

DOES SCRIPTURE TEACH MILLENNIALISM:  
AN EXEGETICAL-EXPOSITIONAL STUDY OF THE PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE  
WHICH ARE USED TO SUPPORT THE MILLENNIAL DOCTRINE

Robert Glen Johnston

A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Sacred Theology in the field of New Testament Theology  
Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary  
May, 1983

Short Title:

DOES SCRIPTURE TEACH MILLENNIALISM?

Approved by Robert R. Lawrick Date 5/5/82  
Erwin J. Haback Date 5/5/82  
Siegfried W. Becken Date 5/5/82  
David P. Kuske Date 5/5/82

**DOES  
SCRIPTURE  
TEACH  
MILLENNIALISM ?**

**AN EXEGETICAL - EXPOSITIONAL  
STUDY OF THE PASSAGES OF  
SCRIPTURE WHICH ARE USED  
TO SUPPORT THE  
MILLENNIAL DOCTRINE**

**DOES SCRIPTURE TEACH MILLENNIALISM :**

**AN EXEGETICAL - EXPOSITIONAL STUDY OF THE  
PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE WHICH ARE USED TO  
SUPPORT THE MILLENNIAL DOCTRINE**

**ROBERT GLEN JOHNSTON**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Sacred Theology  
in the field of New Testament Theology  
at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.  
( May, 1983 )**

**WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY PRESS**

**MEQUON, WISCONSIN**

**1990**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER I . . . . .	1
The Problem Investigated and the Purpose of the Research . .	1
A Validation of the Study . . . . .	2
The Scope of the Study . . . . .	6
II. INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER II . . . . .	8
A Brief History of Millennialism and Its Present Status . .	8
Definition of Terms . . . . .	15
Millennialism/Millennarianism/Chiliasm . . . . .	15
Premillennialism/Postmillennialism . . . . .	15
Dispensationalism . . . . .	16
The Second Coming of Christ . . . . .	17
A Brief Overview of the Organization of the Thesis . . . . .	18
A Summary of the Findings . . . . .	18
III. DISPENSATIONALISM/THE GREAT TRIBULATION . . . . .	21
Blackstone's Theory of Dispensationalism . . . . .	21
The Basis of Blackstone's Dispensationalism . . . . .	23
The Sacred Sevens . . . . .	25
An Evaluation of Dispensationalism . . . . .	27
When the Great Tribulation Will Occur . . . . .	31
An Evaluation of the Millennial Concept of the Great Tribu- lation . . . . .	33
IV. PREMILLENNIALISM/POSTMILLENNIALISM . . . . .	37
Shades of Millennialism . . . . .	37
An Evaluation of the Shades of Millennialism . . . . .	38
V. THE MILLENNIAL RESURRECTIONS, JUDGMENTS AND COMINGS OF CHRIST	44
Two Resurrections . . . . .	44
The Millennial Position on the Two Resurrections . . . . .	44
The Scriptural Evaluation of Their Position on a Divided Resurrection . . . . .	48
Four Judgments . . . . .	56
The Millennial Position on Multiple Judgments . . . . .	56
The Scriptural Evaluation of Their Position on Multiple Judgments . . . . .	58

Chapter	Page
Three Comings . . . . .	60
The Millennial Position on the Three Comings of Christ	60
The Scriptural Evaluation of Their Position on the Three Comings . . . . .	64
VI. ANTISEMITIC FORCES, THE ANTICHRIST AND DATE SETTING . . . . .	69
The Millennial Picture of the Antisemitic Forces and the Antichrist . . . . .	69
Israel Restored as a Nation . . . . .	70
The Antisemitic Forces . . . . .	71
The Antichrist . . . . .	73
An Evaluation of the Millennial Antisemitic Forces and the Antichrist . . . . .	75
Date Setting . . . . .	80
VII. THE RAPTURE . . . . .	84
When Will the Rapture Occur? . . . . .	84
A "Reconciliation" of the Three Theories . . . . .	85
The Rapture - Secret or Seen? . . . . .	87
A Description of the Rapture . . . . .	88
An Evaluation of the Millennial Rapture . . . . .	89
VIII. THE GREAT TRIBULATION AND THE WRATH OF GOD . . . . .	98
The Seventieth Week of Daniel . . . . .	99
Revelation Six to Nineteen and the Great Tribulation . . . . .	106
The "Latter Days" . . . . .	110
The Antisemitic Forces and the Tribulation . . . . .	111
Three and One-Half/Three and One-Half . . . . .	116
The Wrath of God and the Battle of Armageddon . . . . .	118
IX. THE MILLENNIUM AND REVELATION TWENTY . . . . .	126
The Millennium . . . . .	126
Further Characteristics of the Millennial Kingdom . . . . .	132
Revelation Twenty . . . . .	137
X. THE RESTORATION OF ISRAEL AND THE LAST JUDGMENT . . . . .	144
The Restoration of Israel . . . . .	144
The Last Judgment . . . . .	154
XI. SUMMARY CHAPTER . . . . .	157
The Fallacies and Dangers of Millennialism . . . . .	158
A Brief Summary of the Biblical Revelation Concerning the Events of the Last Days . . . . .	173
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	176

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER I

#### The Problem Investigated and the Purpose of the Research

Millennialism is not something new. It finds its roots in the earthly and materialistic interpretation of many of the prophecies of God's Word regarding the purpose of the Messiah's coming and what His coming, in fact, would accomplish.

At the same time millennialism is not something old. In other words, it is a facet of the life of external Christendom that must still be dealt with today. There are still those who see in many of the promises of God an assurance of an earthly and materialistic kingdom, to be established in this world and in which there will be peace, harmony and joy for the church of God. In this kingdom there supposedly will be an Edenic quality for the saints of God, never before experienced since the days of Adam and Eve prior to the fall of man into sin.

Not only is millennialism a doctrine of long-standing, but in these last days a doctrine which has received a surge of new life. Within the last decade or so numerous new publications, setting forth this same earthly and materialistic hope, have been published. Some have even enjoyed tremendous popularity. A case in point is the publication of Hal Lindsey's The Late Great Planet Earth. This book was first published in May of 1970. In August of 1971, only sixteen months after its initial publication, the publisher, Zondervan Publishing



House, undertook the thirteenth printing of the book. The cover of the paperback edition in this thirteenth printing proclaimed that over one-half million copies were in print.

The phenomenal success of The Late Great Planet Earth is indicative of the upsurge and revitalization of this particular doctrinal position. Not only the fact that one such book has enjoyed such popular appeal, but also the fact that many similar books have been published, causes one to realize that modern millennialists are actively fostering this doctrinal position to such an extent that it also does touch the lives of those within the church who do not hold this same doctrinal persuasion. It is this point especially which makes millennialism an issue to be considered and reviewed again in the light of God's Word.

The purpose of this research is to take the various facets of the millennialists' doctrinal statements and to scrutinize and analyze them in the light of the sacred Word. The millennialists, of course, insist that what they teach is not only definitely taught in the Scriptures, but that what they teach is also clearly stated in both the Old and New Testaments. The task of this study will be to review the passages on which the millennialists base their position, in order to see whether what they teach is definitely and clearly stated in Scripture or not.

#### A Validation of the Study

In order to distinguish the doctrinal position of historic Lutheranism and our own Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod from that of the millennialists, we are rightly identified as amillennialists, that is, we reject the doctrine that Christ will establish His kingdom and

literally reign here on earth. The Confessions of the Lutheran Church we of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod believe to be a faithful and accurate presentation of the truths of Scripture. Our subscription to the Lutheran Confessions is one that proclaims the conviction that they faithfully set forth the doctrine of God's Word. This is not a second norm for doctrine and life which we place alongside of Scripture. Rather, "the Symbols, or Confessions, of the orthodox Church are simply its affirmation of the Biblical doctrine over against the denial of it by heretics."<sup>1</sup> Since this is the case, our subscription is one that states our adherence to the statements of the Lutheran Confessions not in so far as (quatenus), but because (quia) they faithfully set forth the doctrine taught in Scripture.

