

AMILLENNIALISM

by Anthony Hoekema

Hoekema's scholarly presentation of the amillennial interpretation of biblical eschatology, explaining the view that Revelation 20's millennium is spiritual rather than literal. He examines key prophetic passages and argues against premillennial and postmillennial readings of Scripture.

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PART I - INTRODUCTION My discussion of the amillennial understanding of the millennium will include the following topics: the interpretation of the book of Revelation, the interpretation of Revelation 20:1-6, a look at two Old Testament passages commonly viewed as predicting an earthly millennial kingdom, a brief sketch of amillennial eschatology and a summarizing statement of some of the implications of amillennial eschatology. A word should first be said about terminology. The term amillennialism is not a happy one. It suggests that amillennialists either do not believe in any millennium or that they simply ignore the first six verses of Revelation 20:1-15, which speak of a millennial reign. Neither of these two statements is true. Though it is true that amillennialists do not believe in a literal thousand-year earthly reign which will follow the return of Christ, the term amillennialism is not an accurate description of their view. Professor Jay E. Adams of Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia has suggested that the term amillennialism be replaced by the expression realized millennialism.[1] The latter term, to be sure, describes the "amillennial" position more accurately than the usual term, since "amillennialists" believe that the millennium of Revelation 20:1-15 is not exclusively future but is now in process of realization. The expression realized millennialism, however, is a rather clumsy one, replacing a simple prefix with a three-syllable word. Despite the disadvantages and limitations of the word, therefore, I shall continue to use the shorter and more common term, amillennialism. The Interpretation of the Book of Revelation To see the background for the amillennial view of the millennium, we should first of all concern ourselves with the question of the interpretation of the book of Revelation. Let us assume, for example, that the book of Revelation is to be interpreted in an exclusively futuristic sense, referring only to events that are to happen around or at the time of Christ's Second Coming. Let us further assume that what is presented in Revelation 20:1-15 must necessarily follow, in chronological order, what was described in Revelation 19:1-21. We are then virtually compelled to believe that the thousand-year reign depicted in Revelation 20:4 must come after the return of Christ described in Revelation 19:11. But if we see Revelation 20:1-6 as describing what takes place during the entire history of the church, beginning with the first coming of Christ, we will have an understanding of the millennium of Revelation 20:1-15 which is quite different from the

one just mentioned. For this reason it will be necessary first to say something about the way in which the book of Revelation should be interpreted. The system of interpretation of the book of Revelation which seems most satisfactory to me (though it is not without its difficulties) is that known as progressive parallelism, ably defended by William Hendriksen in *More Than Conquerors*, his commentary on Revelation.[2] According to this view, the book of Revelation consists of seven sections which run parallel to each other, each of which depicts the church and the world from the time of Christ's first coming to the time of his second. The first of these seven sections is found in chapters 1 - 3

John sees the risen and glorified Christ walking in the midst of seven golden lampstands. In obedience to Christ's command John now proceeds to write letters to each of the seven churches of Asia Minor. The vision of the glorified Christ together with the letters to the seven churches obviously form a unit. As we read these letters we are impressed with two things.

First, there are references to events, people and places of the time when the book of Revelation was written. Second, the principles, commendations and warnings contained in these letters have value for the church of all time. These two observations, in fact, provide a clue for the interpretation of the entire book. Since the book of Revelation was addressed to the church of the first century A.D., its message had reference to events occurring at that time and was therefore meaningful for the Christians of that day. But since the book was also intended for the church through the ages, its message is still relevant for us today. The second of these seven sections is the vision of the seven seals found in Revelation 4:1-11 - Judges John is caught up to heaven and sees God sitting on his radiant throne. He then sees the Lamb that had been slain taking the scroll sealed with seven seals from the hand of the one who was sitting on the throne. The various seals are broken, and various divine judgments on the world are described. In this vision we see the church suffering trial and persecution against the background of the victory of Christ. The third section, found in Revelation 8:1-13, Revelation 9:1-21, Revelation 10:1-11, Revelation 11:1-19, describes the seven trumpets of judgment. In this vision we see the church avenged, protected and victorious. The fourth section, Revelation 12:1-17, Revelation 13:1-18, Revelation 14:1-20, begins with the vision of the woman giving birth to a son while the dragon waits to devour him as soon as he is born—an obvious reference to the birth of Christ. The rest of the section describes the continued opposition of the dragon (who stands for Satan) to the church. This section also introduces us to the two beasts who are the dragon's helpers: the beast out of the sea and the beast out of the earth. The fifth section is found in Revelation 15:1-8 - Nehemiah It describes the seven bowls of wrath, thus depicting in a very graphic way the final visitation of God's wrath on those who remain impenitent. The sixth section, Revelation 17:1-18, Revelation 18:1-24, Revelation 19:1-21, describes the fall of Babylon and of the beasts. Babylon stands for the worldly city — the forces of secularism and godlessness which are in opposition to the kingdom of God. The end of Revelation 19:1-21 depicts the fall and final punishment of the dragon's two helpers: the beast out of the sea, and the false prophet, who appears to be identified with the beast out of the earth (see Revelation 16:13). The seventh section, Revelation 20:1-15, Revelation 21:1-27, Revelation 22:1-21, narrates the doom of the dragon, thus completing the description of the overthrow of the enemies of Christ. In addition, it describes the final judgment, the final triumph of Christ and his church, and the renewed universe, here called the new heaven and the new earth.

Note that though these seven sections are parallel to each other, they also reveal a certain amount of eschatological progress. The last section, for example, takes us further into the future than the other sections. Although the final judgment has already been announced in Revelation 1:7 and has been briefly described in Revelation 6:12-17, it is not set forth in full detail until we come to Revelation 20:11 - Ezra Though the final joy of the redeemed in the life to come has been hinted at in Revelation 7:15-17, it is not until we reach Revelation 21:1-27 that we find a detailed and elaborate description of the blessedness of life on the new earth (Revelation 21:1-27, Revelation 22:1-5). Hence this method of interpretation is called progressive parallelism.

