

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE GREAT TRIBULATION AND THE WRATH OF GOD

Speaking from the millennialists' point of view, we stand in this chapter at the very threshold of the climax of millennial theology, the thousand-year reign of Christ in an earthly kingdom, for the great tribulation and the wrath of God usher in that kingdom. Lest a misleading impression be given, however, it must be pointed out once again that we are speaking of pre-millennial theology, since the post-millennialist sees world conditions improving in the closing days of this world's history and developing into a millennial period of peace and prosperity for the church, at the end of which Christ will return.

A great deal of what has already been presented has a direct bearing on our consideration of this period of time in the millennial chronology. Most specifically, the great tribulation itself was presented in rather brief form and primarily in its relationship to dispensationalism already in chapter III. In addition, chapter VI, dealing with antisemitic forces and the Antichrist, looked at the situation that would prevail, as millennialists see it, during the great tribulation. Chapter VII stressed the divergence of opinion among millennialists as to when the rapture would take place - before, during or after the great tribulation. Hopefully with no disconcerting repetition, this present chapter will draw together a more complete picture of the millennialists' views on the various facets of the great tribulation and the wrath of God and will evaluate on the basis of Scripture the millennial found-

ation on which they base their position.

### The Seventieth Week of Daniel

Daniel 9:24-27 is the primary reference of the millennialist for assigning a time period of exactly seven years to the great tribulation and the wrath of God. There Daniel writes:

"Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy.

"Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens.' It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven,' but in the middle of that 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And one who causes desolation will place abominations on a wing of the temple until the end that is decreed is poured out on him" (Dn 9:24-27).

The last "seven," or "week," of Daniel's prophecy millennialists in general assume to be a seven-year period by applying the day-year theory and identify the great tribulation and the wrath of God with it. The day-year theory, held by most pre-millennialists, simply asserts that in prophetic utterances days are to be construed as years - this, incidentally, in spite of the fact that they insist that theirs is a literal interpretation of Scripture, while that of the amillennialists is figurative or mystical!

The manner in which this day-year theory is applied to Daniel chapter nine and elsewhere is shown in the following quotation from Hal Lindsey:

One of the most important reasons for an allotment of seven years for God's final dealing with mankind has to do with an incredible prophecy of Daniel made in the sixth century B.C. (Daniel 9:24-27).

In this amazing prediction, Daniel set forth a divinely ordained time period of "seventy weeks" of years (490 years) in which God would primarily reach out to the unbelieving world through His chosen people, the Jews. The time period was like a great, divine "time-clock" with 490 years of time marked off on it.

A specific event was to mark the beginning of this 490 years of Jewish evangelistic outreach. When the Persian king, Artaxerxes Longimanus, gave the Jews permission to leave their Babylonian captivity and restore and rebuild the city of Jerusalem, God's finger pushed down on the stop watch and the 490-year allotted countdown began clicking off. That was April, 445 B.C.

Daniel predicted that after sixty-nine weeks of years (483 years) had clicked off on this allotment of time, the Messiah of Israel would be revealed to the Jews and then killed, and the city of Jerusalem and their Temple would be destroyed.

We know the exact time of the fulfillment of this prophecy, because 483 years had transpired on the very day that Jesus presented Himself to the nation of Israel as their Messiah and was rejected by them and put to death. Within forty years of this event, Titus and the Roman legions destroyed the city of Jerusalem and tore down their beautiful Temple.

With these events, God's finger once again pushed in on the divine time-clock and the allotted time of Israel's special outreach to the unbelieving world was stopped, seven years short of the promised 490 years.<sup>1</sup>

Elsewhere Lindsey has this to say about the final week, or seven, on God's time-clock according to Daniel, chapter nine:

Some 2500 years ago the prophet Daniel said that a prince would come to power from the people who would destroy the city of Jerusalem and the second Temple (Daniel 9:27). The Romans under Titus did the destroying, so the coming prince would have to be someone out of the Roman culture. This Roman prince, as we described in "The Future Fuehrer,"<sup>2</sup> will come to power just before the return of Christ. . . .

<sup>1</sup>Hal Lindsey, There's a New World Coming (Santa Ana, California: Vision House Publishers, 1973) pp 100 f.

<sup>2</sup>Lindsey identifies "The Future Fuehrer" with the Antichrist; see chapter VI.

According to Daniel's prophetic chronology, the minute the Israeli leader and the Roman leader sign this pact, God starts His great timepiece which has seven allotted years left on it. This event marks the beginning of the period of Biblical history previously noted as the Tribulation.

