longing for a land. Whilst the return of Jews to a homeland in Palestine is not a specific fulfilment of Old Testament predictions, it is within God’s providential care for his people. Yet this does not mean that Israel’s right to the land is absolute and exclusive. For Palestinian Arabs, too, may claim to be descendants of Abraham.” (Travis)

2. God’s present plan for the Jewish people.

a) Jewish salvation

1. Jewish people can only be saved in the same way as Gentiles – by faith in Jesus (Rom1:16-17; 2:9-11; 3:22-23; 10:12 etc.)
2. This is because Jesus is the goal of the law, the climax of the covenant. To reject Jesus is to reject the *Torah* (Rom 9:30-10:4)
3. Judgement is without discrimination (Matt 25:32 “all the nations”; Acts 4:25-27)

b) The status of Israel and God’s wisdom

1. God has not rejected Israel (Rom11:2). “They are Israelites” (Rom 9:4-5)
2. The chosen people through whom the Jews shall be reached are believing Gentiles (Rom11:11-14).
3. The means of this is ‘provocation to jealousy’ (Rom11:14). The glory of God shown in Gentile salvation and gospel proclamation will cause a turning to Jesus as Messiah (Rom11:30-31).
4. Many Jews will be saved (Rom11:12, 17-24, 26-27).
5. This is a present expectation ‘so ... all Israel will be saved’ (Rom11:26). A merely ‘end-time’ gathering would exclude all Jews before that time.
6. The implication of this is a present mission to the Jews (Rom 9:1-3; 10:1-2; 11:11-14 cf. Matt 10:23 “...you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.”).
7. Entry into God’s ‘time of refreshing’ requires faith in Jesus and repentance, with anticipation of his Return (Acts 3:19-21).
8. Paul seems to believe this turning to Jesus will inaugurate the resurrection the parousia (Rom 11:26- 27; Isa 59:20 = second coming).

3. The strategic place of the Jewish people

This must be understood in relation to the gospel of Christ. It is God's covenant love which always stirred up Israel's rebellion, for example, Ezekiel 16, Hosea.

The fulness of God's unconditional love in the coming of Jesus as Messiah exposes the depth of Israel's heart of rebellion, for example, John 1:11; 3:17-21; Luke 20:9-19. Israel is elected to reject Messiah (Acts 2:22ff; 4:27ff; 13:40-41; 28:24-28; 1 Thess.2:14-16). Through this exclusion the Gentiles are elected (Rom 11:7-24).

The fullness of reconciliation opened up for all humanity can only be most deeply revealed when the deepest schism of all is healed in the Body of Christ. Jew-Gentile reconciliation in the Church will convey to the world the depth of God's atoning love in Christ (Romans 11:12; Eph.2:11-21).

The apparent rejection of the Jewish people through most of their history by God, including their treatment by the "Christian nations" and the church, is a prelude to a great ingathering to her Messiah. In this way Israel images the content of the gospel. A true Israelite (such as Paul) will be conscious that he/his nation bears the yoke of the kingdom of God. Such an understanding is possible only in Christ crucified cf. Gal 2:19- 20.

8.4 What is Israel

1. "Israel" is a term of election and favour. (Rom 9:6-13). "Jew" is an ethnic term in contrast to "Gentile". Jew and Gentile cannot be mixed.
2. Romans 9-11 explains how Gentiles are included in "Israel".
3. "Church" is not defined by differentiation from Israel but by inclusion in Israel and Israel's blessings.
(Rom 9:4-5; 24-25; 11:17-24).
4. "Judaism" and "Christianity" are non-biblical categories of opposition to one another.
5. "Israel" is divided eschatologically by the coming of Jesus the Messiah, the old covenant and new covenant people of God. The latter consists of believing Jew and Gentile (Gal 6:16). Bipolarity in humanity is only overcome in Christ (1 Cor 12:23; Gal 3:28; Eph 2:11 – 3:12; Phil 3:2- 11; Col 3:11; 1 Thess 2:14- 16 etc.).
6. The old Israel of ethnic definition and covenant fidelity ("works") needs to answer God's call in the gospel to enter into the promises (Rom 10).
7. When this happens there will be a complete integration (not assimilation or absorption) between the old Israel and the other nations who are now (also) his people. (Rom 11; 15:7-13).
8. This view is therefore not a replacement of Israel by the church (supersession) nor a spiritualising (Jesus is a Jew after the flesh (Rom 1:4) and the true Israelite) but a genuine organic fulfilment.
9. In the meantime, in this interim period, a tension exists between the old covenant Israel e.g. Rom 9:4 and the new Israel of believing Jews and Gentiles. This parallels the eschatological tension of the divided "I" (Rom 7:14 – 25).

9. THE GENERAL RESURRECTION

9.1 The Biblical Material

9.1.1 The Old Testament

1. Not an early doctrine e.g., not in Pentateuch.
2. Image of national resurrection e.g., Ezek 37.
3. The problem of the suffering of the righteous provoked the expectation of other worldly recompense e.g., Job 19:25-27; Ps 49:15; 73:24-25; Prov 23:14.
4. It is clearly taught in the prophets, Isaiah 26:19, and especially Daniel 12:1-2. This speaks of a resurrection of the righteous and unrighteous issuing in a judgement with eternal consequences.

9.1.2 The New Testament

1. The doctrine had become highly developed in the intertestamental period, becoming one of the distinguishing features of Pharisaism.
2. Jesus accepted and taught the resurrection (Matt 22:23-33; John 5:25-29; 6:39-40, 44,54; 11:24-25; 14:3; 17:24.)
3. Other important passages are 1 Cor 15; 2 Cor 5:1-10; 1 Thess 4:13-16; Rev 20:4-6,13.

9.2. The Nature of the Resurrection

9.2.1 It is the Work of the Trinity

1. God raises the dead (Matt 22:29; 2 Cor 1:9).
2. The Son raises the dead (John 5:21,25,28-29; 6:38-40; 44,54; 1 Thess 4:16). This is an authority which the Father has given to the Son (Matt.28:19; John 17:2).
3. The Holy Spirit gives life to mortal bodies (Rom:8:11).
N.B. parallel with resurrection of Jesus.

9.2.2 It is a Physical or Bodily Resurrection

1. It is not a spiritual resurrection (2 Tim 2:18).
2. It is patterned after the bodily resurrection of Jesus, who is the 'first fruits' of the resurrection (1 Cor 15:20,23) and the 'first born' of the dead (Col 1:18).
3. Redemption must include the body (Rom 8:23; 1 Cor 6:13-20). This is implicit in the incarnation, effected in the resurrection of Jesus, and incorporated in the notion that salvation is a perfection or recreation of fallen nature.
4. It is literally stated in Rom 8:11.
5. Resurrection **means** 'a standing up again' (**anastasis**).
6. It is the nature of the resurrection body which preoccupies Paul in 1 Cor 15:36-38. Here his opponents seem not to be materialists but dualistic spiritualisers who despise the idea of resurrection. cf. Acts 17:32.

9.2.3 The Identity of the Resurrection Body

1. The term 'resurrection' implies the same body.
2. It is explicit in Rom 8:11; 1 Cor 15:53.

3. It is argued at length in 1 Cor 15:36-38. The body is sown as natural body, it is raised a spiritual body (v.40ff).
4. This picture, along with the example of Christ, implies both continuity and discontinuity. It need not be argued that the continuity is of a material kind. Conceivably the form of the body is essentially constant, whereas its nature is transformed. The continuity is provided by the identity of the soul or spirit preserved by God in the intermediate state.