There is eschatological progression in these seven sections, not only regarding the individual sections but also regarding the book as a whole. If we grant that the book of Revelation depicts the struggle between Christ and his church on the one hand and the enemies of Christ and the church on the other, we may say that the first half of the book (Revelation 1:1-20, Revelation 2:1-29, Revelation 3:1-22, Revelation 4:1-11, Revelation 5:1-14, Revelation 6:1-17, Revelation 7:1-17, Revelation 8:1-13, Revelation 9:1-21, Revelation 10:1-11, Revelation 11:1-19) describes the struggle on earth, picturing the church as it is persecuted by the world. The second half of the book, however (Revelation 12:1-17, Revelation 13:1-18, Revelation 14:1-20, Revelation 15:1-8, Revelation 16:1-21, Revelation 17:1-18, Revelation 18:1-24, Revelation 19:1-21, Revelation 20:1-15, Revelation 21:1-27, Revelation 22:1-21), gives us the deeper spiritual background of this struggle, describing the persecution of the church by the dragon (Satan) and his helpers. In the light of this analysis we see how the last section of the book (Revelation 20:1-15, Revelation 21:1-27, Revelation 22:1-21) falls into place. This last section describes the judgment which falls on Satan, and his final doom. Since Satan is the supreme opponent of Christ, it stands to reason that his doom should be narrated last. The Interpretation of Revelation 20:1-6

We are now ready to proceed to the interpretation of Revelation 20:1-6, the only passage in the Bible which speaks explicitly of a thousand-year reign. Note first that the passage obviously divides itself into two parts: Revelation 20:1-3, which describe the binding of Satan; and Revelation 20:4-6, which describe the thousand-year reign of souls with Christ. The premillennial interpretation of these verses sees them as describing a millennial reign of Christ on earth which will occur after his Second Coming. And it is true that the Second Coming of Christ has been referred to in the previous chapter (see Revelation 19:11-16). If, then, one thinks of Revelation 20:1-15 as describing what follows chronologically after what is described in Revelation 19:1-21, one would indeed conclude that the millennium of Revelation 20:1-6 will come after the return of Christ. As has been indicated above, however, Revelation 20:1-15, Revelation 21:1-27, Revelation 22:1-21 comprise the last of the seven sections of the book of Revelation and therefore do not describe what follows the return of Christ. Rather, Revelation 20:1 takes us back once again to the beginning of the New Testament era. That this is the proper interpretation of these verses is clear not only from what has been developed above, but also from the fact that this chapter describes the defeat and final doom of Satan. Surely the defeat of Satan began with the first coming of Christ, as has already been clearly spelled out in Revelation 12:7 - 1 Samuel That the millennial reign described in Revelation 19:4-6 occurs before the Second Coming of Christ is evident from the fact that the final judgment, described in Revelation 19:11-15, is pictured as coming after the thousand-year reign. Not only in the book of Revelation but elsewhere in the New Testament the final judgment is associated with the Second Coming of Christ. (See Revelation 22:12 and the

following passages: Matthew 16:27; Matthew 25:31-32; Jude 1:14-15; and especially 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10) This being the case, it is obvious that the thousand-year reign of Revelation 20:4-6 must occur before and not after the Second Coming of Christ.

Let us now look closely at Revelation 20:1-6 itself. We begin with Revelation 20:1-3, reproduced here from the New International Version: And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations any more until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time. In these verses we have a description of the binding of Satan. The dragon, here clearly identified as “the devil, Or Satan,” is said to be bound for a thousand years and then cast into a place called “the Abyss.” The purpose of this binding is “to keep him from deceiving the nations any more until the thousand years were ended.” The book of Revelation is full of symbolic numbers. Obviously the number “thousand” which is used here must not be interpreted in a literal sense. Since the number ten signifies completeness, and since a thousand is ten to the third power, we may think of the expression “a thousand years” as standing for a complete period, a very long period of indeterminate length. In agreement with what was said above about the structure of the book and in the light of Revelation 20:7-15 (which describe Satan’s “little season,” the final battle and the final judgment), we may conclude that this thousand-year period extends from Christ’s first coming to just before his Second Coming.

Since the “lake of fire” mentioned in Revelation 20:10, Revelation 20:14-15 is obviously a description of the place of final punishment, the “Abyss” mentioned in Revelation 20:1 and Revelation 20:3 must not be the place of final punishment. The word Abyss should rather be thought of as a figurative description of the way in which Satan’s activities will be curbed during the thousand-year period.

What is meant, then, by the binding of Satan? In Old Testament times, at least in the post-Abrahamic era, all the nations of the world except Israel were, so to speak, under Satan’s rule. At that time the people of Israel were the recipients of God’s special revelation, so that they knew God’s truth about themselves, about their sinfulness, and about the way they could obtain forgiveness and salvation. During this same time, however, the other nations of the world did not know that truth, and were therefore in ignorance and error (see Acts 17:30) — except for an occasional person, family or city which came into contact with God’s special revelation. One could say that during this time these nations were deceived by Satan, as our first parents had been deceived by Satan when they fell into sin in the Garden of Eden.

Just before his ascension, however, Christ gave his disciples his Great Commission: “Go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19, NIV). At this point one can well imagine the disciples raising a disturbing question: How can we possibly do this if Satan continues to deceive the nations the way he has in the past? In Revelation 20:1-3 John gives a reassuring answer to this question. Paraphrased, his answer goes something like this: “During the gospel era which has now been ushered in, Satan will not be able to continue deceiving the nations the way he did in the past, for he has been bound. During this entire period, therefore, you, Christ’s disciples, will be able to preach the gospel and make disciples of all nations.” This does not imply that Satan can do

no harm whatever while he is bound. It means only what John says here: While Satan is bound he cannot deceive the nations in such a way as to keep them from learning about the truth of God. Later in the chapter we are told that when the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations of the world to gather them together to fight against and, if possible, to destroy the people of God (Revelation 20:7-9). This, however, he cannot do while he is bound. We conclude, then, that the binding of Satan during the gospel age means that, first, he cannot prevent the spread of the gospel, and second, he cannot gather all the enemies of Christ together to attack the church. Is there any indication in the New Testament that Satan was bound at the time of the first coming of Christ? Indeed there is. When the Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Satan, Jesus replied, "How can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man?" (Matthew 12:29). Interestingly enough, the word used by Matthew to describe the binding of the strong man is the same word used in Revelation 20:1-15 to describe the binding of Satan. One could say that Jesus bound the devil when he triumphed over him in the wilderness, refusing to give in to his temptations. Jesus' casting out of demons, so he teaches us in this passage, was evidence of this triumph. One could counter that the binding of Satan mentioned here is reported in connection with the casting out of demons rather than in connection with the preaching of the gospel. But I would reply that the casting out of demons is an evidence of the presence of the kingdom of God (Matthew 12:28) and that it is precisely because the kingdom of God has come that the gospel can now be preached to all the nations (see Matthew 13:24-30, Matthew 13:47-50). When the seventy returned from their preaching mission, they said to Jesus, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name." Jesus replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:17-18, NIV). These words, needless to say, must not be interpreted literally. They must rather be understood to mean that Jesus saw in the works his disciples were doing an indication that Satan's kingdom had just been dealt a crushing blow — that, in fact, a certain binding of Satan, a certain restriction of his power, had just taken place. In this instance Satan's fall or binding is associated directly with the missionary activity of Jesus' disciples.