Rather ingeniously Lindsey has not only become guilty of date-setting by having God manipulate "the divine time-clock," but has also presented in a matter-of-fact way a portion of Scripture that is by no means as self-evident as Lindsey would have it. The Pulpit Commentary, for example, points out the fact that there are a number of problems with this passage.<sup>4</sup> It is a passage which has a considerable number of variant readings which make the understanding of the passage more difficult. Further, exegetes are united on neither the terminus a quo nor the terminus ad quem for the "seventy sevens." They are even divided on whether the decree which actually heralds the beginning of the seventy sevens should be understood as a human or a divine decree.

Thus, to arrive at a conclusion similar to Lindsey's, several assumptions have to be made. First of all, there is the assumption that the numbers must be taken as so many years. In addition, according to Lindsey's interpretation one must assume the interruption of the time-clock of God between the sixty-ninth and seventieth seven, which is nowhere stated in or supported by the text.

In order to present an unbiased evaluation of Lindsey's understanding of this passage, it should be pointed out that Lindsey and the millennialists do not stand alone in this day-year approach to the inter-

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<sup>3</sup> Hal Lindsey, The Late Great Planet Earth (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), pp 151 f.

<sup>4</sup> The Pulpit Commentary, H. D. M. Spence, M. A., D. D. and Joseph S. Exell, M. A., editors (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950), Vol. 13, pp 268 ff.

pretation of Daniel 9:24-27. Dr. J. T. Mueller, in an article entitled "Notes on the Seventy Weeks in Daniel's Prophecy 9:24-27" states in fact that the explanation of the seventy weeks (or, seventy sevens) as 490 years "is the most ancient and also the most popular."<sup>5</sup> According to this view, the first seven sevens, or forty-nine years, cover the period of the rebuilding of the city and its walls under Nehemiah. The second period, which comprises sixty-two sevens, or 439 years, extends from the rebuilding of Jerusalem to the time of Christ, a total of 483 years. Subsequently, referring to verse twenty-seven, Dr. Mueller continues:

The difficulty in this verse lies in the "one week" which is granted for the confirming of the Messiah's covenant. There are many who believe that all v. 27 means to say is that this preaching of grace will take place in the last of the "Seventy Weeks" or in the seventieth week. This explanation is justified in view of the fact that Christ is said to have been raised after three days, though actually He was dead only a part of that time, since He died on Friday evening and was raised early the next Sunday morning. Biblical reckoning, just as Oriental reckoning in general, is not always as accurate as is our modern Western timekeeping.

Luther seems to regard this last week, or seven years, literally. He says that the first seven years after Christ's ascension were the true "Easter week" during which the Gospel was preached at Jerusalem and many mighty miracles were performed to confirm it. The words of v. 27 that the sacrifice will cease in the midst of the week, he refers to the abrogation of the ceremonial laws in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 15:6 ff.). The end of the last week marks the hardening of the unbelieving Jews at Jerusalem so that the Apostles now turned to the Gentiles (cf. Acts 13:46). While the dates of many events even in the New Testament are not exactly settled, we know that the persecution of the Christian Church at Jerusalem began very early and Luther may be right in saying that the hardening of the Jews set in at the end of the seventieth week, or seven years after the Savior's ascension. With the rejection of Christ as the Messiah the millennialistic movement among the Jews grew stronger and stronger, and this finally brought about Rome's destruction of Jerusalem.

The explanation just described, while it presents a number of

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<sup>5</sup> John Theodore Mueller, "Notes on the Seventy Weeks in Daniel's Prophecy 9:24-27", Concordia Theological Monthly, Vol. XVII (May, 1946), p 369.

difficulties, is in keeping with Matt. 24:15-16, and was so understood by the Christians at Jerusalem, who fled when they saw the eagles of the Roman standards, regarded as objects of idolatrous worship, encamped about Jerusalem. But let no one say that this or that explanation of the important prophecy, made about five hundred years before the destruction of Jerusalem, is the only correct one. Personally the writer prefers the second. Nevertheless let us bear in mind that the destruction of Jerusalem will forever stand as the symbol of the world's destruction and that the many antichrists in Jerusalem foreshadowed the coming of the great Antichrist, of whom St. Paul speaks in 2 Thess. 2. Only when we speak of that Antichrist, let us use the sedes doctrinae which teach the doctrine clearly and unmistakably.<sup>6</sup>

Luther, who, as Dr. Mueller indicates, accepted this understanding of the seventy sevens, also pointed out that the arrival at the figure of the 483 years can be shown also in the following way: from the second year of Darius to the time of Alexander the Great was 145 years (Metasthanes); from Alexander the Great to the birth of Christ, 305 years (as historians witness); from the birth of Christ to his baptism, thirty years; and from his baptism to his death, three years. Luther closes this section with the comment that it is truly a marvel that even infidel historians should so completely agree with Daniel.<sup>7</sup>

Dr. J. T. Mueller, although he prefers the above interpretation, also points out that "there is not a single interpretation of this famous passage which solves every problem that arises."<sup>8</sup> He goes on to state that "there are fundamentally two explanations of Dan. 9:24-27 which satisfy not only the analogy of faith, but also the majority of readers."<sup>9</sup> In addition to the above he indicates that there are those

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp 370 f.