Article XVII of the Augsburg Confession states in the antitheses of this article on "The Return of Christ to Judgment," "Rejected, too, are certain Jewish opinions which are even now making an appearance and which teach that, before the resurrection of the dead, saints and godly men will possess a worldly kingdom and annihilate all the godless."<sup>2</sup> This We Believe, a Statement of Belief of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, under Article IX, "Jesus' Return and the Judgment," states antithetically, "We reject every form of millennialism, since it has no valid scriptural basis and leads Christians to set their hopes upon the kingdom of Christ as an earthly kingdom. We likewise reject as unscriptural any hopes that the Jews will all be converted in those fi-

---

<sup>1</sup>Francis Pieper, D. D., Christian Dogmatics (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), Vol. I, p 354.

<sup>2</sup>The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, translated and edited by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), pp 38 f.

nal days, or that all men will ultimately enjoy eternal bliss."<sup>3</sup>

Millenarians insist that those who reject the millennial doctrine do so because they impose a figurative, symbolic meaning upon certain passages of Scripture which, they say, ought to be, - indeed, must be, - understood literally. William E. Blackstone, a premillennial dispensationalist, states: "There are symbols, figures or tropes, metaphors, etc., used in Scripture and there are also allegories. But, unless they are so stated in the text, or plainly indicated in the context, we should hold only to the literal sense."<sup>4</sup> There can be no argument from Bible Christians with this statement of Blackstone. Our synod likewise insists on the literal interpretation of Scripture. By this it is understood that we accept that meaning and sense of any given passage which was intended by the sacred writer, as he spoke under the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit.

Although both millennialists and amillennialists insist that they are interpreting Scripture literally, it is obvious that both cannot be correct. Thus the question is: Are those passages which the millennialists insist must be interpreted literally truly to be thus understood; or, do they, in fact, fall into the category of "symbols, figures or tropes, metaphors, etc."?<sup>5</sup>

By the very nature of their relationship with God the devout

---

<sup>3</sup>This We Believe: A Statement of Belief of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 1967), p. 24.

<sup>4</sup>Wm. E. Blackstone, Jesus Is Coming (London & Edinburg, Chicago, New York, Toronto: The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, Institute Place, 1908), p. 21.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

Christian is concerned about the right understanding of God's Word. He recognizes the validity of Jesus' statement: "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (Jn 8:31-32).<sup>6</sup> To hold to Christ's teaching means more than a general acceptance of the truths of the Bible, whatever that might be. But it implies an essential and thorough searching of the Scriptures. It requires that the child of God determine the sensus literalis, i.e., the intended sense of the writer. This procedure may involve one or more of a variety of ways by which the sensus literalis is to be determined. The writer himself may append an explanation. In many cases the context, either immediate or remote or both, sheds light on the author's meaning. In addition, one must take into consideration such things as the nature of the subject, concepts which are put into juxtaposition to each other, as well as a comparison of similar texts.

One must proceed on the premise that the biblical writers, especially the divine Author of Scripture, want to be understood. Therefore, it is essential that the student of Scripture search for the intended sense of the writer. Furthermore, since "all Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Tm 3:16), and the holy writers spoke "not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit" (1 Cor 2:13), there is a complete and total harmony from Genesis to Revelation in that Book which the all-wise and unchanging God has authored. Therefore, the Bible student is obligated to interpret Scripture in the light of Scrip-

---

<sup>6</sup>All biblical references are from the New International Version unless otherwise specified.

ture. No interpretation of any passage of Scripture can be legitimized when the interpretation stands in direct conflict with clear passages of the Word. Where this occurs, the individual has obviously not been able to grasp the intended sense of the writer. When millennialism and amillennialism are placed side by side it becomes clear that either one side or the other has not been able to grasp or has stubbornly refused to acknowledge the sensus literalis of those passages which are in dispute.

As the various facets of millennialism are placed under the scrutinizing microscope of God's Word, this research will endeavor to find that sensus literalis of those passages which the millennialists use and, on that basis, to evaluate millennialism. To that end may our gracious God bless this humble effort to his glory and the edification of his people!

#### The Scope of the Study

The twentieth chapter of the Book of Revelation is the sedes doctrinae for millennialism. In verses four and five St. John declares:

Then I saw thrones, and those who sat on them were given authority to judge. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for speaking the truth told by Jesus and God's Word. They had not worshipped the animal and its statue and were not branded on their foreheads and hands. They lived and ruled with Christ a thousand years. The rest of the dead didn't live until the thousand years were over. This is the first resurrection (Re 20:4,5, Beck).

A fundamental difference between millennialism and amillennialism is the question as to whether or not this period of a thousand years is to be taken literally or figuratively, as well as when and how this thousand-year reign of Christ is to be understood.

When one views millennialism, however, we see that from this

point in Revelation twenty the millennialists seek out the passages of Scripture which they believe support their interpretation of this thousand-year reign of Christ and fill in the concomitant details in a logical sequence of events surrounding the millennial kingdom. These include dispensationalism, the tribulation, various resurrections and judgments of Christ, the appearance of the Antichrist, the rapture, the great tribulation, the revelation of the church, and the restoration of Israel. During the course of this study each of these facets of millennialism will be critically viewed and evaluated on the basis of God's Word.

Because of their brand of biblical interpretation, some millennialists tend to find passages of Scripture which prophesy modern automobiles, airplanes and UFOs, the common market, etc. Because of the fact that these are neither basic to the millennial doctrine nor held by all millennialists, these matters are generally outside of the scope of this research and, therefore, will not be dealt with in this thesis.

## CHAPTER II

### INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER II

#### A Brief History of Millennialism and Its Present Status

The roots of millennialism go back over two millennia and are found in the idle hope of the Jews for the coming of a Messianic kingdom that was earthly, restoring once again the kingdom of David and the independence of God's people. Article XVII of the Augsburg Confession, when it speaks of millennialism in connection with the return of Christ to judgment, refers to the various facets of millennialism as "Jewish opinions."<sup>1</sup>

As one might expect, the millennialists themselves stress this point, viz. that their doctrine is one which has its origins in the Old Testament. The millennialist William E. Blackstone, for example, writes:

Jewish writers throughout the Talmud hold that this millennium will be chiefly characterized by the deliverance of the Jews from all their enemies, recovery of Palestine and the literal reign of their Messiah in unequalled splendor therein.<sup>2</sup>

One can catch this same spirit displayed by the disciples of Christ when they asked Jesus at the time of his ascension: "Lord, are you at this

---

<sup>1</sup>The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, translated and edited by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p 38.

<sup>2</sup>Wm. E. Blackstone, Jesus Is Coming (London & Edinburg, Chicago, New York, Toronto: The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, Institute Place, 1908), p 37.

time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Ac 1:6).

William E. Blackstone asserts the historical character of millennialism in the following, lengthy quotation:

It is admitted on all sides that the pre-millennial coming of Christ, and His reign upon earth for a thousand years, was the faith of the early church. Indeed, this is substantiated by such an abundance of evidence that it cannot be denied.

We would that we had the space to quote at length from the many authorities on this point, but must be content to select a few:

Mosheim says: "The prevailing opinion that Christ was to come and reign a thousand years among men before the final dissolution of the world had met with no opposition previous to the time of Origen" (Vol. 1, p. 89).

Geisler says: "In all the works of this period (the first two centuries) millenarianism is so prominent that we can not hesitate to consider it as universal."

Chillingworth, with his characteristic invulnerable logic, argues: "Whatever doctrine is believed and taught by the most eminent Fathers of any age of the Church and by none of their contemporaries opposed or condemned, that is to be esteemed the Catholic doctrine of the Church of those times. But the doctrine of the millenaries was believed and taught by the most eminent Fathers of the age next after the Apostles, and by none of that age opposed or condemned; therefore, it was the Catholic doctrine of those times."

Stackhouse, in his "Complete Body of Divinity" (Vol. 1, p. 597), says: "It cannot be denied but that this doctrine (millenarianism) has its antiquity, and was once the general opinion of all orthodox Christians."

Bishop Newton says: "The doctrine of the Millennium (as held by Millenarians) was generally believed in the first three and purest ages."

Bishop Russell, though an anti-millenarian, says: "Down to the beginning of the fourth century, the belief was universal and undisputed."

Gibbon, who is at least an unprejudiced witness, says: "The ancient and popular doctrine of the Millennium was carefully inculcated by a succession of Fathers from Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, who conversed with the immediate disciples of the Apostles, down to Lactantius to have been the reigning sentiment of orthodox believers."