Another passage which ties in the restriction of Satan's activities with Christ's missionary outreach is John 12:31-32 :

"Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (NIV). It is interesting to note that the verb here translated "driven out" (*ekballo*) is derived from the same root as the word used in Revelation 20:3, "He [the angel] threw [*ballo*] him [Satan] into the Abyss." Even more important, however, is the observation that Satan's being "driven out" or "cast out" (RSV) is here associated with the fact that not only Jews but men of all nationalities shall be drawn to Christ as he hangs on the cross.

We see then that the binding of Satan described in Revelation 20:1-3 means that throughout the gospel age in which we now live the influence of Satan, though certainly not annihilated, is so curtailed that he cannot prevent the spread of the gospel to the nations of the world. Because of the binding of Satan during this present age, the nations cannot conquer the church, but the church is conquering the nations.[3]

We go on now to Revelation 20:4-6, the passage dealing with the thousand-year reign. In the New International Version, these verses read,

I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

We noted previously that Revelation 20:1-3 speak of a “thousand-year” period. We now observe that Revelation 20:4-6 also refer to a period of a thousand years. Though it is possible to understand the “thousand years” of Revelation 20:4-6 as describing a period of time different from the “thousand years” of Revelation 20:1-3, there is no compelling reason why we should do so. We may therefore safely assume that Revelation 20:1-3 and Revelation 20:4-6 concern the same “thousand-year” period. That period, as we saw, spans the entire New Testament dispensation, from the time of the first coming of Christ to just before the time of Christ’s Second Coming.

Let us now take a closer look at Revelation 20:4 : “I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge.” The first question we must face here is, Where are these thrones? Leon Morris points out that in the book of Revelation the word “throne” is used forty-seven times and that all but three of these thrones (Revelation 2:13, Revelation 13:2, Revelation 16:10) appear to be in heaven.[4] When we add to this consideration the fact that John sees “the souls of those who had been beheaded,” we are confirmed in the conclusion that the locale of John’s vision has now shifted to heaven. We may say then that whereas the thousand-year period described in these six verses is the same throughout, Revelation 20:1-3 describe what happens on earth during this time, and Revelation 20:4-6 depict what happens in heaven.

John sees those who had been given authority to judge (literally, those to whom judgment had been given) sitting on thrones. The book of Revelation is much concerned about matters of justice, particularly for persecuted Christians. It is therefore highly significant that in John’s vision those sitting on thrones are given authority to judge. John’s description of them as “sitting on thrones” is a concrete way of expressing the thought that they are reigning with Christ (see the last part of Revelation 20:4). Apparently this reigning includes the authority to make judgments. Whether this means simply agreeing with and being thankful for the judgments made by Christ, or whether it means that those sitting on the thrones are given the opportunity to make their own judgments about earthly matters, we are not told. In any event the reigning with Christ described here apparently includes having some part in Christ’s judging activity (see Daniel 7:22).

We ask next, Who are seated on these thrones? The answer is given in the rest of the verse: “And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God.” Since John tells us that he saw “the souls of those who had been beheaded,” it is quite clear that he is not talking about people who are still living on the earth. Sometimes, to be sure, the word here rendered “souls,” *psuchai*, may be used to describe people

who are still living on the earth — as, for example, in Acts 2:41 : “And there were added that day about three thousand souls.” But in Revelation 20:4 this meaning of the word *psuchai* will not work. One cannot translate *tas psuchas ton pepelekismenon* as “the people of those who had been beheaded,” or as “the men of those who had been beheaded.” Here the word *psuchai* must denote the souls of people who had died. This text is, in fact, a kind of parallel to an earlier passage in Revelation 6:9 : “When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained.”

If one should ask how John could see the souls of those who had died, the answer is, John saw all this in a vision. One could just as well ask, How could John see an angel laying hold of the devil and binding him for a thousand years?

John sees the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. In other words, he sees the souls of the martyrs — believers who had suffered martyrs’ deaths because of their faithfulness to Christ. When John wrote Revelation, many Christians were being martyred for their faith. Needless to say, the vision here recorded would bring great comfort to the relatives and friends of these martyrs: John sees their souls as now sitting on thrones in heaven, taking part in the work of judging.

“They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands.” The New International Version renders these words as if they were a further description of the martyrs referred to in the preceding clause. There is, however, another possibility — the possibility conveyed by the translation found in the American Standard Version: “and such as worshiped not the beast, neither his image, and received not the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand.” Earlier in the book unbelieving opponents of Christ and his kingdom were described as those who worship the beast or his image and who receive the mark of the beast on their foreheads or on their hands (see Revelation 13:8, Revelation 13:15-17, Revelation 14:9-11). Conversely, believers who remained faithful to their Lord are described as those who were victorious over the beast (Revelation 15:2) or who did not worship the beast or his image (Revelation 13:15). I take it, therefore, that in the clause we are now considering John is describing a wider group than just the martyrs. By “those who had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark” John means all Christians who had remained true to Christ and had resisted anti-Christian powers — all Christians, in other words, who had remained faithful to the end. Those who had died a martyr’s death would constitute a part of this group but not the whole group. (Though John does not here specifically speak of “souls,” we may safely assume that he is still talking about the souls of believers who have died, since he began by speaking about the souls of the martyrs who had been slain.)