9.2.4 It is a Glorified Body

1. The terms 'incorruption', 'immortality', 'power', 'glory', 'spiritual' all relate to the elevation of the body by the power of God beyond decay and dissolution.
10. We must suppose that only in such a body can human beings stand before the glory of God and live.
11. If this body has the above properties, so does the life of those who are related to God. Father, Son and Spirit are not immortal because of some special substance, but because each of them eternally and completely loves the others. Thus they impart love to one another according to their personhood as Father, Son and Spirit. This implies that eternal life is essentially communal.

9.2.5 It is a Resurrection of both the Righteous and the Unrighteous

1. This is taught in Scripture (Dan 12:1-2; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; Rev 20:13 - 15).
2. The biblical focus is on the resurrection of the just, for this alone is saving.
3. The resurrection of the believer is a participation in that of Christ (1 Cor 6:14; 2 Cor 4:14 cf. Rom 6:3- 11; Gal 2:19; Rom 8:17; Col 2:12 -3:5)

9.3 The Timing of the Resurrection

Views on this depend on the position taken with respect to the tribulation (see before) and the millennium (see later: positions 1 and 2 are pre-millennial).

1. Pre-Tribulation - there will be three resurrections:
 - (a) At the rapture.
 - (b) Of the saints who died during the tribulation i.e., at the Second Coming.
 - (c) Of the unrighteous dead at the end of the millennium.
2. Post-Tribulation - there will be two resurrections:
 - (a) The resurrection of believers at the end of the tribulation and beginning of the millennium.
 - (b) The resurrection of the unrighteous at the end of the millennium.
3. Amillennialism - the end of the tribulation, the time of the last judgement, the parousia, the 'end' of the millennium and the resurrection of all persons occur simultaneously.

10. MILLENNIAL VIEWS

Millennium : the 1000 year reign of Christ upon the earth.

(see T.R. p.226 for a helpful diagram.)

10.1 The History of Millennial Thought

Introduction

The term “millennium” refers to the period of 1,000 years mentioned in Rev. 20:2—7 as the time of the reign of Christ and the saints over the earth. Three main views of the millennium are usually distinguished (premillennialism, postmillennialism and amillennialism), but these views as they have emerged in the history of Christianity can be best understood as five traditions of interpretation:

1. Premillennialism (or chiliasm) in the early church

Many Jewish apocalyptic works write of a two-phase eschaton consisting of a temporary messianic age followed by an eternal state. For example, 1 Enoch 91-107 (beginning of the second century B.C. – early first century A.D.?); 4 Ezra 7: 28 -36 (c. 70 A.D.); 4 Ezra 12:34; 2 Baruch 24:1-4; 30:1-5; 39:3-8; 40:1-4; Jubilees 1:4-29; 23:14-31; *b. Sanh.* 99a.

Many of the early fathers, including Epistle of Barnabas (c.100?), Papias (c.60—c. 130), Justin (c. 100—c. 165), Irenaeus, Tertullian, Victorinus of Pettau (d. c. 304) and Lactantius (c. 240—c. 320), were premillennialists, i.e. they expected the personal coming of Christ in glory to inaugurate a millennial reign on earth before the last judgment. This belief was not only an interpretation of Rev. 20, but also a continuation of Jewish apocalyptic expectation of an interim messianic kingdom. The framework of Rev. 20 was filled with content derived from Jewish apocalyptic and especially from OT prophecies, with the result that the millennium was understood primarily as a restoration of paradise. Amid the abundant fruitfulness of the renewed earth and peace between the animals, the resurrected saints would enjoy 1,000 years of paradisaic life on earth before being translated to eternal life in heaven. The 1,000 years were explained either as the originally intended span of human life on earth or as the world’s sabbath rest at the end of a 7,000-years’ ‘week’ of history. However common, it was not the doctrine of the church embodied in any creed or form of devotion and there is an acknowledgement that the view is not universal e.g. Justin *Dialogue* 80.

One of the reasons for the decline of premillennialism was its support by the Montanists, an apocalyptic and charismatic group seeking to revive the church in the second century. They prophesied the imminent outpouring of the Paraclete and the descent of the heavenly Jerusalem upon their native region of Phrygia. Montanism was declared heretical by A.D. 200.

It was the materialistic nature of this millennialism which made it objectionable to others of the fathers (Origen c. 185- c. 254; Caius c. 200; Dionysius of Alexandria c. 190- 265; Eusebius c. 260- c 340; Jerome 342 – 420). Origen allegorised and spiritualised scripture, turning the focus to the manifestation of the kingdom of God in the soul. Augustine (354 - 430) drew a connection between the feasting of the Donatists and their earthly eschatological expectation. His vigorous and highly influential rejection of it led to the virtual disappearance of premillennialism until the 17th century.

The Protestant Reformers opposed premillennialism as taught by various Anabaptist and Hussite groups who continued a tradition of revolt against Catholic political hegemony. The civil violence associated with the occupation of Munster led to a violent reaction. The Confessions of the Reformation condemned chiliasm as Jewish fiction.

Protestant premillennialism originated in the early 17th century, especially under the influence of Joseph Mede (1586—1638). It expects the personal advent of Christ and the bodily resurrection of the saints to precede the millennium, and therefore tends to stress the discontinuity between the present and the millennial age. Various Puritan writers and pietists such as Bengel (cf. Isaac Newton) embraced these views. Many Christian leaders in colonial America promoted premillennialism, including beliefs in the restoration of Israel and the conversion of the Jews.

From 1790 to the mid-19th century, premillennialism was a popular view among English Evangelicals, even within the Anglican church. The social and political climate in Europe, especially the French Revolution, stimulated premillennial thought. Throughout the 19th Century, premillennialism continued to gain wider acceptance in both the US and in Britain, particularly among the Irvingites, Plymouth Brethren, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christadelphians and Seventh-day Adventists.

It enjoyed a major revival in England in the 1820s, from which its modern forms derive. Premillennialism gained popularity in circles whose view of the current situation was deeply pessimistic. Not the influence of the church, but only the personal intervention of Christ could establish his kingdom on earth.

Premillennialists have taken many views on the character of the millennial reign, but 19th-century premillennialism tended towards a literal interpretation of prophecy, including prophecies applied to the millennium. This tendency reached a climax in the dispensationalist theology pioneered by J. N. Darby (1800- 1882), in which a ‘secret rapture’ of the church, preceding the coming of Christ, is to bring the age of the church to an end, while the millennium functions as the time of fulfilment for the OT prophecies to Israel.

In the US, the dispensational form of premillennialism was propagated on the popular level largely through the Scotfield Reference Bible (3 million copies in 50 years) and on the academic level with Lewis Sperry Chafer’s eight volume *Systematic Theology*. (Biola, Moody Bible Institute, Dallas Theological Seminary, Grace Theological Seminary.)

More recently dispensationalism has been popularized through Hal Lindsey’s 1970s bestseller, *The Late, Great Planet Earth* and through the *Left Behind* Series by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins. Popular proponents of dispensational premillennialism are John F. MacArthur, Phil Johnson, Ray Comfort, Todd Friel, Dwight Pentecost, John Walvoord (d. 2002), Tim LaHaye, Charles Ryrie (in the notes for the *Ryrie Study Bible*) and Charles Feinberg.

Historic, or Classic Premillennialism is distinctively non-dispensational. This means that it sees no theological distinction between Israel and the church. It is often post tribulational meaning that the rapture of the church will occur after a period of tribulation. Historic premillennialism maintains chiliasm because of its view that the church will be caught up to meet Christ in the air and then escort him to the earth in order to share in his literal thousand year rule. Proponents of the view include Charles Spurgeon; George Eldon Ladd; Millard Erickson and Wayne Grudem.