<sup>7</sup>Dr. Martin Luther, Saemtliche Schriften, Vol. VI, Auslegung des Alten Testaments (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1897), col. 909, para. 37.

<sup>8</sup>John Theodore Mueller, op. cit., p 368. <sup>9</sup>Ibid., p 368.

who explain the seventy sevens of verse twenty-four symbolically and view them as covering the period from the time of Daniel's prophecy until the day of judgment.<sup>10</sup>

In reading the text one has to be impressed by the frequency with which the symbolic number seven recurs in the passage. The number seven is a number used in Scripture to denote completeness. Seventy "sevens" would then be an adequate - even an impressive - term to denote the totality of the remainder of world history, without any need for assuming a divine manipulation of God's time-clock.

P. E. Kretzmann, in his Popular Commentary,<sup>11</sup> identifies the seven "sevens" as the period extending from the time of Daniel until the coming of Christ, the seven sevens denoting the completeness of a part of the whole (the later history of the Old Testament in contrast to the period from Daniel to the end of present human history). The sixty-two sevens he places into the New Testament period, identifying this as the period during which the New Testament church is constructed as a "holy temple in the Lord."<sup>12</sup> At the end of the sixty-two sevens he further sees the great denial of Christ, which is one of the signs of the imminence of his final coming in judgment. The final "seven," which we might note in passing is significantly smaller than either the period of the seven "sevens" or the sixty-two "sevens," Kretzmann equates with the Antichrist and the last days, ending in the vindication

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p 368 f.

<sup>11</sup>Paul E. Kretzmann, Ph. D., D. D., Popular Commentary of the Bible (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1922), New Testament, Vol. II, pp 626 f.

<sup>12</sup>See Ephesians 2:20-22.

of the Lord and his church by his coming and the final judgment. Summarily, Kretzmann writes:

The prophecy thus sets forth the vicissitudes of the Church of God, which would be relieved by the coming of the promised Messiah. But even after His coming the congregation of saints would be in fact a Church Militant, the great Roman Antichrist making the first attack upon the Lord's forces and being supported in the last days of the world by other antichristian elements following his leadership, until the Lord will definitely and finally bring destruction upon him and them at the time of the Great Judgment.<sup>13</sup>

Dr. J. T. Mueller, in his "Notes on the Seventy Weeks in Daniel's Prophecy 9:24-27," wisely offers a two-fold caution. He observes:

The one is that we do not permit ourselves to be drawn away from the center to the periphery, in other words, from the discussion of important doctrines to such as are of minor significance, especially not to prophecies which at best can be explained only in a general way. . . . The second caution is that we must not make any passage a proof-text for some doctrine which manifestly is not a sedes doctrinae.<sup>14</sup>

It seems rather obvious that Lindsey has taken undue liberties with this text by disrupting the sequence of the seventy sevens when he concludes that after the events of the 483 years, "God's finger . . . pushed in on the divine time-clock . . ., seven years short of the promised 490 years"<sup>15</sup> and that "the minute the Israeli leader and the Roman leader," the Antichrist, sign their pact, "God starts His great timepiece which has seven allotted years left on it."<sup>16</sup>

Properly, Dr. J. T. Mueller says:

Theologians may err by not fully evaluating passages which indeed

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<sup>13</sup>Paul E. Kretzmann, op. cit., p 627.

<sup>14</sup>John Theodore Mueller, op. cit., p 368.

<sup>15</sup>Hal Lindsey, There's A New World Coming, op. cit., p 101.

<sup>16</sup>Hal Lindsey, The Late Great Planet Earth, op. cit., p 152.



are prooftexts, but there is danger, too, that they may be led to twist certain passages to prove things which actually they neither teach nor prove. This then becomes a case of ἀπέρο ὑποφῆς, that is, of going beyond Scripture.<sup>17</sup>

It is into this latter category into which fall Lindsey and those who see in the seventieth "seven" scriptural proof for the seven-year period of tribulation.

#### Revelation Six to Nineteen and the Great Tribulation

Chapters six through nineteen of the Book of Revelation and the great tribulation are bound together by Lindsey. In doing so he is in fact saying that almost two-thirds of the Book of Revelation, fourteen of twenty-two chapters, deal with a seven-year period of man's history, known by millennialists as the great tribulation. Lindsey has this to say:

In Chapters 6 to 19 of the Book of Revelation we're given an unfolding chronological picture of a future seven-year period of the greatest tribulation this earth will ever experience. This period is God's final countdown for mankind, culminating in the personal, visible return of Jesus Christ to this earth to reclaim it as His own possession.