Now follow the most controversial words in the passage: “They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.” Premillennial interpreters, whether dispensational or non-dispensational, understand these words as referring to a literal resurrection from the dead, and therefore find in this passage proof for a thousand-year reign of Christ on earth, after his Second Coming. Is this the correct interpretation of the passage?

It must be granted that the Greek word rendered “came to life,” *ezesan*, can refer to a physical resurrection (see, for example, Matthew 9:18; Romans 14:9; 2 Corinthians 13:4; Revelation 2:8). The question is, however, whether this is what the word means here. That John is speaking of a

kind of resurrection here is apparent from the second sentence of Revelation 20:5 : “This is the first resurrection” — words which obviously refer to the living and reigning with Christ of Revelation 20:4. But is this “first resurrection” a physical resurrection — a raising of the body from the dead? Obviously not, since the raising of the body from the dead is mentioned later in the chapter as something distinct from what is described here (see Revelation 20:11-13). Only if one believes in two bodily resurrections — one of believers at the beginning of the millennium and another of unbelievers after the millennium — will one be able to understand the ezesan of Revelation 20:4 as referring to a bodily resurrection. Since the Scriptures elsewhere clearly teach only one bodily resurrection which will include both believers and unbelievers (see John 5:28 - John 5:29; Acts 24:15), what is described in the last clause of Revelation 20:4 must be something other than the physical or bodily resurrection which is yet to come.

What is meant, then, by the words “they came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years”? The clue has already been given in Revelation 20:4 a. There John said, “I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge.” The rest of the verse makes plain that those sitting on the thrones were the souls of people who had died — martyrs for the faith and other Christians who had remained true to Christ to the very end of their lives. This is the group which John sees as “living and reigning with Christ.” Though these believers have died, John sees them as alive, not in the bodily sense, but in the sense that they are enjoying life in heaven in fellowship with Christ. This life is a life of great happiness (see Paul’s words in Php 1:23 and 2 Corinthians 5:8). It is a life in which they sit on thrones, sharing in the reign of Christ over all things, even sharing in his judging activity! This heavenly reigning is a fulfillment of a promise recorded earlier in the book: “To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne” (Revelation 3:21, NIV).

We can appreciate the significance of this vision when we remember that in John’s time the church was sorely oppressed and frequently persecuted. It would be of great comfort to those believers to know that though many of their fellow Christians had died, some even having been cruelly executed as martyrs, these deceased fellow believers were now actually alive in heaven as far as their souls were concerned — living and reigning with Christ. This living and reigning with Christ, John goes on to say, shall continue throughout the thousand years — that is, throughout the entire gospel era, until Christ shall come again to raise the bodies of these believers from the grave.

There is no indication in these verses that John is describing an earthly millennial reign. The scene, as we saw, is set in heaven. Nothing is said in Revelation 20:4-6 about the earth, about Palestine as the center of this reign or about the Jews.[5] The thousand-year reign of Revelation 20:4 is a reign with Christ in heaven of the souls of believers who have died. This reign is not something to be looked for in the future; it is going on now, and will be until Christ returns. Hence the term realized millennialism is an apt description of the view here defended — if it be remembered that the millennium in question is not an earthly but a heavenly one. The next sentence, Revelation 20:5 a, is of a parenthetical nature, and is therefore properly put between parentheses in the New International Version: “The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.” I have already given the reason why I do not believe that these words describe a bodily resurrection which is to take place after the millennium. The word ezesan (“lived” or “came to life”) as it is used in this sentence must mean the same thing that it meant in the preceding sentence. John is here speaking about the unbelieving dead — the “rest of the

dead,” in distinction from the believing dead whom he has just been describing. When he says that the rest of the dead did not live or come to life, he means the exact opposite of what he had just said about the believing dead. The unbelieving dead, he is saying, did not live or reign with Christ during this thousand-year period. Whereas believers after death enjoy a new kind of life in heaven with Christ in which they share in Christ’s reign, unbelievers after death share nothing of either this life or this reign. That this is true throughout the thousand-year period is indicated by the words, “until the thousand years were ended.” The Greek word here translated “until,” *achri*, means that what is said here held true during the entire length of the thousand-year period. The use of the word until does not imply that these unbelieving dead will live and reign with Christ after this period has ended. If this were the case, we would have expected a clear statement to this effect. (For an example of this kind of statement, see Revelation 20:3.) Rather, what happens to the unbelieving dead after the thousand years have ended is what is called in Revelation 20:6 “the second death.” When it is said in Revelation 20:6 that the “second death” has no power over the believing dead, it is implied that the “second death” does have power over the unbelieving dead. What is meant by “the second death”? Revelation 20:14 explains: “This is the second death, even the lake of fire” (ASV). The second death, then, means everlasting punishment after the resurrection of the body. As far as the unbelieving dead are concerned, therefore, there will be a change after the thousand years have ended, but it will be a change not for the better but for the worse.

Now John goes on to say, “This is the first resurrection.” These words depict what has happened to the believing dead whom John was describing at the end of Revelation 2:4, previous to the parenthetical statement just discussed. In the light of what was said above, we must understand these words as describing not a bodily resurrection but rather the transition from physical death to life in heaven with Christ. This transition is here called a “resurrection” — an unusual use of the word, to be sure, but perfectly understandable against the background of the preceding context. The expression “the first resurrection” implies that there will indeed be a “second resurrection” for these believing dead — the resurrection of the body which will take place when Christ returns at the end of the thousand-year period.

John now says, in Revelation 20:6, “Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection.” The next words give the reason for this blessedness: “The second death has no power over them.” The second death, as we saw, means eternal punishment. These words about the second death imply that the “first resurrection” which John has just mentioned is not a bodily resurrection. For if believers should here be thought of as having been physically raised, with glorified bodies, they would already be enjoying the full and total bliss of the life to come, and it would not need to be said that over them the second death has no power.

“But they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years” (Revelation 20:6 b). During this entire thousand-year period, therefore, the believing dead shall worship God and Christ as priests and shall reign with Christ as kings. Though John is here thinking only about the thousand-year period which extends until Christ returns, the closing chapters of the book of Revelation indicate that after Christ’s return and after the resurrection of the body these believing dead shall be able to worship God, serve God and reign with Christ in an even richer way than they are now doing. They shall then worship and serve God throughout all eternity in sinless perfection with glorified bodies on the new earth.