He also says: As long as this error (as he calls it) was per-



mitted to subsist in the Church, it was productive of the most salutary effects on the faith and practice of Christians."

Dr. Daniel Whitby, - the father of the modern post-millennial theory, - in his "Treatise on Traditions," candidly acknowledges that, "the doctrine of the millennium passed among the best of Christians, for two hundred and fifty years, for a tradition apostolic, and as such is delivered by many Fathers of the second and third centuries, who speak of it as a tradition of our Lord and His Apostles, and of all the ancients who lived before them, who tell us the very words in which it was delivered, the Scriptures which were so interpreted, and say that it was held by all Christians that were exactly orthodox." . . .

Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia, who was a disciple of St. John, or who at least received his doctrines from the immediate followers of the Apostle, was an extreme millenarianist, and has been called the father of millenarianism. (See McClintock & Strong's Enc.) Irenaeus, as a disciple of Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, was directly connected with St. John. And also Justin Martyr was one of the earliest fathers.<sup>3</sup>

Though we willingly concede that millenarianism "formed a constant . . . part of the church doctrine"<sup>4</sup> in the early history of the New Testament era, it would seem that Blackstone and the authors he quotes reveal an overzealous spirit in regard to both the universality of the acceptance of millennialism as well as the length of time into the New Testament period that it was unquestioned and unopposed. The Lutheran Cyclopedia states:

In the second century, chiliasm formed a constant, though not unquestioned, part of the church doctrine, until a radical change in external circumstances and in the attitude of many of its leaders towards the question forced it into the position of a heresy. . . . The first decided opponent of millenarianism was Caius, a Roman presbyter (c. 200).<sup>5</sup>

In addition, Blackstone confuses the concepts of the second com-

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp 66 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Lutheran Cyclopedia, Erwin L. Luecker, editor in chief (Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1954), p 679.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p 679.

ing of Christ and the millennial coming of Christ, making the terms interchangeable, even when the context makes a distinction between the two. A case in point is the quotation which he uses from Gibbon.

Blackstone quotes Gibbon to support the assertion that "the pre-millennial coming of Christ, and His reign upon earth for a thousand years, was the faith of the early church."<sup>6</sup> In defense of this assertion

Blackstone uses Gibbon to say: "As long as this error (as he calls it) was permitted to subsist in the Church, it was productive of the most salutary effects on the faith and practice of Christians."<sup>7</sup> Obviously,

Blackstone assumes the "error" of which Gibbon is speaking is the "pre-millennial coming of Christ." However, John Wesley White, Ph. D., in

his book entitled Re-entry, also quotes this same passage of Gibbon to

show the effect, not of the premillennial coming of Christ, but of

Christ's second coming, upon the church. White declares:

Professor Duffield has pointed out that there are 22 of these quotations in the epistles alone, calls to purity, patience and service in the light of Christ's return. The Church Father, Cyril, wrote 1,620 years ago: "Look thou for the Son of God to judge the quick and the dead. Venture not to declare when, nor on the other hand slumber, for He saith 'watch.' We are looking for Christ." Adjudged Gibbon, the historian, "As long as this error (sic) was permitted in the church, it was productive of the most salutary effects on the practice of Christians."<sup>8</sup>

That White understood Gibbon's remark to refer to the second coming of Christ rather than the millennial coming of Christ becomes even more obvious when he continues: "Dwight L. Moody, like Luther and Wesley,

---

<sup>6</sup>Wm. E. Blackstone, op. cit., p 66.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p 67.

<sup>8</sup>John Wesley White, Ph. D., Re-entry (Minneapolis, Minnesota: World Wide Publications; 1971), pp 180 f.

preached constantly that Christ's coming was imminent, declaring, 'Nowhere am I told to watch for the millennium but for the coming of the Lord.'"<sup>9</sup> Incidentally, White himself is a millennialist!

In the latter half of the second century, particularly in the time of Montanus, with the Montanists' extreme type of millennialism, a growing and strengthened antagonism toward millennialism became apparent. Until the time of the Middle Ages millenarianism was opposed by such church leaders as Origen and Dionysius of Alexandria in the East and Jerome and Augustine in the West.

During the Middle Ages the prevalent view was that the day of judgment and the end of the world were coincidental and imminent events. Yet, even during this period, pockets, made up of individuals and groups who espoused millennialism, were frequent. Though the church of the Middle Ages continued to view it as heretical, chiliasm nevertheless continued to survive.

At the time of the reformation the Book of Revelation underwent a new method of interpretation, especially in regard to chapter thirteen and the interpretation of the Antichrist. The reformers in general, including Luther, viewed the Roman papacy as the Antichrist. To them his appearance was a fulfilment of prophecy that signaled the imminence of the final judgment. Thus a keen awareness of the impending end of the world permeated the reformers and their followers. In spite of this sense of the nearness of the second coming of Christ, which, at the same time, was even further removed from the millennial dream of an earthly kingdom of Christ, "millenarianism prevailed among mystical enthusiasts

---

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p 181.

and sects and was espoused especially by the Anabaptists of Germany."<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, the Lutheran Church also had within its ranks - and even among otherwise conservative theologians - those who held to the millennial interpretation of passages such as Revelation, chapter twenty. This was especially true later on in the history of Lutheranism and Lutheran theology. However, both the Lutheran and the Reformed Churches spoke out and condemned millennialism as "mere visionary Judaism . . . a caricature of the true Gospel hope."<sup>11</sup> (Cf. the Augsburg Confession, Article XVII, and the Helvetic Confession, Article XI.)

Politically, the seventeenth century was a time of upheaval in Europe, especially in Germany, France and England. Within the Lutheran Church the pietistic movement gained a foothold toward the end of that century. All of this seems to have set the stage for a new upsurge and strengthening of millennialism. The seventeenth century provided the ideal climate for chiliasm to enjoy its most successful hour. Conservative Lutheran theologians, for the most part, continued to challenge the millennial movement as heretical. However, the millenarian followers continued to exist and even thrive in many parts of Europe as well as in America. In England the Plymouth Brethren took up the banner of millenarianism. The Catholic Apostolic Church (the Irvingites), in fact, made millennialism one of its distinctive tenets.

In America, too, chiliasm was transplanted and has flourished in segments of external Christendom down to our own day. The authors of Popular Symbolics write:

---

<sup>10</sup> Lutheran Cyclopedia, op. cit., p 680.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p 680.

We are concerned with the American revival of chiliasm, which has made the doctrine prominent in Seventh-day Adventism and Russellism and which has captivated a great part of that movement which is called Fundamentalism. . . .

One of the earliest millenarians who formed organizations was Ann Lee, who came from England in 1774; her followers are the Shakers. The Plymouth Brethren arose at Plymouth in England about 1827 and now have six branches in this country. William Miller, a converted deist, began to lecture in New York State in 1831 and fixed the date of Christ's return in 1843. Out of this movement came the Adventist churches. The Mormons are premillennialists. And "Pastor" Russell founded his successful financial enterprise on the basis of his doctrine of "millennial dawn," fixing the end of the world for 1914.<sup>12</sup>

Today, the situation in the world in general and in America in particular causes man to reach out for something which will give him hope and, through that hope, strength to meet the tensions and frustrations of life. Billy Graham, speaking of the second coming of Christ in his "Foreword" to the book, Re-entry, states:

Probably no Gospel theme apart from "Ye must be born again" is more relevant today, and I preach on some facet of this subject in virtually all of my crusades. Our world is filled with fear, hate, lust, greed, war, and utter despair. Surely the second coming of Jesus Christ, His "re-entry," is the only hope of replacing these depressing features with trust, love, universal peace and prosperity. For it the world, wittingly or inadvertently, waits.<sup>13</sup>

As a result, the past few decades especially have provided fertile soil for a newly invigorated shooting up of delusive millennialism.

To be sure, the time IS ripe for Christ's second coming. All of the prophecies of Scripture dealing with the days immediately preceding his coming are fulfilled - and are continuing to be fulfilled in even greater measure. But nowhere do the Scriptures point us toward an

---

<sup>12</sup>Th. Engelder, W. Arndt, Th. Graebner, F. E. Meyer, Popular Symbolics (St. Louis, Mo.; Concordia Publishing House, 1934), p 367.