2. Augustinian amillennialism

The interpretation of Rev. 20 which held the field for most of the medieval period and remained influential down to the present was pioneered by the 4th-century Donatist Tyconius, whose ideas were taken up by Augustine. He likely was influenced as well by the era of peace instituted for Christianity by Constantine. According to this view the millennial reign of Christ is the age of the church, from the resurrection of Christ until his parousia. Augustine took the figure 1,000 itself to be symbolic, not the actual length of time. Moreover, the millennium of Revelation 20 became for him “symbolically representative of Christ’s present reign with the saints.” His became the official doctrine of the church in the medieval period.

This interpretation of Rev. 20 is often called amillennialist, because it rejects belief in a future millennium. For the earthly kingdom expected by the chiliasts, it substituted a twin emphasis on the present rule of Christ and other-worldly eschatological hope.

The Protestant Reformers adopted a modified form of Augustine’s view. Amillennialism is found in the major Lutheran and Reformed Confessions. They took the millennium to be an actual period of 1,000 years in the past (variously dated), during which the gospel flourished. Satan’s release at the end of this period (Rev. 20:7) marked the rise of the medieval papacy. For the future, the Reformers expected the imminent coming of Christ, leading at once to the last judgment and the dissolution of this world.

Amillennialism has been widely held in the Eastern Orthodox Church and by Anglicans and is the official position of Reformed theology. The Catholic Catechism teaches an overt amillennial position, “Already they [the saints] reign with Christ; with him ‘they shall reign for ever and ever.’” (Article, 12. II. 1029).

3. Joachimism and Protestant postmillennialism

The ideas of the 12th-century abbot Joachim of Fiore (c. 1132 -1202) inspired a new form of eschatological expectation which in the later Middle Ages and the 16th century was the major alternative to the Augustinian view. Before the end of history there would be an age of the Spirit (age of the Father = law, OT; age of the Son = grace, NT/ ending 1260 A.D.), a period of spiritual prosperity and peace for the church on earth, which was identified with the millennium of Rev. 20, though not primarily derived from that text. This expectation can be called postmillennialist, since it held that the millennium would be inaugurated by a spiritual intervention of Christ in the power of his Spirit, not by his bodily advent, which would follow the millennium.

Joachimism appealed to some early Protestants, who saw in the success of the Reformation gospel the dawning of a new age of prosperity for the church. Joachimist influence, Protestant optimism about the trends of history, and exegesis of Revelation combined to produce Protestant postmillennialism, whose first influential exponent was Thomas Brightman (1562—1607) and which first flourished in the 17th century. In this view, the millennium would come about through the Spirit-empowered preaching of the gospel, resulting in the conversion of the world and the world-wide spiritual reign of Christ through the gospel.

The 18th century was the great age of post millennialism, which played a key role in the development of missionary thinking. Daniel Whitby (1638- 1726) influenced Jonathan Edwards who was at the centre of the First Great Awakening in colonial America. He believed

that the world would become Christianised through the preaching of the gospel and America had a key role in this transformation. John Wesley anticipated the end of human conflict. The revivals were seen as the first ripples of the movement of conversion which would engulf the world, and a view which gave human activity a significant role in God's purpose of establishing his kingdom was a major stimulus to missionary activity.

In the United States, after the Second Great Awakening (Charles Finney etc.), the civil war, non-Protestant immigration and growing secularism turned people away from the optimism of postmillennialism to the more pessimistic and apocalyptic premillennialism.

In the 19th century, postmillennial expectation increasingly approximated to the secular doctrine of progress and merged into liberal theology's identification of the kingdom of God's with moral and social improvement. Protestant theology in America (manifest destiny) equated the millennium with the spread of democracy, technology and other benefits of Western civilisation. The modern decline of postmillennialism coincides with the loss of Christian credibility that doctrines of progress have suffered.

A form of postmillennialism has been revived in the Reconstructionist school of "dominion theology" in the United States. This is Calvinistic. Alternatively, Kingdom Now theology is a strain of Dominion Theology operating as a small minority within the Charismatic movement. The church, under the leadership of restored apostles and prophets, must take over the world and put down all opposition to it before Christ can return.

4. The influence of Historical Circumstances

In the days of early Rome, the idea of an imminent parousia followed by an era of peace after the persecutions of a fierce Antichrist was very plausible and brought hope comfort to believers.

In Augustine's day, with universal peace already evident, it seemed the millennium had already begun.

In the days of the Reformers, the scene changed again. Now, with the papacy seemingly fulfilling the role of the Antichrist, the millennium was forgotten: what was important was dealing with the present apostasy. This however required the support rather than the overthrow of the state, as in state religion. Hence apocalyptic scenarios were rejected.

By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the progress of the gospel was so impressive through the nation-wide revivals that were being experienced everywhere, it seemed only a matter of time until the millennium was ushered in simply through the proclamation of the word of God.

The disillusionment of the twentieth century with its wars and revolutions brought about a resurgence of the view of the early Church - our only hope was the return of Christ. This was also fuelled by the terrorist and ecological crises of this century.

Whenever the U.S. has faced a time of crisis e.g. 9/11, some have revived a civil postmillennialism as a means to encourage and comfort its citizens. This has become increasingly vague biblically as the society has become more pluralistic.

10.2 Postmillennialism

10.2.1 The Nature of the Millennium

1. The millennium will be an extended period, but not necessarily a literal 1000 years.
2. Christ returns **after** the millennium.
3. Postmillennialism is based less on Revelation 20 (the only place in scripture which speaks of a 'millennium') than on other parts of the Bible.

10.2.2 Features of Postmillennialism

1. Postmillennialism is an optimistic view of history which has flourished in times of rapid church growth and revival, e.g., Augustine, John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, James Orr. Advocates of a 'social Gospel' e.g., Walter Rauschenbusch and proponents of political theology e.g., Johannes Metz, J. Moltmann present a more secularised form of postmillennialism.
2. In postmillennialism the kingdom of God is a present reality rather than a future heavenly realm e.g. Ritschl.
3. The major tenet of postmillennialism is the successful spread of the Gospel. Satan is bound during the period of the spread of the Gospel, so that he cannot deceive the nations.
4. The gospel will be so successful that the world will be converted. When the reign of Christ is complete and universal peace will prevail and evil will be virtually banished.
5. The Antichrist will appear towards the end of the millennium, but his time is short because the parousia is imminent. At the end of the millennium Satan therefore stirs up trouble, but is then permanently subdued.
6. Then when the Gospel has fully taken effect, Christ will return, that is **after** the millennium.

10.2.3 Scriptural support

1. Ezek 36:27ff proclaims the transformation of society through inner spiritual renewal. Ps 47,72,100; Isaiah 45:22-25, Hosea 2:23 say that all nations will come to know God. Jesus taught that the Gospel must be taught in all nations before the end (Matt 24:14).
2. The parables of the kingdom (Matt 13) emphasise intensive and extensive growth.
3. Even where there are temporary setbacks and crises the Gospel will eventually triumph. Postmillennialists take seriously our Lord's promise that the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church (Matt 16:18). The saved are not a tiny remnant but a great multitude from every tribe, people and tongue (Rev 7:9); the principalities and powers of the old aeon cannot withstand the Gospel (Rev 12:11).

10.2.4 Weaknesses in Postmillennialism

1. The New Testament describes an increase in apostasy and tribulation before the coming of Christ, this is nowhere minimised e.g., Matt 24:6-14; 21,22; Luke 18:8; 21:25-28; 1 Thess 2:3-12; 2 Tim 3:1-6; Rev 13.
2. The parables of the kingdom do not teach a total transformation of human history under the present conditions of existence.