This, then, is the amillennial interpretation of Revelation 20:1-6. So understood, the passage says nothing about an earthly reign of Christ over a primarily Jewish kingdom. Rather, it describes the reigning with Christ in heaven of the souls of believers who have died. They reign during the time between their death and Christ's Second Coming.

PART II - THE INTERPRETATION OF OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY

There is a basic difference in the method of biblical interpretation employed by premillennialists and amillennialists. Premillennialists, particularly those of dispensationalist persuasion, are committed to what is commonly called the "literal" interpretation of Old Testament prophecy. John F. Walvoord, a prominent spokesman for the dispensational premillennial viewpoint, defines the hermeneutical method of this school of interpretation: The premillennial position is that the Bible should be interpreted in its ordinary grammatical and historical meaning in all areas of theology unless contextual or theological reasons make it clear that this was not intended by the writer.[6] In his discussion of this principle Walvoord admits that sometimes an Old Testament passage contains indications that certain parts of it are not to be interpreted literally but figuratively — for example, the "rod of his mouth" with which Christ is said to smite the earth in Isaiah 11:4.[7]

Amillennialists, on the other hand, believe that though many Old Testament prophecies are indeed to be interpreted literally, many others are to be interpreted in a non-literal way.[8] In the abstract, an amillennialist might agree with the definition of the premillennial hermeneutical method given by Walvoord. The difference between an amillennial and a premillennial interpreter comes out when each tries to indicate which prophecies must be interpreted literally and which prophecies are to be interpreted in a non-literal sense. On this question there would be wide divergence of opinion.

There is no space in this short chapter to go into these differences of interpretation in depth. It will be helpful, however, for us to take a brief look at two Old Testament passages which are commonly understood by premillennialists as picturing a future earthly millennial reign. When we do so we shall see that the premillennial interpretation of these two representative passages is by no means the only possible one.

Let us look first of all at Isaiah 11:6-9 as rendered by the New Scofield Bible: The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together. And the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the nursing child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.[9] In the New Scofield Bible of 1967 the heading above Isaiah 11:1-16, which covers Isaiah 11:1-10, reads, "Davidic kingdom to be restored by Christ: its character and extent." A footnote to Isaiah 11:1 reads, "This chapter is a prophetic picture of the glory of the future kingdom, which will be set up when David's Son returns in glory." It is obvious, therefore, that the New Scofield Bible interprets this passage as describing the future millennial age.

John F. Walvoord, a representative contemporary premillennialist, shares this interpretation of the chapter:

Isaiah 11:1-16 paints the graphic picture of the reign of Christ on earth, a scene which cannot be confused with the present age, the intermediate state, or the eternal state if interpreted in any normal literal sense. As presented it describes the millennial earth. . . . The description [found in this chapter] . . . describes animals such as wolves, lambs, leopards, kids, calves, young lions, all of which are creatures of earth and not of heaven, and further pictures them in a time of tranquility such as only can apply to the millennial earth.’[10]

It can easily be understood that if a person believes in a future earthly millennium, he will see that millennium described in these verses. Such an interpretation is, however, by no means the only possible one. We know that the Bible predicts that at the end of time there will be a new earth (see, for example, Isaiah 65:17; Isaiah 66:22; Revelation 2:1:1). Why may we not therefore understand the details found in these verses as descriptions of life on the new earth?[11] This is particularly likely in view of the sweeping panoramic vision conveyed by Isaiah 11:9 : “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.” Why should these words have to be thought of as applying only to a thousand-year period preceding the new earth? Do they not picture the final perfection of God's creation? The other Old Testament passage I should like to adduce in this connection is Isaiah 65:17-25, also quoted from the New Scofield Bible:

For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people; and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying.

There shall be no more in it an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days; for the child shall die an hundred years old, but the sinner, being an hundred years old, shall be accursed. And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them.

They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat; for like the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the LORD, and their offspring with them. And it shall come to pass that, before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD. In the New Scofield Bible the heading above Isaiah 65:17 reads, “New heavens and new earth.” The heading above Isaiah 65:18-25, however, reads, “Millennial conditions in the renewed earth with curse removed.” It would appear that the editors of this Bible, while compelled to admit that Isaiah 65:17 describes the final new earth, restrict the meaning of Isaiah 65:18-25 so as to make them refer only to the millennium which is to precede the final new earth. Walvoord, in similar fashion, understands Isaiah 65:17-19 as describing the eternal state[12] and Isaiah 65:20-25 as describing conditions during the millennium.[13]

Once again it may be observed that if one does not believe in a future earthly millennium, he will certainly not be compelled to accept it by the reading of these verses. If, however, one does believe in such a millennium, he may very well find it described here. But in order to do so he will have to overcome a rather serious exegetical obstacle.

One can find a description of the millennium in this passage only by deliberately overlooking what we find in Isaiah 65:17 - Job Isaiah 65:17 speaks unambiguously about the new heavens and the new earth (which the book of Revelation depicts as marking the final state). Isaiah 65:18 calls upon the reader to “rejoice forever” — not just for a thousand years — in the new heavens and new earth just referred to. Isaiah is not speaking here about a newness which will last no longer than a thousand years but about an everlasting newness! What follows in Isaiah 65:19 is linked directly with the preceding: “And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people; and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying” (see Revelation 21:4). There is no indication whatever that at this point, or at either Isaiah 65:18 or Isaiah 65:20, Isaiah is suddenly shifting to a description of a millennial age preceding the creation of the new heavens and new earth! In Isaiah 65:25, in fact, we have a description of the animal world which reminds us of the picture of the final state found in Isaiah 11:1-16. At the end of this verse we hear an echo of what is found in Isaiah 11:9, “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD.”[14] Truly a beautiful description of the new earth! One will see a millennium here only if he has previously put on his millennial glasses!