<sup>13</sup>John Wesley White, Ph. D., op. cit., p 8.

earthly kingdom of Christ such as the millennialists vainly hope for. With Dwight L. Moody we must say: "Nowhere am I told to watch for the millennium but for the coming of the Lord."<sup>14</sup>

#### Definition of Terms

##### Millennialism/Millenarianism/Chiliasm

The terms millennialism, millenarianism and chiliasm are interchangeable and are used to designate the doctrine of the millennium.

The term millennium comes from the Latin mille, a thousand, and annus, a year. A millennium, then, is a period of a thousand years. Because of the term's specific theological application, it designates that thousand-year period which is mentioned by Saint John in Revelation 20:1-6. Millennialism is the teaching that this period of a thousand years in duration is to be taken literally, rather than figuratively.

However, the term millennialism refers, not only to this thousand-year period, but also to the belief that for the duration of this thousand years the kingdom of Christ will be established on earth and the church will enjoy peace, joy and prosperity. Thus the terms are used in a more specific sense than the etymology of the various terms suggests. In addition, this is both the basis and the universally accepted tenet among chiliasts.

##### Premillennialism/Postmillennialism

Because some millenarians set the second coming of Christ at the beginning of the millennium with Christ physically and visibly reigning

---

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p 181.

over his earthly kingdom for a thousand years, they are referred to as premillennialists. Postmillennialists believe, on the other hand, that Christ's coming will take place after the thousand-year period of peace and prosperity for the church has come to an end. In its modern form, chiliasm is predominantly premillennial in character.

A brief summary of premillennial theology is provided in Popular Symbolics, where it is stated:

It (premillennialism) may be summarized as the expectation of a return of Christ in splendor to gather together the just, to annihilate hostile powers, and to found a glorious kingdom on earth for the enjoyment of the highest spiritual and material blessings; He Himself will reign as its King, and all the just, including the saints recalled to life, will participate in it. At the close of this kingdom the saints will enter heaven with Christ, while the wicked, who also have been resurrected, will be condemned to eternal damnation.<sup>15</sup>

### Dispensationalism

The concept of dispensationalism goes back as early as the time of Irenaeus (c. 120-202), Tertullian (c. 150-230) and Origen (185-254). These men, along with the Montanists of the latter part of the second century, divided the history of the world into three or more distinct periods of time "during which man is tested in respect to obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God."<sup>16</sup>

Modern dispensationalists distinguish seven periods of time, or dispensations, culminating in the millennial kingdom of Christ. William E. Blackstone, whose book, Jesus Is Coming, is generally regarded as the textbook of dispensationalists, identifies the following seven aeons,

<sup>15</sup>Th. Engelder, E. Arndt, Th. Graebner, F. E Meyer, op. cit., p 366.

<sup>16</sup>Lutheran Cyclopedia, op. cit., p 304.

or dispensations: 1) Eden, 2) Antedeluvian, 3) Postdeluvian, 4) Patriarchal, 5) Mosaic, 6) Christian and 7) Millennial. For the purpose of this present thesis, references to dispensationalism will refer to this sevenfold breakdown of world history, unless otherwise specified. By its very nature dispensationalists deal especially with the sixth and seventh dispensations.

### The Second Coming of Christ

Special consideration needs to be given to this term in order to avoid confusion and to understand precisely what millennialists mean when using this expression. The confusion and misunderstanding that is apt to occur centers primarily around the purpose and, as a result, the concomitant features of Christ's second coming.

The three ecumenical creeds clearly state both the purpose and the accompanying events surrounding Christ's second coming. The Apostles' Creed states: "From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead." The Nicene Creed somewhat augments this statement, as it declares: "And he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead." Even more detail is given in the Athanasian Creed:

From whence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. At whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies and shall give an account of their works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire.

Millennialists, some of whom even advocate three comings of Christ instead of two, view the second coming of Christ as the inauguration of the millennial kingdom. Thus one must be constantly aware of this particular situation when reading millennial literature as well as in understanding their interpretation of Bible passages dealing with the



## Παρουσία.

### A Brief Overview of the Organization of the Thesis

In general, the thesis has been organized on a topical basis. Each of the principal facets of millennialism has been incorporated either into a separate chapter or else tied together with one or more related aspects as major divisions of a chapter. An effort has been made to follow somewhat of a millennial chronology in the arrangement of the material both in the chapter sequences as well as within the chapters themselves. A chronological order has been laid aside, however, where it was deemed advisable for the sake of clarity, in order to keep related subject-matter together, or to provide background for a better understanding of subsequent topics. The final chapter serves as a summation of the body of the thesis and includes a summary of the conclusions which were reached as a result of evaluating the facets of millennialism on the basis of Scripture.

### A Summary of the Findings

Millennialists are guilty of a false and piecemeal exegesis in which context is largely ignored. To take any kind of phraseology or suggestion which seems to support some millennial view and then misapply and misconstrue it to fit into a millennial framework is to "distort" the Scriptures "to their own destruction" (2 Pe 3:16).

Nowhere do the Scriptures focus the Christian's eyes on a millennial kingdom of Christ, or even on a period of unprecedented prosperity and peace for his church on earth. The tenor of the Scriptures is, rather, that the prognosis for the church here on earth is an ever-wor-

sening state of affairs, which is shortened for the sake of the elect by the grace of God by Christ's coming again in judgment.

Millennialism becomes guilty of taking many of the aspects of the church which are an integral part of the New Testament church and postponing them for a millennial reign of Christ. Likewise, many of those details which Scripture declares to be concomitant with the Παρουσία and the final judgment, events which will occur simultaneously with the coming of Christ, the millennialists elongate in such a way that it covers the entire period of the millennial dream.

Furthermore, Christology is moved from the center of Scripture and eschatology in general and chiliasm in particular are made the hub around which all of Scripture revolves. The resultant situation is one in which there is little regard for creeds other than millennial eschatology and unionistic practises which display an indifference to the overall body of scriptural doctrine.

In addition, Scripture uses the terms "kingdom of Christ" and "kingdom of God" interchangeably. Millennialism distinguishes between them and makes two kingdoms out of the one. Further, it denies the present reality of the kingdom of Christ and places it into the future as the millennial kingdom.

Also, there is in millennialism an unscriptural and, therefore, an inordinate preeminence given to the Jews. Millennialists obviously must hold to an irresistible conversion of the Jews as a nation. Furthermore, they see this conversion as occurring, not as a result of the grace of God as the Holy Spirit works through the means of grace, but rather as a direct result of a display of God's wrath upon the hostile forces arrayed in open battle against Israel as a nation.

In short, the evaluation of Dr. Francis Pieper is valid when he states:

Chiliasm has no basis in Scripture, for Scripture itself explains the passages to which chiliasm appeals as speaking of the spiritual glory of the New Testament Church, which dawned with the coming of Christ in the flesh and the preaching of the Gospel in the world.<sup>17</sup>

Subsequently, Dr. Pieper presents the effects of millennialism on the spiritual life of Christians. He writes, fittingly:

And what is the effect of chiliasm on the spiritual life of Christians? Chiliasm's misdirection of the Christian hope is extremely harmful and dangerous. Where chiliasm is taken seriously, that is, where it controls the heart, it turns heart and mind away from the invisible spiritual glory of the Christian life, which consists in the assurance of the remission of sins and of the future heavenly heritage, and supplants it with the expectation of an outward and mundane greatness. It depreciates such mighty and glorious words as these: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you" (John 14:27), and: "These things have I spoken unto you that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Chiliasm is not content with the "Behold, the Kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21), but would have the Kingdom of God come with outward display so that one might say: "Lo, there it is!" In short, Scripture does not teach chiliasm, but warns against it.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup>Francis Pieper, D. D., Christian Dogmatics (Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), Vol. III, p 520.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 526 f.