3. The Bible teaches that the end of the age will come suddenly, supernaturally, miraculously, catastrophically (Matt 19:28; 24:29-31; 35-44; Heb 12:26-27; 2 Pet 3:10-13).
4. The kingdom does not come by human effort or gradual evolution but by the unaided power of God.
5. The postmillennial tendency to interpret the first resurrection in Rev 20:4-5 as the elevation of the martyrs to reign with Christ, separate from the resurrection of the rest of the righteous, tends to detract from the need for all believers to confess their faith under trial. Likewise, all Christians will reign as priests and kings (1 Cor 6:2; Rev 1:6; 9; 5:9,10).
6. It undermines the urgency of expectation of Christ's return.

10.3 Premillennialism

10.3.1 The Nature of the Millennium

1. The millennium comes **after** the return of Christ.
2. Jesus will reign on earth by a physical presence for 1000 years. Therefore the millennium lies in the future.

10.3.2 Features of Premillennialism

1. Premillennialists envision a sudden, cataclysmic event initiating the millennium. The rule of Jesus will be complete from the start of this period.
2. The conditions of the millennium will be radically different from anything we know in this age. There will be universal peace, extending even throughout the natural world (Isa 11:6-7). The saints will rule with Christ during this period (Rev 19).
3. Dispensationalists read the Old Testament prophecies concerning the restoration of the nation of Israel literally. Jesus will reign from David's throne in Jerusalem. The temple will be rebuilt, sacrifices will be restored (Ezek 45:17), the nations will travel up to keep the feasts (Zech 14:16).
4. Nondispensationalists do not accept many of these features. Israel's special place, being spiritual in nature, will be found within the church. Israel will be converted in large numbers during the millennium.
5. At the end of the millennium Satan and his forces are loosed from their bondages. A universal conflict occurs involving earthly nations. The forces of evil are destroyed. The final judgement takes place before the great white throne.

10.3.3 Scriptural support

1. The key passage for premillennialism is Rev 20:1-6.
2. This seems to teach a 1000 year rule of Christ separated by two resurrections. Since the same verb (**edzesan**) is used of both resurrections they must both be physical. Nothing in the context suggests a shift of meaning.
3. Those who participate in the first resurrection are not involved in the second. Only the first are said to be blessed and holy. Only believers share in the earthly reign of Christ.
4. This interpretation of Revelation 20 is supported by those passages in the New Testament where the Greek term **eita** is used in a temporal sequence to do with events at the end. **Eita** usually means "after that", so that when Paul says that "the end" is **eita**

in relation to the return of Christ (1 Cor 15:23 – 25) he means a temporal sequence intervenes between them. This is the millennium.

10.3.4 Weaknesses of Premillennialism

1. The kingdom of God is made into an earthly and national kingdom, rather than a spiritual and universal one.
2. The Bible brackets the resurrection of the righteous and unrighteous (Dan 12:2; John 5:28-29; 11:24).
3. The Bible does not separate the last judgement from the parousia (Matt 16:27; 25:31-32; Jude 14-15; 2 Thess 1:7-10; Rev 22:12).
4. Dispensationalism ignores the fulfilment of the prophetic promises in the person of Jesus, and the place of the Church as the true Israel (Rom 9:6; Gal 6:16).
5. Some premillennialists picture a mingling of glorified saints with humans in natural bodies on the earth - this is a mythological view of paradise. The Reformers, in opposition to the Anabaptists, took a literal 1000 year reign to contradict God's perfect Lordship.
6. Even if **eita** does indicate temporal progression, the notion that unaided it indicates a break of one thousand years, or a major era in salvation history, is unlikely.
7. Rev 20:1-6 is capable of different interpretation:
 - (a) The book is highly symbolised. Nowhere else are its numbers to be literalised.
 - (b) The rest of the New Testament is read in the light of this difficult passage, not vice-versa.
 - (c) The whole passage is not taken literally e.g., the chain in v.1, the souls in v.4.
 - (d) The martyrs are not strictly speaking said to be resurrected, but that their coming to life and reigning with Christ is a resurrection.
 - (e) The text does not mention an earthly reign.
 - (f) No mention is made of Israel, the temple etc.
8. The rest of the New Testament encourages a single future expectation, viz. the Parousia, not the two-fold expectation of millennium and New Jerusalem.
9. Some forms of premillennialism, those which emphasise the radical discontinuity between the present evil in the world and the coming millennial kingdom, are pessimistic in a way which does not fit the realism of the New Testament, but is closer to Jewish apocalyptic literature.

10.4 Amillennialism

10.4.1 The Nature of the Millennium

1. Literally, 'amillennial' means no millennium i.e., no earthly reign of Christ. The final judgement immediately follows the Second Coming of Christ and issues directly in the final states of the wicked and righteous.
2. The millennium is the **present** reign of Christ with his saints from heaven.

10.4.2 Features of Amillennialism

1. Amillennialism shares common views with postmillennialism. Satan is presently bound (Matt 12:29; John 12:31-32; Col 2:15). This does not necessitate a complete cessation of activity, as for example in 2 Thess 2: 6 – 7). The 1000 years of Rev 20 is to be taken symbolically, the millennium is the church age.
2. Amillennialists also agree with (classic) premillennialists concerning the nature of the events which will precede the coming of Christ. There will be a great period of persecution and apostasy followed by the radical supernatural inbreaking of the kingdom of God.
3. Amillennialists differ from premillennialists, especially dispensationalists, in their interpretation of Old Testament prophecy. As a general rule prophecies find their fulfilment in Jesus and through him in the Church.

Amillennialists place the final Satanic rebellion of Rev 20:7ff in the period immediately preceding the Second Coming. This is what Paul outlines in 2 Thessalonians 2. Revelation 20 does not follow chapter nineteen chronologically. It is a flashback which recapitulates the triumph of Jesus over Satan from a slightly different angle. (The expressions ‘after this’, ‘when the thousand years are ended’ (Rev.20:3, 7) represent an order in the visions, not of chronology. This interpretation is truer to the symbolic nature of Revelation than a literalistic view.)

Rev 20:1 – 3 precedes 19:11 – 21 in time; 20:7-10 narrates the demise of Satan at the same time as that of the beast/false prophet in 19:17-21 i.e. Parousia. Rev 19:17-18 and 20:7-10 are parallel expansions of Chs.15-16, all of which take us to the end.

4. “Thus the binding of Satan, the resurrection of the saints, and the thousand year reign are metaphors for the present situation of Christians. As expected, the day of the Lord has quelled all opposition and brought peace for believers.” Dumbrell, W. J. 1994: 342 *The search for order*. Grand Rapids : Baker.

10.4.3 Weakness of Amillennialism

1. It has a difficulty maintaining a consistent exegesis of Rev 20. The key problem for amillennialists is how to deal with the two resurrections of Rev 20:4-6. The most common interpretation is that the first resurrection is spiritual and the second is physical. The first resurrection is to be taken symbolically, it is regeneration, the second resurrection is to be taken literally i.e., physically. All those who share in the first resurrection share in the second, but not vice-versa. The living and reigning with Christ of v.4-5 is the context of present Christian experience (1:6; 5:10) viz. conversion cf. Rom.6:1-10; Gal.2:20; Eph.2:5; Col.3:1-2.

An obvious problem with this exegesis is that it interprets identical terms in the same context in a different manner.

The best reply to this problem is that ‘to live’ may be taken in 2 different senses because it refers to two entirely different experiences. To live with Christ in the midst of the present evil age is not the same as life after his return. (A comparison could be drawn between Jesus’ pre - and post - resurrection states.)