PART III - A BRIEF SKETCH OF AMILLENNIAL ESCHATOLOGY A common criticism of amillennial eschatology is that it is too negative, spending its strength primarily in opposing and refuting eschatological systems with which it does not agree. Leaving aside the question of whether this criticism is true or false, I would like at this point to counteract the negativism of some amillennial eschatologies by sketching briefly some positive affirmations made by amillennialist theologians. In this way we shall be able to see amillennial eschatology in its totality, rather than just as a certain interpretation of the millennium of Revelation 20:1-15. This sketch will cover two areas: first, what amillennial eschatology teaches with regard to inaugurated eschatology, and, second, what it teaches with reference to future eschatology. By inaugurated eschatology I mean that aspect of eschatology which is already present now, during the gospel era. The term inaugurated eschatology is preferred to realized eschatology because, while the former term does full justice to the fact that the great eschatological incision into history has already been made, it does not rule out a further development and final consummation of eschatology in the future. When we speak of “inaugurated eschatology” we are saying that for the New Testament believer significant eschatological events have already begun to happen while other eschatological occurrences still lie in the future. As regards inaugurated eschatology, then, amillennialism affirms the following:

1. Christ has won the decisive victory over sin, death and Satan. By living a sinless life and by dying on the cross as the sacrifice of atonement for our sin, Christ defeated sin. By undergoing death and then victoriously rising from the grave, Christ defeated death. By resisting the devil's temptations, by perfectly obeying God, and by his death and resurrection, Christ delivered a deathblow to Satan and his evil hosts. This victory of Christ's was decisive and final. The most important day in history, therefore, is not the Second Coming of Christ which is still future but the first coming which lies in the past. Because of the victory of Christ, the ultimate issues of history have already been decided. It is now only a question of time until that victory is brought to its final consummation.
2. The kingdom of God is both present and future. Amillennialists do not believe that the kingdom of God is primarily a Jewish kingdom which involves the literal restoration of the throne of David.

Nor do they believe that because of the unbelief of the Jews of his day Christ postponed the establishment of the kingdom to the time of his future earthly millennial reign. Amillennialists believe that the kingdom of God was founded by Christ at the time of his sojourn on earth, is operative in history now and is destined to be revealed in its fullness in the life to come. They understand the kingdom of God to be the reign of God dynamically active in human history through Jesus Christ. Its purpose is to redeem God's people from sin and from demonic powers, and finally to establish the new heavens and the new earth. The kingdom of God means nothing less than the reign of God in Christ over his entire created universe. The kingdom of God is therefore both a present reality and a future hope. Jesus clearly taught that the kingdom was already present during his earthly ministry: "But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matthew 12:28, NIV). When the Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God was coming, he replied, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Lo, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you" (Luke 17:20-21). But Jesus also taught that there was a sense in which the kingdom of God was still future, both in specific sayings (Matthew 7:21-23; Matthew 8:11-12) and in eschatological parables (such as those of the Marriage Feast, the Tares, the Talents, the Wise and Foolish Virgins). Paul also makes statements describing the kingdom as both present (Romans 14:17; 1 Corinthians 4:19-20; Colossians 1:13-14) and future (1 Corinthians 6:9; Galatians 5:21; Ephesians 5:5; 2 Timothy 4:18). The fact that the kingdom of God is present in one sense and future in another implies that we who are the subjects of that kingdom live in a kind of tension between the "already" and the "not yet." We are already in the kingdom, and yet we look forward to the full manifestation of that kingdom; we already share its blessings, and yet we await its total victory. Because the exact time when Christ will return is not known, the church must live with a sense of urgency, realizing that the end of history may be very near. At the same time, however, the church must continue to plan and work for a future on this present earth which may still last a long time.

Meanwhile, the kingdom of God demands of us all total commitment to Christ and his cause. We must see all of life and all of reality in the light of the goal of the redemption not just of individuals but of the entire universe. This implies, as Abraham Kuyper, the renowned Dutch theologian and statesman, once said, that there is not a thumb-breadth of the universe about which Christ does not say, "It is mine." This total commitment further implies a Christian philosophy of history: All of history must be seen as the working out of God's eternal purpose. This kingdom vision includes a Christian philosophy of culture: Art and science, reflecting as they do the glory of God, are to be pursued for his praise. The vision of the kingdom also includes a Christian view of vocation: All callings are from God, and all that we do in everyday life is to be done to God's praise, whether this be study, teaching, preaching, business, industry or housework. A common source of tension among evangelicals today is the question of whether the church should be primarily concerned with evangelism or social and political action. A proper kingdom vision, it seems to me, will help us to keep our balance on this question. Needless to say, evangelism — bringing people into the kingdom of God — is one of the essential tasks of the church. But since the kingdom of God demands total commitment, the church must also be vitally concerned about the implementation of Christian principles in every area of life, including the political and the social. Evangelism and social concern, therefore, must never be thought of as options between which Christians may make a choice; both are essential to full-orbed kingdom obedience.

3. Though the last day is still future, we are in the last days now. This aspect of eschatology, which is often neglected in evangelical circles, is an essential part of the New Testament message. When I say, “we are in the last days now,” I understand the expression “the last days” not merely as referring to the time just before Christ’s return, but as a description of the entire era between Christ’s first and second comings. New Testament writers were conscious of the fact that they were already living in the last days at the time they were speaking or writing. This was specifically stated by Peter in his sermon on the day of Pentecost when he quoted Joel’s prophecy about the pouring out of the Spirit upon all flesh in the last days (Acts 2:16-17). He was thus saying in effect, “We are now in the last days predicted by the prophet Joel.” Paul made the same point when he described believers of his day as those “upon whom the end of the ages has come” (1 Corinthians 10:11). And the Apostle John told his readers that they were already living in “the last hour” (1 John 2:18). In the light of these New Testament teachings, we may indeed speak of an inaugurated eschatology, while remembering that the Bible also speaks of a final consummation of eschatological events in what John commonly calls “the last day” (John 6:39 - John 6:40, John 6:44, John 6:54; John 11:24; John 12:48). The fact that we are living in the last days now implies that we are already tasting the beginnings of eschatological blessings—that, as Paul says, we already have “the first fruits of the Spirit” (Romans 8:23). This means that we who are believers are to see ourselves not as impotent sinners who are helpless in the face of temptation but as new creatures in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), as temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19) and as those who have decisively crucified the flesh (Galatians 5:24), put off the old self and put on the new (Colossians 3:9 - Colossians 3:10). All this involves having an image of ourselves which is primarily positive rather than negative. It also involves seeing fellow Christians as those who are in Christ with us and for whom we should therefore thank God.[15]

4. As far as the thousand years of Revelation 20:1-15 are concerned, we are in the millennium now. Earlier in the chapter evidence was given for the position that the thousand years of Revelation 20:1-15 extend from the first coming of Christ to just before his Second Coming, when Satan will be loosed for a short time. The amillennial position on the thousand years of Revelation 20:1-15 implies that Christians who are now living are enjoying the benefits of this millennium since Satan has been bound for the duration of this period. As we saw, the fact that Satan is now bound does not mean that he is not active in the world today but that during this period he cannot deceive the nations — that is, cannot prevent the spread of the gospel. The binding of Satan during this era, in other words, makes missions and evangelism possible. This fact should certainly be a source of encouragement to the church on earth.