## CHAPTER III

### DISPENSATIONALISM/THE GREAT TRIBULATION

#### Blackstone's Theory of Dispensationalism

William E. Blackstone is considered by many to be the final authority on dispensationalism.<sup>1</sup> He insists that the Scriptures point to a sequence of seven dispensations, each of which is approximately a thousand years in length. These seven aeons, or ages, of Blackstone may be summarized in the following manner. The first of these he calls Eden. The age begins with the creation and ends with the casting out of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. The first dispensation Blackstone calls the age of innocence. This is followed by the antediluvian dispensation. During this period man's only restraint was his conscience and is, therefore, called the age of freedom. This dispensation closes with the flood and the depopulation of the world, leaving only Noah and his family, a total of eight souls. During the antediluvian period we are told of Enoch's translation (Gn 5:24). This fact, coupled with the drastic reduction in the world's population, Blackstone sees as a type of the church's rapture and the judgment of nations which will take place at the close of the sixth dispensation. The third aeon, or age, of Blackstone is the postdiluvian. He names this the age of government. During this dispensation man is placed under civil authority. This age

---

<sup>1</sup>Th. Engelder, W. Arndt, Th. Graebner, F. E. Meyer, Popular Symbolics (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1934), p 368.

ends with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The patriarchal dispensation, the pilgrim age, follows. Pharaoh's overthrow in the waters of the Red Sea marks the close of this age. The fifth is called the Mosaic dispensation. This is the Israelitish age and terminates with the death of Christ and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. During this particular period Blackstone sees the translation of Elijah (2 Kgs 2:11) as another type of the rapture of the saints. The Christian dispensation, called by Blackstone the aeon of mystery, is the sixth age. During this period the Jews are scattered throughout the world. The great tribulation, the Lord's coming and the judgment of the nations will mark the close of this age. The final dispensation is the millennium, the age of manifestation for Blackstone. Satan's last deception and the great white throne judgment bring this seventh dispensation to its close.<sup>2</sup> To the above Blackstone adds:

Beyond this is the New Heavens and the New Earth wherein dwelleth righteousness, probably the beginning of another series of aions. For these seven make a week of aions, corresponding to the expression in Eph. 3:21, aion of aions, or one great aion composed of these seven aions. And, in harmony with the weeks of years appointed unto Israel (Lev. 25:8-11), other great aions are to follow corresponding to the expression aions of aions. . . . Possibly the fiftieth aion may be like the Jubilee of Lev. 25 and the aion of aions.<sup>3</sup>

Two potentially soul-destroying dangers face the Bible student. The one is that he does not allow the Scriptures to say what they intended to say; the other, that he insists that the Scriptures say more than they intended to say. The Word of God insists that we neither add

---

<sup>2</sup>Wm. E. Blackstone, Jesus Is Coming (London & Edinburg, Chicago, New York, Toronto: The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, Institute Place, 1908), pp 222 f.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p 223.

to nor subtract from that message which he himself has given to us through the inspired writers (Dt 4:2; 12:32; Pr 30:6; Re 22:18-19) and pronounces the judgment of God on those who disobey (Dt 4:3; Pr 30:6; Re 22:18-19). The vital question before us at this point is whether the dispensationalists hear Scripture saying something which it does not intend to say or the amillennialists do not hear Scripture saying something which it intends to say.

### The Basis of Blackstone's Dispensationalism

Because of the manner in which Blackstone uses the twenty-sixth chapter of Leviticus, it ought to be said here at the outset that this chapter does not point out God's dealings with the world. Throughout the chapter, interspersed even between the verses which Blackstone selects to "prove" his dispensationalism, God's dealings with his chosen people and the special covenant which he has established with them are the real issues which God is here laying before his people. God calls upon them to observe the sabbaths and to reverence his sanctuary in verse two. In verse nine God speaks of keeping his covenant with them. He reminds his people that he it is who brought them out of Egyptian bondage in verse thirteen. In verses fifteen and twenty-five God speaks of the consequences which his people will bear if they break the covenant with him. In verses thirty-four and thirty-five he deals with the violation of the sabbaths by his special people. In verse thirty-eight God threatens the dispersion of his people among the nations if they should violate his covenant. Yet, because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (v. 42), God will not reject them and thus break his covenant with their forebearers (v. 43), but for the sake of their an-

cestors he will remember his covenant (v. 45). The chapter closes with the dramatic comment: "These are the decrees, the laws and the regulations that the Lord established on Mount Sinai between himself and the Israelites through Moses" (Lv 26:46).

In chapter twenty-six, therefore, the Book of Leviticus lays before God's Old Testament people his punishments upon them if they disobey his commandments. Verses fourteen to thirty-nine set forth the details of the Lord's chastening if they were disobedient. Four times during the course of these verses, the Lord threatens to punish such disobedience "seven times over" (Lv 26:18,21,24,28). These verses read: "If after all this you will not listen to me, I will punish you for your sins seven times over" (v. 18); "If you remain hostile toward me and refuse to listen to me, I will multiply your affliction seven times over, as your sins deserve" (v. 21); "I myself will be hostile toward you and will afflict you for your sins seven times over" (v. 24); "Then in my anger I will be hostile toward you, and I myself will punish you for your sins seven times over" (v. 28). The Hebrew word translated "seven times over" is the word שבע, used adverbially in each of the four references. On this text Blackstone imposes the words of 2 Peter 3:8b: "With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day," and draws the conclusion that Leviticus twenty-six teaches seven periods or dispensations of approximately a thousand years each for the execution of these punishments of God.

Two facts, both of which can be established by merely cursory examination, become apparent. The one is that all of the punishments which are mentioned by God to his people in this section have in some way or another been carried out and are even recorded in the pages of

the Old Testament. Regarding this The Amplified Bible in a footnote on this section states:

This chapter (Leviticus twenty-six) abounds in prophecies of what God would do for, or against, His people if they did, or did not, meet His conditions: each of which prophecies were literally fulfilled in the following centuries. The Scripture references indicate where these fulfilments were recorded; there are at least a dozen of them.<sup>4</sup>

The second fact is that the adverbial usage of שִׁבְעִים may just as reasonably be construed as to degree or extent. Even assuming the interpretation of seven specific times that the Lord God would chasten, there still is absolutely nothing in the text that refers the שִׁבְעִים to seven millennia.

Blackstone's interpretation of Leviticus twenty-six is an example of the way in which dispensationalists, and millennialists in general, impose a preconceived notion on passages by which these passages are made to say something which was never intended by the sacred writer.

#### The Sacred Sevens

The number seven is generally accepted as being a sacred number in the sense that it is frequently used by God in the Scriptures to indicate completeness or totality. Thus the number is frequently used symbolically. Whether it is to be taken literally or figuratively must be determined from the context.

An elaborate system has been devised by Blackstone in connection with the number seven and in support of his seven dispensational ages. In the following quotation he speaks of "the sacred seven." He writes:

---

<sup>4</sup>The Amplified Bible (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1965), p 156.



. . . the Jews had fully developed the doctrine of the Millennium as the teaching of the Old Testament scriptures long before the Book of Revelation or any portion of the New Testament was written. It was the view most frequently expressed in the Talmud that "the Messianic kingdom would last for one thousand years," and this was commonly believed among the Jews. It is easy to discern upon what they founded the doctrine. It is the Sabbath of God's weeks.

The division of time into sevens, or weeks, permeates the Scriptures. A fundamental enactment of the Mosaic law was the keeping of the Sabbath, Ex. 20:8. This was based upon God's rest day in Gen. 2. Upon this is founded not only the week of seven days, but also the week of weeks unto Pentecost (Lev. 23:15-16); the week of months, with the Atonement and seven days' feast of Tabernacles in the seventh month (Lev. 23:27-28); the week of years, ending with the Sabbatic year (Lev. 25:4); the week of weeks of years, ending with the seventh Sabbatic year, and followed by the year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:8-12).

Even the duration of Israel's great punishments was based upon this law of the sevens. Their captivity in Babylon was for seventy years. Jer. 25:11-12; Dan. 9:2. The great period revealed to Daniel (ch. 9), unto the coming of the Messiah was divided into seventy sevens. The unequalled period of Israel's punishment and dispersion in the lands of their enemies, prophesied by Moses, is, with fourfold emphasis, specified to be for seven times (Lev. 26:18,21,24,28). This sacred SEVEN is woven into the laws, life and history of the chosen people, with whom God established His theocracy. And notwithstanding all of Israel's rebellion and sinfulness and consequent chastisement, there still remains for them and the whole world a keeping of the Sabbath. Heb. 4:9 margin. With God a day is as a thousand years (Psa. 90), and a thousand years as one day. 2 Pet. 3:8.