2. How can the devil be both in the Abyss and active on the earth at the same time?
3. It can be argued that the binding of Satan in the Gospels is an anticipation of the final defeat rather than being identical with it.

4. Jewish apocalypses all think of the millennium as Messiah's future reign rather than present.
5. It tends to be based on dogmatic rather than exegetical concerns.
6. It tends toward an identification between the kingdom of Christ and the visible Church.
7. It tends to focus on the kingdom as an other-worldly spiritual reality (in heaven).
8. It tends to take away the urgency of the return of Christ (realised, in part, by the gift of the Spirit to the Church).

10.5 A Functional Theology of the Millennium

10.5.1 Hermeneutics

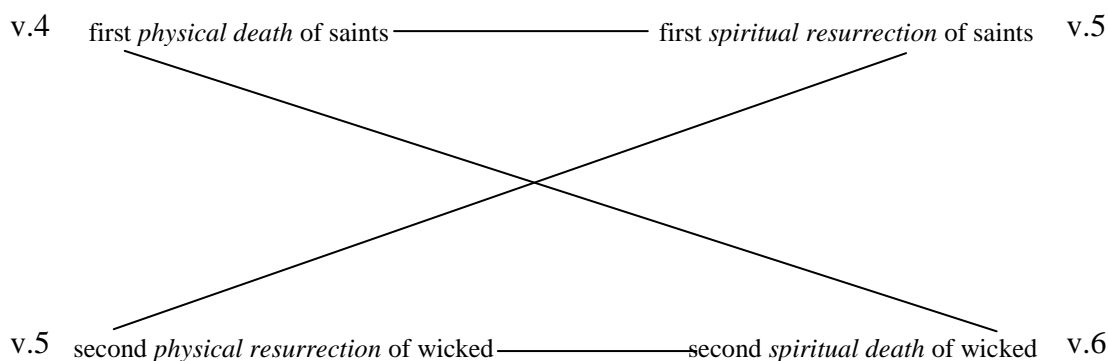
1. Revelation 20 must be useful to the first readers, i.e. in their situation of persecution. It must also be useful to each successive generation of Christians.
2. The principal message of the book of Revelation is Christ the Conqueror:
1:13-18; 2:8, 26-27; 3:21; 5:5-9; 6:2, 16; 7:9-10; 11:15; 12:9ff; 14:1, 14; 15:2ff;
17:14; 19:11, 16; 20:4; 22:3, 16.
3. 'Reportorial eschatology' is alien to the nature of biblical apocalyptic. It claims to present a 'knowledge' of the future course of history and concrete events which always proves illusory and distant. Even if premillennialism is correct, its dominant cultural interpreters put it forward in an escapist fashion.
4. "The visions of this chapter, which are among the most difficult in the book have to do with the prelude to eternity which is mysteriously bound up with a thousand years. We must remind ourselves again that these are apocalyptic visions and not history. We have glimpses of an unseen world and of it bearing upon world events here and now. We are given also intimations of what shall be. But all this is clothed in mysterious symbolical language and measured out in its span by an apocalyptic calendar. It is expressed thus precisely because it cannot be expressed in the straightforward way of direct speech. Extraordinary symbols have been thrown upon the screen of vision strange uncanny creatures in fantastic mixture of the mythical and the recognisable, and now on the same screen of vision we have the symbol a thousand years. It is quite evident that we have no more right to take this thousand years literally than we have to take the ten-headed and seven horned monster literally. It is entirely out of place therefore to bring down the thousand years out of its apocalyptic setting and place it on the ordinary plane of history as if it could be handled by a worldly arithmetic and manipulated in calculations about the dispensations of time or about the end of the world. Such an intrusion into the secrets of God is utterly foreign to the Bible, and, as we have seen again and again in this book, it is always denied to us. God's time is different from our time

What kind of time is it in the Kingdom of God? It is time like a thousand years, perfect in duration and complete in itself, time in which the dragon of guilt is bound, time therefore which can mature and find its perfect fulfilment in the eternal life of God—the time of Christ."

(Thomas Torrance *The Apocalypse Today* James Clarke, 1960, pp. 162—164.)

10.5.2 Revelation 20

1. Life and rule are the main themes of vv4 – 6. The millennium demonstrates the victory of suffering Christians.
2. The identity of those who come to life in Rev 20:4 is the martyrs (“souls”) of chapter 6:9-11. This does not restrict participation of other believers (Rev 1:6; 5:9 – 10).
3. The millennium is not realised in political and social conditions within history, but in a more than temporal fulfilment, that is , in heaven.
4. The millennium is not the messianic age on earth of the Old Testament but the reward for the uncompromised saints of being able to share in Christ’s rule(cf. Dan 7).
5. The use of “first resurrection” is found nowhere else in the Bible. Elsewhere in the New Testament “resurrection” and “life” are used together in the same context as synonyms and interchangeably of both spiritual and physical resurrection (John 5:24 – 29; 11:25 –26; Rom 6:4 – 13; 8:10 – 11).
6. This produces a chiastic pattern in the passage:



1. The state of the dead in heaven is the intermediate state, which in other places in the New Testament can be spoken of as “life” (Luke 20:37 –38, 1 Peter 4:6). This is a “resurrection” in the sense of translation to a higher state of life.
2. This interpretation does not see the first resurrection as regeneration occurring on the earth, but a higher stage of life which overcomes physical death that follows some time after regeneration.

10.5.3 Power and Comfort

1. If the primary issue is power, who has the Lordship, Christ or Caesar/Satan, the primary outcome is comfort.
2. The expressions of time are essentially power concepts. Christ’s 1000 year reign represents absolute power, the release of Satan for ‘a little while’ (Rev.20:3) means limited power.
3. The binding of Satan (cf. Rev.12:9; Col.2:15) is neither quantitative nor geographical but complete in its authority.
4. This means that the power of the millennium is not reduced while Satan gathers the nations.
5. The release of Satan points out the unassailable nature of the first resurrection no matter what appears to be happening (cf. Rev.17:12 ‘for one hour’).

6. The revelation of these truths about the reign of Christ brings deep and immediate comfort to his persecuted brothers and sisters: ‘the proclamation goes out that everything is really different from what men in the depths of their bitter experience think it is.’ Berkouwer, G. C. 1972. *The return of Christ*. Grand Rapids:Eerdmans (p.322).
7. The vision of believers ruling with Christ is the opposite of a limited millennial expectation. “Those who see the millennium as being in the now of history and know Christ to be reigning now, have more confidence in the sovereign action of God, and expect much to happen that is great before the Parousia.” (Bingham, G.C. 1991:32 *The matter of the millennium*. Blackwood:New Creation).
8. The victory of God is outworked in the present as the life of Jesus manifested in our bodies in the midst of struggle (2 Cor.4:11; Rom.5:3; 2 Cor.1:4f).
9. Believers form a royal priesthood with direct access to God.

11. THE LAST JUDGEMENT

11.1 Differing Views of the Final Judgement

11.1.1 It is Purely Metaphorical

: it is symbolic of the final separation of the world and the Church (Schleiermacher).

11.1.2 It is Purely Immanent

: 'the history of the world is the judgement of the world' (Schelling).

The claim is that divine retribution or reformation is totally exhausted by the exercise of divine wrath in history cf. Rom 1:18ff.

11.1.3 It is not a Single Event

Dispensationalists advocate three different future judgements:

1. A judgement of the risen and living saints at the rapture or coming of the Lord, assigning rewards and a place in the millennial kingdom.
2. A judgement at the day of the Lord at the end of the tribulation, during which the Gentile nations are judged as nations for their attitude to the evangelising remnant of Israel. Righteous nations (Matt 25:31-46) enter the millennial kingdom.
3. A judgement at the end of the millennium when the unrighteous dead are judged according to their works.