Amillennialists also teach that during this same thousand-year period the souls of believers who have died are now living and reigning with Christ in heaven while they await the resurrection of the body. Their state is therefore a state of blessedness and happiness, though their joy will not be complete until their bodies have been raised. This teaching should certainly bring comfort to those whose dear ones have died in the Lord. As regards future eschatology, amillennialism affirms the following:

1. The “signs of the times” have both present and future relevance. Amillennialists believe that the return of Christ will be preceded by certain signs: for example, the preaching of the gospel to all the nations, the conversion of the fullness of Israel, the great apostasy, the great tribulation and the coming of the Antichrist. These signs, however, must not be thought of as referring exclusively

to the time just preceding Christ's return. They have been present in some sense from the very beginning of the Christian era[16] and are present now.[17] This means that we must always be ready for the Lord's return and that we may never in our thoughts push the return of Christ off into the far-distant future.

Amillennialists also believe, however, that these "signs of the times" will have a climactic final fulfillment just before Christ returns. This fulfillment will not take the form of phenomena which are totally new but will rather be an intensification of signs which have been present all along.

2. The Second Coming of Christ will be a single event. Amillennialists find no scriptural basis for the dispensationalist division of the Second Coming into two phases (sometimes called the parousia and the revelation), with a seven-year period in between. We understand Christ's return as being a single event.

3. At the time of Christ's return, there will be a general resurrection, both of believers and unbelievers. Amillennialists reject the common premillennial teaching that the resurrection of believers and that of unbelievers will be separated by a thousand years. They also reject the view of many dispensationalists that there will be as many as three or four resurrections (since, in addition to the two resurrections just mentioned, dispensationalists also teach that there will be a resurrection of tribulation saints and a resurrection of believers who died during the millennium). We see no scriptural evidence for such multiple resurrections.[18]

4. After the resurrection, believers who are then still alive shall suddenly be transformed and glorified. The basis for this teaching is what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 "Listen, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed" (NIV).

5. The "rapture" of all believers now takes place. Believers who have just been raised from the dead, together with living believers who have just been transformed, are now caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17). That there will be such a "rapture" the Bible clearly teaches. But I have put the word rapture between quotation marks in order to distinguish the amillennial conception of the rapture from the dispensationalist view. Dispensationalists teach that after the rapture the entire church will be taken up to heaven for a period of seven years while those still on earth are undergoing the great tribulation.

Amillennialists see no scriptural evidence for such a seven-year period or for a transference of the church from earth to heaven during that period. Risen and glorified bodies of believers do not belong in heaven but on the earth. The word translated "to meet" in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 (apantesis) is a technical term used in the days of the New Testament to describe a public welcome given by a city to a visiting dignitary. People would ordinarily leave the city to meet the distinguished visitor and then go back with him into the city.[19] On the basis of the analogy conveyed by this word, all Paul is saying here is that raised and transformed believers are caught up in the clouds to meet the descending Lord, implying that after this meeting they will go back with him to the earth.

6. Now follows the final judgment. Whereas dispensationalists commonly teach that there will be at least three separate judgments, amillennialists do not agree. The latter see scriptural evidence for

only one Day of Judgment which will occur at the time of Christ's return. All men must then appear before the judgment seat of Christ. The purpose of the final judgment is not primarily to determine the final destiny of men since by that time that final destiny has already been determined for all men except those still living at the time of Christ's return. Rather, the judgment will have a threefold purpose: First, it will reveal the glorification of God in the final destiny assigned to each person; second, it will indicate finally and publicly the great antithesis of history between the people of God and the enemies of God; and third, it will reveal the degree of reward or the degree of punishment which each shall receive.

7. After the judgment the final state is ushered in. Unbelievers and all those who have rejected Christ shall spend eternity in hell, whereas believers will enter into everlasting glory on the new earth. The concept of the new earth is so important for biblical eschatology that we should give it more than a passing thought. Many Christians think of themselves as spending eternity in some ethereal heaven while the Bible plainly teaches us that there will be a new earth. When the book of Revelation tells us that the holy city, the new Jerusalem, will come down from heaven to the new earth (Revelation 21:2), that God will now have his dwelling with men (Revelation 21:3) and that the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the new Jerusalem (Revelation 22:3), it is teaching us in figurative language that in the life to come heaven and earth will no longer be separated but will have merged. In the final state, therefore, glorified believers will be both in heaven and on the new earth, since the two shall then be one. When one keeps the vision of the new earth clearly in mind, many biblical teachings begin to form a significant pattern. As we have seen, the resurrection of the body calls for a new earth. The cosmic significance of the work of Christ implies that the curse which came upon creation because of man's sin (Genesis 3:17-19) shall some day be removed (Romans 8:19-22); this renewal of creation means that there will indeed be a new earth. The Bible also contains specific promises about the new earth. We have already looked at Isaiah's prediction of the new earth in Isaiah 65:17 (see Isaiah 66:2). Jesus promised that the meek shall inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5). Peter speaks of new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness shall dwell (2 Peter 3:13). And the elders and living creatures whom John sees in the heavenly vision recorded in Revelation 5:1-14 sing a song of praise to the victorious Lamb which includes these words, "You have made them [those whom you purchased with your blood] to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth" (Revelation 5:10, NIV).[20] In the light of biblical teaching about the new earth, many Old Testament prophecies about the land of Canaan and about the future of the people of God fall into place. From the fourth chapter of the book of Hebrews we learn that Canaan was a type of the Sabbath-rest of the people of God in the life to come. From Paul's letter to the Galatians we learn that all those who are in Christ are included in the seed of Abraham (Galatians 3:29). When we read Genesis 17:8 ("And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land of thy sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God" [ASV]) with this understanding of the New Testament broadening of these concepts, we see in it a promise of the new earth as the everlasting possession of all the people of God, not just of the physical descendants of Abraham. And when, in the light of this New Testament teaching, we now read Amos 9:15 ("And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be plucked up out of their land which I have given them, saith Jehovah thy God" [ASV]), we do not feel compelled to restrict the meaning of these words to national Israel and the land of Palestine. We understand them to be a prediction of the eternal dwelling of all God's people, Gentiles as well as Jews, on the new earth of which Canaan was a