Upon this rock of the sacred sevens we can consistently, with the Jews, base our conclusion that as we have the scriptural week, week of weeks, week of months, week of years, week of weeks of years, week of seventy years, week of times; week of olans or aians (ages), . . . so we also have the week of millenniums. Six thousand year days of labor and then the Millennium, or blessed seventh thousand years of rest.

This scriptural doctrine of the Millennium cannot be shaken. Its root is in the Sabbath of Genesis, and its fruit is in the thousand-year kingdom of Revelation. It shines throughout the Word of God as a glorious hope for the nations, whom God has promised to bless. Gen. 12:3.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup>Wm. E. Blackstone, op. cit., pp 38 f.

## An Evaluation of Dispensationalism

It must be pointed out again that in his carrying out of his millennial design Blackstone has not listened to the Scriptures to hear what they have to say, but has superimposed upon the Word his own pre-conceived notions of what he thinks the Bible ought to be saying. Thus, if one reads carefully the second last paragraph of the above quotation, it becomes clear that Blackstone is forced to admit that the "week of millenniums" is a conclusion which he and the dispensationalists have drawn. The fact that they have endeavored to establish this on the "rock of the sacred sevens" still leaves them with a shaky foundation and simply cannot alter the fact that the "week of millenniums" is an inference. We might add that it is an inference that is not only extra-biblical, but, as we shall continue to see as we proceed, also contrary to the Scriptures and the intended sense of the biblical writers. Blackstone is obviously carried away with an overzealous fascination for the number seven, which carries him to unwarranted deductions simply because they thus fit neatly into his millennial scheme of things.

That this type of approach is characteristic of millennialists is evidenced again by Hal Lindsey, when he admits: "If we are headed toward an obvious climax in history, there must be something about it in the Bible."<sup>6</sup> When one approaches the study of the Scriptures from this point of view, the Word can be made to say almost anything. The inclination from this approach to Bible study is to bring thoughts in from the outside, rather than to draw from the inside of Scripture the

---

<sup>6</sup>Hal Lindsey, The World's Final Hour: Evacuation or Extinction (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), pp 14 f.

message which it intends to share with us.

Still another indication of this kind of unjustifiable superimposing of dispensational thinking on terms used in Scripture is brought out in A Theological Word Book of the Bible under the heading of "Time." There it is stated in connection with the biblical use of the Hebrew אֵלֶּם and the Greek αἰών and αἰώνιος:

We must now turn to the words used for ETERNAL. In the OT the word 'olam predominates, and it originally implied a period of time, one at least of whose boundaries was not fixed. Its significance changes with the object to which it is applied. Thus, in reference to a man's life it can mean simply 'lifelong.' . . . Its quantitative character is passing into a qualitative one when the OT speaks of the 'everlasting hills' (Gen. 49:26), and that process is evidently complete when the word is applied to God, whose existence cannot be thought of as circumscribed by our human temporal limitations. . . .

The NT has as its characteristic words for eternity aion and aionios. . . . What is fairly certain is that, since the words were used to translate 'olam from the OT, the NT usages have the OT world of thought behind them. In this connexion it is important to observe that neither there, nor in any Jewish literature current at the time, was the word aion used to express the view that the history of the world is made up of a number of aions or 'ages', nor even the notion of two aions or ages - the present and the one to come.

The last sentence is especially noteworthy. The use of biblical forms with a meaning different from that which the Scriptures use is, to say the least, misleading and deceptive. Further, it is to be noted that a part of the basis for Blackstone's faulty conclusion of "the week of millenniums" is based, at least in part, on "the scriptural . . . week of clams or aions" (cf. the quotation from Blackstone on page 27).

This kind of improper exegesis marks the pattern of dispensationalism and millennialism and indicates that their doctrinal foundation is not

---

<sup>7</sup>A Theological Word Book of the Bible, edited by Alan Richardson, D. D. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955), pp 265 f.

to be found in the Word of God.

Finally, the concept that each of the seven dispensations is a complete and sufficient unit per se denies the unity that existed and is evident in the Word of God between the Old Testament and New Testament church. It further denies the fact that Old Testament believers were saved in exactly the same way as New Testament believers, viz. by the grace of God through the coming Messiah in the Old Testament and the Christ who has come in the New. St. Paul stresses this unity of the way of salvation when he writes:

The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith (Ga 3:8 f.).

The Magnificat also speaks of this in the words of Mary: "He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers" (Lk 1:54 f.).

The New Testament church is a fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. This is precisely what Peter was stressing when in his Pentecost sermon he declared that the earlier events of that great day were in fulfilment of what had been written by the prophet Joel (Ac 2:16-21). When dispensationalists view the Mosaic age (the fifth dispensation) as an age in which, because of poor judgment, the Israelites chose the law instead of grace or when they assert that Jesus delayed the establishing of his kingdom because the Jews in general rejected faith and repentance, then the New Testament church is made a "detour in God's dealing with men."<sup>8</sup> In Blackstone's view, then, grace merely becomes a new alternative simply because the earlier method did not work. And this is

---

<sup>8</sup>Wm. E. Blackstone, op. cit., p 223.

totally out of harmony with the sacred Scriptures. To our very first parents the promise of grace was given immediately after the fall into sin, when they were expelled from Eden. In his letter to the Galatians St. Paul stresses the fact that this covenant of grace through faith, once established, as it was anew with Abraham, cannot be set aside and that the giving of the Sinaitic covenant, presented to Israel 430 years later through Moses, cannot annul that covenant of grace (Ga 3:15-20).

In this broader context of Scripture such passages as Jeremiah 31:31-34 must be interpreted. The covenant God himself here speaks through the prophet and declares:

"The time is coming, . . . when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the Lord. "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the Lord. "For I will forgive their wickedness and I will remember their sin no more."

To be sure, this text stresses the inadequacy of the Sinaitic covenant to produce a righteousness in man acceptable to the one, true God. It is for this very reason that the Lord here speaks of a "new" covenant, a new covenant as opposed to the Sinaitic covenant, a new covenant in the sense that it was yet to be fully accomplished in the redemptive work of Christ and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. But the Sinaitic covenant was adequate to accomplish its divinely appointed task of pointing in sharp contrasts the reality of sin and the lack of man's ability to produce the righteousness which that law demanded and so of pointing the individual away from himself to the grace of a loving

God, evidenced in the promise of a "new" covenant, already given 430 years before. But God knew what he was doing! He did not offer a plan of salvation in the Sinaitic covenant that simply did not work and then change courses in order to find some other plan that might possibly work. God simply does not operate in such a hit and miss fashion!

Because of their rabid enchantment with these millennial ages, dispensationalists, whether they will admit it or not, remove Christ from the center of Scripture and in his place make dispensationalism the hub and focal point of the Bible. They thus deny the glory rightly due to him who said: "These are the Scriptures that testify about me" (Jn 5:39) and turn the entire purpose of the Word away from that which Scripture itself asserts, namely, to show us the way of salvation (Ga 3:15; cf. also Jn 20:31).

#### When the Great Tribulation Will Occur

The end of Blackstone's sixth dispensation, the Christian dispensation or the age of mystery, is marked by four great events. These are "the great tribulation, the coming of the Lord, the judgment of nations, and another great reduction in the world's population."<sup>9</sup> It is the first of these four events with which we are presently concerned.

The vast majority of modern millennialists view the time of the great tribulation to be imminent, much in the spirit of Hal Lindsey when he writes:

We are approaching the most electrifying decade of human history. The 1980s may be the most determinative decade in the history of the human race. The die will be cast as to how his-

---

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 223.

tory is going to be ended.

We have enough evidence and information available to us today, if we are really honest with what is going on, to show us that man is headed toward some sort of catastrophic climax in his long history. Knowledgeable people are saying that man will probably not survive this century. Population explosion, pollution, ecological imbalance, nuclear threat - all point to the end. . . .