11.1.4 It is a Single Event

1. It is 'the day of judgement' John 5:28-29; Acts 17:31; 2 Peter 3:7; cf. Matt 7:22; Rom 2:5; 2 Tim 4:8.
2. The righteous and wicked appear in judgement for a final separation (Matt 7:22-23; 25:31-46; Rom 2:5-7; Rev 11:18; 20:11-15).
3. The judgement of the wicked accompanies the coming of the Lord and his revelation on the day of the Lord (2 Thess 1:7-10; 2 Pet 3:4-7).
4. It is difficult to deny that the judgement of Matt 25:31-46 applies to individuals.

11.2 The Nature of the Judgement

1. It is visible.
2. It is public.
3. It is forensic i.e., in relation to the revealed will or law of God.
4. It is declarative. It is not an investigative judgement in order to determine the status of men and women before God, this has already been established by virtue of their response to the Gospel. (John 3:18, 36; 1 John 5:12)..
5. It is final i.e., eternal.

See Matt 25:31-46; John 5:27-29; Acts 24:25; Rom 2:5-11; Heb 9:27; 10:27; 2 Pet 3:7; Rev 20:11-15.

11.3 The Judge and his Assistants

11.3.1 Christ is the Judge

That Jesus is Judge comforts those who have accepted him and convicts those who have rejected him.

1. That Jesus is the Judge is taught in Scripture: Matt 25:31-32; John 5:27; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Phil 2:10; 2 Tim 4:1.
2. This is an honour conferred on the Son by the Father as a reward for his atoning work (Matt 28:18; John 5:27; Phil 2:9-10). P.T. Forsyth: ‘Judgement is an essential element in Fatherhood and not a corrective device.’
3. It is the last stage of his exaltation.
4. It is part of who he is as the Word made flesh for our salvation. “Christ, the truth, is judge of the world, by the very fact of having taken it upon himself.” (Zizioulas)
5. It completes the salvation of his people. It is their public justification from sin.

11.3.2 The Angels assist Jesus

1. Matt 13:41-42; 24:31; 25:31.
2. They would seem to do this as agents.

11.3.3 The Saints will Sit and Judge with Christ

1. Ps 149:5-9; 1 Cor 6:2-3; Rev 20:4.
2. They will do this in their union with Christ.

11.4 The Parties that will be Judged

1. Fallen angels - Matt 8:29; 1 Cor 6:3; 2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6.
2. All people - Ps 50:4-6; Matt 12:36-37; 25:32; Rom 14:10; 2 Cor 5:10; Rev 20:12.
3. The sins of believers will be revealed as **pardoned** sins cf. John 5:24.

11.5 The time of the Judgement

1. At the end of history (Matt 13:40-43; 2 Pet 3:7).
2. It will be a fruit of the coming of Jesus (Matt 25:19-46; 2 Thess 1:7-10; 2 Pet 3:9-10).
3. It will immediately follow the resurrection (Dan 12:2; John 5:28-29; Rev 20:12-13).

11.6 The Standard of Judgement

1. This is the revealed will of God.
2. Gentiles who have not heard the Gospel will be judged by the law of nature inscribed on their hearts (Rom 2:12-16).
3. Israelites before Christ will be judged in terms of the Old Testament revelation.
4. Those who have heard the Gospel will be judged by their response to the Gospel.
5. Christians will be judged according to their manner of life as believers (Rom.14:10ff; 1 Cor.3:5ff; 4:4ff; 2 Cor.5:10).
6. There will be different degrees of retribution and reward according to the deeds done in the body (Matt 11:22,24; Luke 12:47,48; 20:47; Dan 12:3; 2 Cor 9:6).

11.7 The Comprehensiveness of the Judgement

1. It will take into account the secret thoughts and intentions of the heart.
 - (a) As the heart is the source of motivation (1 Sam 16:7 cf. Rom 8:27; 1 Thess 2:4) it must be judged by God (1 Cor 4:5 cf. Matt 5:21,27,33).
 - (b) This involves supraindividual guilt, or what it means to be fallen and ‘in Adam’.

2. It will render to every person according to their works.
 - (a) This is clearly taught in the New Testament e.g., Matt 5:11f; 10:32f; 10:41f; Rom 2:5-10; 2 Cor 5:10.
 - (b) The motive of good works is not the reward to come but devoted and humble service to God (Luke 17:10 etc).
 - (c) The reward is a sign or symbol of God's good pleasure (Matt 25:21,23,28ff).
 - (d) The reward is God Himself (1 Cor 13:12; 2 Cor 5:7).
 - (e) This reveals that Gospel pardon is a miracle we could never naturally anticipate.
3. It will involve a pronouncement of sentence.
 - (a) It is a revelation of God's righteous judgement before his tribunal and all creation (Rom 2:5; 2 Cor 5:10).
 - (b) It is the public vindication of God and the glory of his grace.
 - (c) It will be a public pronouncement.
4. It will involve an execution of sentence.
 - (a) The righteous to everlasting blessedness: this honours the saints before angels, humanity and their enemies, "come you blessed of my Father.....".
 - (b) The wicked to everlasting misery: "depart". (Matt 25:32ff.)
5. It is final
 - (a) God is supreme Judge – there is no court of appeal
 - (b) God is omnipotent – it is vain to resist
 - (c) God's decree is inexorable – it is vain to entreaty (Isa.1:5; Ezek.8:18)
 - (d) The time for mercy is past (Rev.14:10).
(Jonathon Edwards).

12 HEAVEN AND HELL

12.1 Hell

12.1.1 The Meaning of 'Hell'

1. In the oldest strata of the Old Testament there is no place of eternal punishment (Job 7:21; 10:21-22; 17:26; Prov 7:27; Ps 139; Ezek 26:20).
2. Later in the Old Testament a doctrine of final judgement and permanent punishment is developed (Isa 24:21-22; 66:24; Dan 12:2).
3. By the time of Jesus the Pharisees accepted a doctrine of eternal punishment. Jesus spoke of 'hell' as **Gehenna** i.e., the valley of Hinnom, where a perpetually smouldering rubbish dump consumed the waste of Jerusalem (Mark 9:43-48 etc).
4. Elsewhere this is referred to as a 'furnace of fire' (Matt 13:42) and a 'lake of fire' (Rev 20:14-15).
5. It would appear that hell is a place as well as a state.

12.1.2 The Origin of Hell

1. According to Jesus hell was a place 'prepared for the devil and his angels' (Matt 25:41).
2. From this we may infer that hell had no place in God's original purpose for humanity. No-one therefore 'belongs' in hell. It is an emergency measure (2 Pet.3:9), an end without a goal i.e. not an eschatological realisation. Heaven and hell, election and rejection are non-symmetrical; hence there are only detailed descriptions of heaven at the end of the Bible (Rev. 21-22).
3. "I would comment further that hell is not the location of evil (not the realm of the devil) in the biblical view, but the place of righteousness vindicated, holiness glorified, rebels reconciled in the sense of Col 1:20. Evil owns no place at all."
(H. Blocher)

12.1.3 The Suffering of Hell

1. The teaching of Jesus indicates degrees of punishment in hell (Matt 11:21-24; Luke 12:47-48).
2. The principle here is that responsibility is in direct proportion to knowledge.
3. It involves exclusion from the presence of God (Matt 7:23; 25: 10 – 13,30,41; 2 Thess 1:9; Rev 22:15). This must be taken to mean complete loss of the favour of God. The inhabitants of hell are outside of the heart of God.
4. The agonies of hell are described in physical terms: 'men will weep and gnash their teeth' (Matt 8:12; 13:42; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30). Presumably this is an example of hyperbole cf. Jude 7, 13.
5. Hell is spoken of as "outer darkness" (Matt 8:12; 22:13; 25:30) eternal fire (Matt 18:8; 25:31; Jude 7), eternal punishment (Matt 25:46) and the second death (Rev 21:8). This must mean the total absence of participation in the glory of God.
6. Subjective elements of hell would include despair, guilt, hopelessness, remorse, loss of meaning, a sense of complete failure etc. Absolute anonymity. As the pleasure of the

Father – Creator in the present world order no longer will exist, there is no possible consolation or satisfaction other than in God, who has been rejected.