type. Amillennialists therefore feel no need for positing an earthly millennium to provide for the fulfillment of prophecies of this sort; they see such prophecies as pointing to the glorious eternal future which awaits all the people of God. When premillennialists therefore charge amillennialists with teaching a future kingdom which is only spiritual and which has nothing to do with the earth, they are not representing the amillennial view correctly. Amillennialists believe that Old Testament prophecies which predict that the land of promise shall be the everlasting possession of the people of God, that the wolf shall dwell with the lamb and that the earth shall be as full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea, shall be fulfilled not just for a thousand-year period but for all eternity! This interpretation, we believe, gives us a richer, wider and more relevant understanding of those prophecies than that which restricts their meaning to a description of an earthly millennium which shall precede the final state.

Some Implications of Amillennial Eschatology

What, in conclusion, are some of the implications of amillennial eschatology for our theological understanding? Let me mention four of them:

1. What binds the Old and New Testaments together is the unity of the covenant of grace. Amillennialists do not believe that sacred history is to be divided into a series of distinct and disparate dispensations but see a single covenant of grace running through all of that history. This covenant of grace is still in effect today and will culminate in the eternal dwelling together of God and his redeemed people on the new earth.
2. The kingdom of God is central in human history. That kingdom was predicted and prepared for in Old Testament times, was established on earth by Jesus Christ, was extended and expanded both in New Testament times and during the subsequent history of the church, and will finally be consummated in the life to come.
3. Jesus Christ is the Lord of history. This means that all of history is under Christ's control and will ultimately prove to have been subservient to his purpose. We must therefore be concerned not just with enjoying the blessings of our salvation but also with joyfully serving Christ as Lord in every area of our lives.
4. All of history is moving toward a goal: the total redemption of the universe. History is not meaningless but meaningful. Though we are not always able to discern the meaning of each historical event, we know what the ultimate outcome of history will be. We eagerly look forward to the new earth as part of a renewed universe in which God's good creation will realize finally and totally the purpose for which he called it into existence: the glorification of his name.

All this implies that regarding world history, amillennialists adopt a position of sober or realistic optimism. Belief in the present rule of Christ, in the presence of God's kingdom and in the movement of history toward its goal is accompanied by a realistic recognition of the presence of sin in this world and of the growing development of the kingdom of evil. Amillennial eschatology looks for a culmination of apostasy and tribulation in the final emergence of a personal Antichrist before Christ comes again. Amillennialists do not expect to see the perfect society realized during this present age.

Yet, since we know that the victory of Christ over evil was decisive and that Christ is now on the throne, the dominant mood of amillennial eschatology is optimism — Christian optimism. This means that we view no world crisis as totally beyond help and no social trend as absolutely irreversible. It means that we live in hope — a hope that is built on faith and that expresses itself in love.

Amillennial eschatology, therefore, gives us a realistic, yet basically optimistic world-and-life view. It is an eschatology which is exciting, exhilarating and challenging. It is an eschatology which gives us an inspiring vision of the lordship of Christ over history and of the ultimate triumph of his kingdom.

Notes 1. Jay E. Adams, *The Time Is at Hand* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1970), pp. 7 - 1 Kings

2. William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1939). An exposition and defense of this method of interpretation, summarized in nine propositions, can be found on pp. 11 - 3 John 3. For an expanded exposition of these verses, see Hendriksen, pp. 221 - Joel 4. Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1969), p. 236.

5. As a matter of fact, even if ezesan is interpreted to mean a bodily resurrection, the verse still does not describe the earthly millennium commonly held to by premillennialists. For on the basis of the common premillennial interpretation of Revelation 20:4, it is only raised believers who are said to reign with Christ; nothing is said in this passage about a reign of Christ over people who have not died but are still living. The millennium of the premillennialists, however, is said to be primarily a reign of Christ over people who are still alive when Christ comes and over their descendants!

6. John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Findlay, Ohio: Dunham, 1959), p. 128.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 130.

8. See Martin J. Wyngaarden, *The Future of the Kingdom in Prophecy and Fulfillment* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1934) for an elaboration and demonstration of the amillennial method of interpreting prophecy. This work is particularly valuable in that it shows how the New Testament spiritualizes many Old Testament concepts: Zion, Jerusalem, the seed of Abraham, Israel, the temple, sacrifices and so on.

9. This and the following passage (Isaiah 65:17-35) are quoted from the New Scofield Bible (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967) which gives the King James Version with only a few minor revisions.

10. Walvoord, p. 298.

11. Walvoord's comment that the animals mentioned here are creatures of earth and not of heaven does not rule out the possibility that these words may be a prophetic description of conditions on the new earth.

12. Walvoord, p. 325.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 253, 318 - Psalms

14. Note that in 11:9 Isaiah adds the reason why “they shall not hurt nor destroy”: “for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” Surely this condition will be realized only on the new earth in the life to come (see Revelation 21:27; Revelation 22:14-15). The last-quoted words cannot be a description of the millennium since during the millennium, according to premillennial teaching, there will still be disobedient nations which must be ruled with a rod of iron.

15. See Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Christian Looks at Himself* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1975).

16. Note, for example, how John tells us that the spirit of the Antichrist is already in the world in his day (1 John 4:3).

17. G. C. Berkouwer, in his recent book, *The Return of Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1972), shows how Scripture requires us to think of the “signs of the times” as having relevance throughout the entire Christian era (pp. 235.59).

18. Scripture proof for a single general resurrection has been given above in the exposition of Revelation 20:1-6. For additional evidence against a multiple resurrection, see L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1941), pp. 724 - Daniel

19. Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1964), I, 380-81.

20. See the excellent chapter on the new earth in Berkouwer, pp. 211 - Nahum

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