All this has caused me to become a "prophecy freak", trying to find out whether the Bible has anything to say about this dilemma. I wanted to know if God has any hope for someone, sometime, but I was a little concerned about this generation and not someone way off in the future. Besides, if we are headed toward an obvious climax in history, there must be something in the Bible about it. There are events today which, because they are happening all at once, are different from any other time in history. We are seeing the final fitting together of all the prophetic signs that Jesus said would come.<sup>10</sup>

Lindsey then proceeds to list seven signs or events that have happened or will happen which culminate in this "catastrophic climax." He refers to 1) the restoration of Israel as a nation; 2) Israeli control of old Jerusalem; 3) the rebuilding of the temple; 4) a Russian attack upon Israel which will cause the last great war; 5) a coalition of an Arab confederacy with the Russians; 6) the addition of an Asian confederacy, allying itself with Russia and the Arab nations; and 7) a confederacy of the nations of Western Europe (the restoration of the Roman Empire) under a dictator (the Antichrist),<sup>11</sup> whom Lindsey calls "the future Fuehrer."<sup>12</sup>

After the presentation of these seven signs Lindsey states:

The climax of all I am talking about, when all of these movements of history will converge, will occur during a seven-year period immediately prior to the return of the Messiah, and Bible stu-

<sup>10</sup> Hal Lindsey, op. cit., pp 11 f.

<sup>11</sup> These seven signs will be discussed in detail in Chapter VIII.

<sup>12</sup> Hal Lindsey, op. cit., p 40.

dents call this period the great tribulation."<sup>13</sup>

### An Evaluation of the Millennial Concept of the Great Tribulation

The Scriptures do indeed speak of tribulation as being a part of our existence here on earth, a direct result of and attributable to the corruption of man's nature and the presence of sin in the world. Jesus himself addressed this fact when he said to his disciples: "In this world you will have trouble (θλίψιν). But take heart! I have overcome the world" (Jn 16:33). Paul and Barnabas made the same assertion to the faithful in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch with the words: "We must go through many hardships (θλίψεως) to enter the kingdom of God" (Ac 14:22). Tribulation (θλίψις) will especially mark the closing period of this world's history. In response to the disciples' question of the signs of his coming and the end of the world (Mt 24:3) Jesus said: "There will be great distress (θλίψις μεγάλη), unequalled from the beginning of the world until now - and never to be equaled again" (v. 21). The glorified saints are described as "they who have come out of great tribulation (τῆς θλίψεως τῆς μεγάλης)" (Re 7:14). Passages such as these latter two provide the terminology for the great tribulation.

The various things that will make up this tribulation according to Jesus in Matthew, chapter twenty-four, are the arising of false Messiahs (vv. 4-5), wars and rumors of wars (vv. 6-7a), famines and earthquakes (v. 7b), the hatred of the world and persecution (v. 9) a falling away from the faith and betrayal and hatred among men (v. 10), an

---

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp 42 ff.



onslaught of false prophets (v. 11), an increase of wickedness and lovelessness (v. 12) and the preaching of the gospel in all the world (v. 14a). "And then the end will come" (v. 14b), declares Jesus.

We have no quarrel with the millennialists that the end of this "dispensation" will be marked by great tribulation. What Jesus and the rest of Scripture foretell, however, is not a situation that is so drastically different from what the world - and especially the church - had experienced before, that we are able chronologically to mark its beginning and count its end in a period of seven (or three and a half) years.<sup>14</sup> But rather the Scriptures present a picture of the conditions under which the church must function in a sinful world that is degenerating. The great tribulation, then, is scripturally not a matter of change but rather a matter of increasing intensity to the point where, "if those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened" (Mt 24:22).

This conclusion of increasing intensification is borne out by the Scriptures. Change is recognizable and would become a means by which we could actually determine the time-table of God, particularly if we interpret "literally" the seven years of tribulation. Yet Jesus encouraged the disciples of his day: "You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him" (Lk 12:40). On another occasion he told them with even greater force: "No one knows about that day, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father" (Mt 24:36). In Matthew 24:23-26 Jesus warns against those who say they can predict when and where he will come. He further as-

---

<sup>14</sup>This period of seven years will be discussed in detail in Chapter VIII.

serts that those who attempt such predictions thus identify themselves as false prophets. The Savior told his disciples:

"At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect - if that were possible. See, I have told you ahead of time. So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the desert,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it" (Mt 24:23-26).

Yet John T. Sharrit, a millennialist, has written:

We will probably know the "year" and perhaps the "month", in which He will come - when that "year" and that "month" actually arrives. Jesus never said that we would never know the year or the month, but He said that we would not know the "day" or the "hour."<sup>15</sup>

If we are able to ascertain the year and perhaps even the month of the Lord's second coming, then there really is no point in the many admonitions of Scripture to be ready at any time for the ΤΡΑΠΟΥΣΙΑ. The changes that we are to observe in respect to the Lord's coming are simply the ones which would indicate progression, in this case the increasing severity of the tribulation, similar to observing the progressive signs that indicate the waning of winter and the advent of spring (Mt 24:32).

The imminence of Christ's second coming as presented in Scripture also would indicate intensification of the tribulation rather than change. The Scriptures again and again tell us that the Lord is at hand (Php 4:5), that he will come without delay in a little while (He 10:37), that his coming is near (Jas 5:8) and that he is coming soon (Re 3:11; 22:20). The Word of God encourages us to be always ready for that great and decisive moment at the end of history as we know it "when the Son of

<sup>15</sup> John T. Sharrit, Soon-Coming World-Shaking Events (Phoenix, Arizona: Christian Mission Society, 1978), p 179.

Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him" (Mt 25:31a).

We agree with the millennialists that Christ's second coming is imminent. But so it has been for almost two millennia! The New Testament makes it clear that already since the work of man's redemption was completed we have been living in the last days. We need to look forward to only one more great, climactic event in world history. That is the coming again of Christ to judge the quick and the dead and to make his church militant the full complement of the church triumphant.

We do not know how soon this will occur. Lindsey may be right with his statement that "we are approaching the most electrifying decade of human history."<sup>16</sup> But all that we really do know is that we are living in the last days and that the Lord's coming is indeed at hand.

---

<sup>16</sup>Hal Lindsey, op. cit., p 11.

## CHAPTER IV

### PREMILLENNIALISM/POSTMILLENNIALISM

#### Shades of Millennialism

The one thing on which millennialists agree, as stated before and inherent already in the name, is the millennial kingdom of Christ here on earth before the end of the world. Beyond this point there is a staggering degree of inconsistency and divergence among the millennialists. These range from the coarsest kind of chiliasm that sees even the satisfaction of carnal pleasures incorporated into it to a long period of time during which the church will enjoy growth, peace, prosperity and joy. Within the confines of these two extremes all millennialists fall. However, between these two extremes there is an almost continuous spectrum in millennial shades.

Dr. Francis Pieper speaks of three basic types of millennialism: chiliasmus crassissimus, chiliasmus crassus and chiliasmus subtilis.

In explaining these he states:

The grossest (crassissimus) chiliasm anticipates a full measure of not only spiritual, but also carnal delights and pleasures in a future millennial kingdom on earth. Gross (crassus) chiliasm teaches a future golden age and era of peace for the Church on earth, in which the Church, after a universal conversion of the Jews and the fall of Antichrist, will reign over the world for a thousand years and control also all secular affairs. This chiliasm teaches two future returns of Christ and a two-fold resurrection of the dead, with or without the "establishment of the kingdom of Christ on earth" in Jerusalem and the Holy Land. Subtle (subtilis) chiliasm omits a two-fold return of Christ and two resurrections of the dead and confines itself to a "hope for better times" ("Hoffnung besserer Zeiten," Spener) for the Church, to set in before the end of the world. But individual teachers of

chiliasm manifest various differences even in the fundamental ideas.<sup>1</sup>

### An Evaluation of the Shades of Millennialism

The inconsistencies that exist among millennialists should not disturb or confuse the Bible Christian. These differences are, in fact, the direct result of having no clear passages of Scripture on which to base their millennial hopes. Since millennialism is a doctrinal aberration that must be brought in from the outside rather than drawn out from the inside of Scripture, these shades of millennialism merely indicate the fact that the individual - in this case, the millennialist - has come up with an idea and then searched for some statement of the Scriptures that might somehow support his thinking. The result of this approach to the Scriptures invariably produces a preponderance of conflicting opinions, differing doctrinal positions and confusion.

What has happened with millennialists is that they have in fact imposed unwarranted time factors and elements on Scripture that cannot be harmonized with the truths of God's Word. Much of what is said in Old Testament prophecy regarding the New Testament church (e.g., Is 2:4; 11:6-9; 65:25) millennialists reserve for the millennial kingdom. And much of what is said in the New Testament regarding the end of the world and Christ's παρουσία, which the Scriptures tell us will happen in rapid sequence (e.g., Mt 24 and 25; 1 Th 4:13-18), the millennialists want to have span a thousand-year period. Setting a

---

<sup>1</sup>Francis Pieper, D. D., Christian Dogmatics (Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), Vol. III, p 520.

chronological sequence of events into this kind of a pattern becomes the focal point of a great deal of the literature produced by them.