7. Since hell has no proper goal, its agonies cannot be experienced as in any sense purposeful; educative or reformatory.
8. Presumably, the deepest pain of hell is moral.

The revelation of Christ is the revelation of the Gospel: that God has acted in Christ graciously with total justice and complete love for the salvation of all. The recognition of the meaning of the rejection of this free offer is the power of condemnation. This is the “wrath of the Lamb”. Sin transforms, through guilt, the revelation of the fullness of the righteous love of God in Christ into an experience of unbearable guilt and condemnation. God’s love is experienced as absolute terror.

12.3 Universalism

12.2.1 The Doctrine

1. This is a belief in universal salvation, that in the end all human beings will attain to heaven.
2. The negative reasons upholding this view include:
 - a) an eternal punishment of retribution is incompatible with a loving God.
 - b) it makes God's purposes out as failed. It denies the sovereign freedom of God to bring all persons to himself.
 - c) the images of hell are not literal but symbolic. They are designed to shock us into repentance now.
 - d) the bliss of the saints is incompatible with their knowledge of an eternal hell.
3. The positive reasons advanced for this view include:
 - a) the eternal presence of the love of God will subdue all human resistance.
 - b) a universal atonement means universal reconciliation (Eph 1:9-10; Col 1:20; Phil 2:10,11).

12.2.3 A Reply

1. God's wrath is the expression of his holy love, not in opposition to it.
2. It is not God but people who fail to reach their goal. God will still have a family.
3. The scriptures speak of an eternal separation from God, even if the language used of hell is pictorial (Matt 25:41, cf. Luke 16:19-31).
4. It denies the total bias the human heart has against God (Jer 17:9).
5. No purpose exists in shocking language if nothing corresponds to it.
6. The universal texts of the New Testament speak of a universal subjugation of persons to the rule of Christ. This is a pacification that may in some cases have to be brought about by force.

12.3 Annihilationism or Conditional Immortality

12.3.1 The Doctrine

1. This is the belief that those who are not saved will be annihilated.
2. The reasons put forward for annihilationalism include the following:
 1. the alternative of eternal punishment is cruel and vindictive, a finite amount of sin cannot deserve infinite torment.
 2. since the Bible teaches that immortality is not natural to man but a gift given by God to believers, that logically implies that unbelievers do not exist indefinitely after death i.e., the person either dissolves away gradually or is destroyed by God.
 3. the objects in Gehenna disintegrate, but the fire continues (Mark 9:48).
 4. biblical images such as fire and destruction e.g., 2 Thess 2:8-9 suggest annihilation of existence.
 5. strict literalism cannot be forced upon the apocalyptic language of Revelation.

6. 'eternal' in places like Matt 25:46; 2 Thess 1:9 and Heb 6:2 signifies a permanent result to judgement.
7. eternal torment leads to an eternal cosmic dualism.
8. God can only be 'everything to everybody' (1 Cor.15:28) if evil is totally destroyed.
9. "The choice is, therefore, not between belief or non-belief in eternal judgement. The choice is between a belief that God deliberately maintains potentially millions or even billions of human creatures in being in order to be tormented for their offence against Him, and on the other hand a belief that those who refuse God will lose Him and so lose the eternal life He offers. It is hard to square the first view with the God of compassionate justice whom we encounter in and through Jesus Christ." (Nigel Wright)

"Let me say at the outset that I consider the concept of hell as endless torment in body and mind an outrageous doctrine, a theological and moral enormity, a bad doctrine of the tradition which needs to be changed. How can Christians possibly project a deity of such cruelty and vindictiveness whose ways include inflicting everlasting torture upon his creatures, however sinful they may have been. Surely a God who would do such a thing is more nearly like Satan than like God, at least by any ordinary moral standards, and by the gospel itself Does the one who told us to love our enemies intend to wreak vengeance on his own enemies for all eternity? As H. Kung appropriately asks, "What would we think of a human being who satisfied his thirst for revenge so implacably and insatiably?" ... [E]verlasting torment is intolerable from a moral point of view because it makes God into a blood-thirsty monster who maintains an everlasting Auschwitz for victims whom he does not even allow to die" (C. Pinnock.)

12.3.2 The Reply

1. Annihilationism has never been accepted as part of Christian orthodoxy, but has proven popular with heretics, e.g. Socinius, Jehovah's Witnesses.
2. Annihilationism is inconsistent with what it means to be created in the image of God i.e., eternal (this is not to suggest that the soul is indestructible but that is **created** immortal). To be created for sonship is to be created eternal.
3. Annihilationism does not sufficiently deal with the continuity between this life and the next, there needs to be degrees of punishment.
4. The justice of God requires that total guilt be dealt with by an infinite punishment.
5. The annihilationist view of eternal punishment (hell) is too extrinsic.
6. This view of God's justice treats sin more like an incurable disease, and annihilation as a blessed euthanasia, than sin as a crime and hell as a fitting punishment.
7. Jesus spoke of continuity of life in Gehenna 'their worm does not die' (Mark 9:47-48).
8. The Greek word for 'destroy' (*appolumai*) has a different meaning from annihilate (*ekdemenisis*), eg. Matt 26:8. The latter word is never used.
9. The material in Revelation expressly states people (14:10-11; 20:15; 21:8) suffer forever.
10. The natural sense of the use 'eternal', 'everlasting' and 'forever' suggests an endless period (Isa 33:14; 66:24; Jer 17:4; Matt 18:8; 25:41; Jude 7; Rev 14:11; 20:10).
11. The parallelism between 'eternal punishment' and 'eternal life' in Matt 25:46 is inescapable. Life is not merely a permanent 'result', but an ongoing relationship.

12. Hell as a state of existence is not the creation of God, but is self-created by persistent and unrepentant human evil which refuses to acknowledge that the only glory is the glory of God (Rev.22:10-11).
13. God is 'everything to everybody' from the time that Jesus raises the dead (1 Cor 15:25ff) i.e. the wicked still exist. While unpunished evil detracts from God's glory, his triumph over evil enhances it (Rev.9:17, 22-24). Hell is not to be thought of as part of the cosmos. It is outer darkness – without order, light, law or love.
14. "But there is a deeper, more fundamental question. The wages of sin is death. Suppose we translate that, "The wages of sin is annihilation." How can we relate this to the atonement? Christ became a curse for us. Does that mean he was annihilated? Christ tasted death. Does that mean he tasted annihilation? To ask is to answer. For Jesus, the curse was conscious torment: something through which he existed, and throughout which he was fully conscious.
Crux probat omnia ("The cross is the test of everything"), said Luther. Hell is what Christ experienced at Calvary. There he was *made* sin. He became it, as he became flesh. He was spared nothing that sin deserved. The physical pain, the treachery of friends, the taunts of enemies and the howls of demons – all expressed the anger of God. They told him that, as sin, he was repugnant to the Most High; that he was banished; that God couldn't look at him or listen to him.
 God wouldn't allow any contact. As the lost one, he was without God, desolate, derelict. He represents – bears – is – all the sin, all the lawlessness, of the world and God hurls him to the place where all lawlessness belongs: to the pit, the black hole; to the infinite, utter, outside; to the place where there is nothing to say but, Why? And Why!". (D. Macleod).
15. This means that in a practical sense annihilationism is true i.e. the "people" in hell will unknowable to those in heaven (to God?).