On the basis of millennial views, John L. Benson divides Christianity into three camps. In a section which he subtitles with the misnomer, "Christians Agree to Differ," he makes the following statement which is germane to our present consideration:

As a thoughtful Christian you would not disagree with the necessity for and the actuality of a historical vindication of the Lord Jesus Christ, would you? Just what form that historical vindication will take has divided the Bible-believing world into rival camps. Perhaps the majority of Christians hold the view that the historical vindication will be brief. They teach that world conditions will continue to worsen until Christ intervenes by His promised appearing. At that moment, so they say, He will return to earth and bring a sudden finale to history. With that the eternal state will commence immediately. This is the view of the amillennialists, those who do not believe in a literal 1000-year reign of Christ on Planet Earth.

Another large company of Christians embrace the view that the historical vindication of Christ will require a thousand years. They maintain that world conditions will continue to deteriorate until Christ intervenes. At that time He will rectify political, social, economic, and ecclesiastical wrongs and preserve peace, justice, and prosperity for a thousand years. This is the view of the premillennialist.

A much smaller group of Christians see a third outcome of history. They believe the preaching of the gospel and the influence of Christianity will gradually bring about an improvement of world conditions; and when at last man has succeeded in conquering disease, solving racial tensions, banishing war, and providing equal opportunities for all, Christ will return to earth and usher in the eternal state. This is the view of the postmillennialist.<sup>2</sup>

Subsequently, Benson calls the view of the amillennialist "totally pessimistic" because "it offers no prospect of a Golden Age."<sup>3</sup> The postmillennialist's view is evaluated as "greatly optimistic" because "this

---

<sup>2</sup>John L. Benson, The Future Reign of Christ on Planet Earth (Denver, Colorado: B/P Publications, 1974), pp 7 f.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp 8 f.

view disappoints any realist."<sup>4</sup> The premillennialist's view he asserts to be a "pessimistic optimism" because "it takes seriously those passages of Scripture which explain that earth's darkest day lies ahead" and yet "it believes the coming of Christ will introduce a Golden Age of history - the dispensation of the fulness of time."<sup>5</sup>

To label the amillennialist's view as pessimistic is to disregard the fact that many amillennialists also believe in Christ's παρουσία, a fact which Benson himself admits (see page 39, above). One can hardly accuse a man like St. Paul of being a pessimist when he says: "I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better" (Php 1:23). How can he legitimately be charged with holding "no prospect of a Golden Age"? Nor is the church pessimistic when she prays: "Your kingdom come" (Mt 6:10a) in its eternal import. Christ indeed offers a golden age to those on his right hand when he will say in the judgment: "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world" (Mt 25:34). One can hardly call the serenity and peace, the joy and perfection, the beauty and splendor which St. John portrays as he describes the new heaven and the new earth in Revelation, chapter twenty-one, as anything but a golden age!

When Benson calls the postmillennialist's view "greatly optimistic" and describes it as a view that "disappoints any realist," he is absolutely correct. Not just the realist, but the Bible Christian, who is concerned about what the Scriptures have to say to man, finds this view disappointing because it can stand neither the test of the

---

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p 9.      <sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp 10 f.

progression of the history of man nor the scriptural description of the last days before the Lord's return. Man, because of sin, will continue to live in a world ruined by sin until the day Christ comes to take us to eternal glory (Ro 8:18-25). Scripture paints a picture so dark and drab of the days immediately preceding Christ's coming that unless the Lord himself brings them to an abrupt halt for the sake of his chosen children no man would be saved (Mt 24:22; Mk 13:20).

The Scriptures support Benson's view that "earth's darkest day lies ahead." It does not, however, support his view when he asserts that Christ's coming "will introduce a Golden Age in history - the dispensation of the fulness of time." Peter writes: "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare" or "burned up" (2 Pe 3:10). When Christ returns he will bring down the curtain on the last scene of the final act of human history as we know it. What follows will be eternity. This cannot appropriately be placed into the framework of time as we presently know it. The kind of pessimistic optimism with which Benson describes the premillennial view is a delusion and provides a false hope which has no scriptural foundation.

Walter Albrecht, the sainted professor of dogmatics at Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield, Illinois, states: "To disprove millennialism nothing more is necessary than to pit the premillennialists and the postmillennialists against each other."<sup>6</sup> Profes-

---

<sup>6</sup>W(alter) Albrecht, Eschatology (Springfield, Illinois: Concordia Theological Seminary, uncopyrighted notes), p 30.



sor Albrecht then continues:

Dr. Duffield of Princeton, a proponent of premillennialism, disproves postmillennialism in this manner: "1) Were the doctrine true, it would undoubtedly be prominent in the New Testament, and especially in the Apostolic Epistles. The fact is, it is not only not prominent, but, so far as we are informed, the advocates of the doctrine do not pretend to find in the epistles the slightest allusion to it. 2) The uniform and abundant teaching of the New Testament as to the condition of the Church and of the world during the present dispensation - that is, until the advent - forbids the expectation of such a millennium. 3) The advent itself, not the millennium, is prominently presented in the New Testament as 'the blessed hope' of the Church, and is uniformly referred to as an event near at hand, ever imminent, to be 'looked for' with longing expectation. 4) The Savior's repeated command to 'watch' for His coming, because we 'know not the hour', is inconsistent with the idea of a millennium intervening. 5) The New Testament teaches repeatedly and unequivocally that the advent and the manifestation of the Messianic kingdom are to be synchronous events."<sup>7</sup>

To disprove premillennialism Professor Albrecht quotes Dr.

Charles Hodge, who accepted postmillennialism, as follows:

"1) It is a Jewish doctrine. The Jews expected that when the Messiah came He would establish a glorious earthly kingdom at Jerusalem; that those who had died in the faith should be raised from the dead to share in the blessings of the Messiah's reign; that all nations and peoples on the face of the whole earth should be subject to them; and that any nation that did not serve them should be destroyed. . . . 2) This theory teaches that believers only are to rise from the dead when Christ comes. . . . 3) This theory teaches that the final judgment will not occur until after the millennium. . . . 4) According to this theory, instead of heaven awaiting the risen saints, they are to be introduced into a mere worldly kingdom. . . . 5) It is inconsistent . . . that at the resurrection they are to be brought down to a lower state of existence, degraded from heaven to earth. . . . 6) It is a worldly kingdom. Its blessedness is to consist largely in worldly prosperity. . . . Births and deaths are to go on. . . . This theory teaches that after the second advent the distinction between the Jews and Gentiles is to continue and to be made greater than ever before. The temple at Jerusalem is to be rebuilt; the sacrifices restored; and all the details of the Mosaic ritual, as described in Ezekiel, again introduced. . . . This theory teaches the 'earth's eternal perpetuity.'" For the last argument he quotes Joseph A. Seiss, the ULC theologian, as writing: "The earth shall not pass away." Hodge goes on: "7) This theory dis-

---

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p 30.

parages the Gospel. . . . 'The universal prevalence of religion . . . is to be effected . . . by a stupendous display of divine wrath upon all the apostate and ungodly.' 'The Gospel has never yet truly converted one nation, one city, one town, nor even a single village.' . . . The Scriptures are to be 'superceded' in the Millennium. . . . Other revelations are to be made for the salvation of men. 8) Another objection to the premillenarian theory is the want of consistency in its advocates and the conflicting conclusions to which they come. They profess to adopt the principle of literal interpretation. Yet they are forced to abandon their literalism when they come to the interpretation of the prophecies which predict that all nations are to go up to Jerusalem every month, and even on every Sabbath. And more than this, they go to the extremes of figurative or spiritual interpretation in explaining the prophecies which refer to the end of the world. The apostle Peter says in express terms: 'The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.' This they deny. They say . . . that the final conflagration will produce less change or injury than the deluge did (Seiss). . . . Dr. Cunning and Dr. Seiss say they wish no better heaven than this earth free from the curse and from sin."<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp 30 f.