12.4 Heaven

12.4.1 The Term 'Heaven'

1. Heaven can mean a place (Gen 1:1, Matt 5:18 etc) 'Heaven and earth' constitute the universe.
2. Heaven is a virtual synonym for God (Luke 5:18,21; Matt 21:25; John 3:27). This is clear in the Synoptic Gospels where Matthew uses 'kingdom of heaven' and Luke 'kingdom of God'.
3. Heaven is the abode of God.
 God is said to be 'in heaven' (Matt 6:9, 7:11, 21; 10:32 etc). Likewise the expression 'heavenly Father' (Matt 5:48; 6:14 etc). To come from heaven is to come from God (John 3:13; 3:31 etc).
4. Heaven is the home of the angels who are God's servants (Mark 13:32; Matt 18:10; Luke 2:13 etc).
5. Heaven is the place from which Christ shall be revealed (1 Thess 1:10; 4:16; 2 Thess 1:7). It appears that his activity in heaven involves preparing a place for fellowship with his followers (John 14:2-3).

6. Heaven is the place where believers will be for all eternity (Matt 6:19-20; Col 1:5; Eph 1:10; 1 Pet 1:4-5 etc).
7. Heaven is the true home of believers. They are renewed, but the earth is not, therefore they experience alienation (Heb.11:13ff; 1 Pet.2:11; Phil.3:20-21; Col.3:2; 1Jn.5:19)

12.4.2 The Location of Heaven

1. Heaven must be a place as well as a state.
2. The scriptures speak of a new heaven and a new earth (Rev 21:1), of a regenerated universe (2 Pet 3:10-13 – this parallels the Flood, so it is not annihilation.). The new Jerusalem descends from heaven to earth (Rev 21). After Rev.21:1 there is no reference to heaven, for God is now on the earth (21:4ff).
3. What holds this all together is the person of Christ. Since the Father and the Spirit are pure spirit (John 4:24) the location of heaven as such can only be defined in terms of the ‘whereabouts’ of Jesus’ resurrection body.
4. Jesus heads up all ‘things in heaven and things on earth’ (Eph 1:9-10). All things have been reconciled by the blood of the cross (Col 1:20). He ascended that he might fill all things (Eph 4:10). Where Christ is fully present there heaven is.
5. Spatial language about heaven is to be taken metaphorically rather than literally. We cannot imagine the precise conditions of eternity.

12.4.3 The Nature of Heaven

1. Heaven is the fulfilment of God’s original intention to dwell with men and women in the most intimate fellowship (Rev 21:3). N.B. this surpasses Eden – a city rather than a Garden, God lives there.
2. This fellowship must be understood Christocentrically. Jesus promised that he would reveal his glory to his disciples, and that they would share in his oneness with the Father (John 17). This means participation in the fellowship of the Father and the Son in the power of the Spirit. Enjoyment of the complete harmony of Father and Son; “God-Lamb” are bracketed in Revelation and equal in function (1:8; 4:11; 5:13; 7:9-10; 21:1, 6, 22, 23; 22:3, 13).
3. It involves perfect knowledge of God (1 Cor 13:9-12; 1 John 3:2). “And our eyes at last shall see him, through his own redeeming love”.
4. It includes the destruction of all sin and evil (Rev 20:10; 21:4). No sea means no chaos.
5. It is a place of great glory. The glory of the heavenly city is the glory of God (Rev 21:23; 22:5).
6. The thought of heaven should stimulate holiness (2 Pet.3:11, 14; 1Jn.3:2-3) bring consolation (Rev.21-22) and open us to admonition (Rev.21:8, 27; 22:3, 11, 14, 15) and warning (Rev.21:27; 22:14)..

12.4.4 Heaven and Reward

(Refer also to the notes on the Last Judgement.)

(a) There are eternal distinctions in heaven.

1. Scripture teaches different rewards in heaven (Dan 12:3; Luke 19:11-17; 1 Cor 3:14-15; 15:41 etc).

2. This apparently involves continuity with faithfulness in this life i.e., the greater the degree of obedience to God the greater the reward.
3. This is an inducement to present holiness of life.
3. These differences vindicate present (hidden) faithfulness.
4. As the reward of heaven and in heaven is participation in the life of God himself it may suggest that sanctification is a preparation for glorification. Sanctification in the present determines the degree to which we will be able to receive what God has in store for us in eternity.
5. Differences in reward may be both objective and subjective, involving degrees of authority and levels of appreciation of the presence of God.
6. This does not necessarily mean these are registered as differences in experience, all will be equally happy.
7. Even if these distinctions are recognised, they will be accepted as fully just.
8. This is not a matter of merit: "God crowns his gifts in us." (Augustine)

(b) There are no eternal distinctions in heaven.

1. Passages to do with "crowns" simply refer to eternal life itself (1 Cor 9:25; 1 Thess 2:19; 2 Tim 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Pet 5:4).
2. 1 Cor 3:11-15 says nothing about the distinctions among believer's experiences persisting beyond judgement day (cf. the shame of 1 John 2:28).
3. 2 Cor 5:10 refers back to 1 Cor 3; it does not carry the point of judgement beyond the day of reckoning.
4. The parables of the talents (Matt 25:14-30) and the pounds (Luke 19:11-27) have one main point, to distinguish between the faithful and unfaithful. (What would "ruling over cities" mean in heaven?)
5. The parable of the workers in the vineyard teaches an equality of reward due to grace alone (Matt 20:1-16).
5. Some scriptures do teach a different experience at the judgement (1 Cor 3:11-15; 4:5; 2 Cor 5:10). Presumably the reward of the Christian is: "Well done ... enter into the joy of your master." (Matt 25:21, 23).
6. To teach otherwise implies:
 - a. this worldly differences continue into the "new" creation e.g. hierarchy.
 - b. some of the "old things" are remembered (Isa 65:17), this implies eternal regret (Rev 21:4)
 - c. there are degrees of participation in the life of Christ in eternity.
 - d. salvation is a gift of grace, rewards are earned or merited.
 - e. that infinite rewards can in some way be correlated with finite works
 - f. believers are not perfected at death (Heb 12:23)

7. Welcome at the judgement, combined with love and gratitude, are adequate motives for Christian living.

“God crowns his gifts in us.” (Augustine)

“it is difficult to see how some shall be more advanced than others’ hereafter when God who is all in all shall fill all the faithful with his Spirit.” (Amyraut)

12.4.5 Activity in Heaven

1. All life in heaven is characterised by rest. The writer to the Hebrews sees this as a fulfilment of the type of entry into the promised land (3:11,18; 4:9-11). The dead in Christ are those who have rested from their labours (Rev 14:13).
2. Worship is a central activity in heaven (Rev 19:1-8 etc). Strictly speaking, all life in heaven will be worship.
3. Life in heaven seems to involve service. This would be a fulfilment of the original command to have dominion over the earth (Gen 1:26). The reward for faithful service in the parable of the talents (Matt 25:14-30) is the opportunity for further work.
4. Heaven must involve perfected community of fellowship amongst believers (Heb 12:22-24). It is the home of righteousness (2 Peter 3:13) without any evil (Rev. 21:8, 27; 22:11, 15, 27).