The "Tribulation," as this period is called, is well named, for there will be sorrow and suffering on this earth such as man has never known before and will never know again. These are the days Jesus spoke of when He said that if He didn't return to end the Tribulation there wouldn't be anyone left alive.<sup>18</sup>

Subsequently, Lindsey adds his own further explanation. One must assume that he is speaking of Revelation chapter six, when he continues somewhat later:

In this chapter of the Revelation, John begins to unfold the sobering judgments of God that will begin the seven-year countdown until Jesus returns to the earth. The Book of Revelation presents these

<sup>17</sup>John Theodore Mueller, op. cit., p 368.

<sup>18</sup>Hal Lindsey, There's A New World Coming, op. cit., p 99.

Tribulation judgments in three distinct series. They're presented in chronological order in Chapters 6 through 19 of the Revelation and each contains an unleashing of seven specific horrors, each getting progressively worse.

The first of these judgments is depicted here in Chapter 6 as the breaking and unrolling of the seven-sealed scroll of God. Out of it come the unforgettable Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse with their reign of terror.

The second series of God's outpoured wrath is signaled by the successive sounding of seven trumpets. The earth itself is devastated by these judgments.

The third series of God's punishments is unleashed by the pouring out of seven bowls full of the wrath of God. These are the most severe of all.<sup>19</sup>

Lindsey's interpretation of chapters six to nineteen of Revelation is based on several faulty premises. Two of them are quite obvious. The one is that the Book of Revelation to Lindsey does not portray a panoramic view of New Testament history. The other is Lindsey's scripturally unfounded position that God's New Testament Israel is to be identified with the Old Testament nation of Israel.

As we consider more fully the first of these faulty premises, one needs but take a look at what is left in the Book of Revelation if we restrict chapters six to nineteen to a seven-year period of the great tribulation. Following the introduction of chapter one John records for us the letters to the seven congregations of Asia Minor in the second and third chapters. The fourth chapter presents what might be called a heavenly interlude between the seven letters and the presentation of the seven seals. Chapter five already presents the scroll sealed with seven seals and the Lamb who alone was worthy to open them. Following the fourteen chapters which Lindsey assigns to a description

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp 101 f.

of the great tribulation (chapters six to nineteen) is the thousand-year reign of Christ of the millennialists in the twentieth chapter, which follows the tribulation and the wrath of God. The closing chapters, twenty-one and twenty-two, describe heaven, the period following the millennium, and then these chapters lay before God's people the closing admonitions and encouragements in view of Christ's imminent coming. It becomes rather obvious that with this kind of interpretation of the Book of Revelation the Scriptures must be understood to be silent on the affairs even of God's people for some nineteen hundred years of New Testament history.

Turning to the second obvious fallacy which underlies Lindsey's interpretation of Revelation, it must be noted that there is an apparent failure to recognize the fact that the Old Testament church has flowed into and has become the New Testament church, and this in spite of such passages as 1 Peter 2:9: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God." And lest one still insists that Peter was in fact addressing himself to Jews who rightly were by birth God's people, we note that he addresses these words to those who were called "out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pe 2:9). He, then, even reminds these Gentile Christians that "once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God" (1 Pe 2:10). Lindsey goes so far with this almost obsessive insistence on the primary role of the Jews as a nation in the final economy of God that he even identifies the 144,000 of Revelation seven as the exact number of Jewish converts during the tribulation period, who thus become the tribulation saints.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>This will be discussed in detail in chapter X.

The 144,000 of Revelation fourteen is a symbolic number expressive of the sum total of the saints of God in heavenly glory.

The false premises on which Lindsey bases his interpretation of Revelation distort the very purpose and thrust of the book. The Book of Revelation is intended to provide comfort for the Christian in the midst of the trials and tribulations of life. From the beginning of the book to its end we see the exalted Christ as he triumphantly rules and protects his church to his praise in the many and severe trials she is called upon to bear. Each of the seven sections of the book either begins or ends with a glimpse into heaven and a view of the triumphant Christ. Several of the sections have such a heavenly interlude at both the beginning and the end.

Thus the Book of Revelation was intended to serve every Christian of every age in the New Testament period. It indeed contains strong admonitions against unbelief and rejection of Christ, but it also brings to the Christian who is enduring difficulties and hardships at the hands of the devil, the world and perhaps even his own sinful flesh a message of encouragement, comfort and assurance. No matter how hopeless our circumstances may seem to be, no matter how bad the world situation may appear to be on the surface, the Christian is constantly reminded in the Book of Revelation that thus, on the one hand, it will be in a perverse and dying world. On the other hand, the book reminds us that the same Christ, who has all power in heaven and on earth (Mt 28:18), still rules - yes, even over the kingdoms of this world - as he with his divine wisdom and his divine love protects and leads his church safely into the heavenly kingdom.

## The "Latter Days"

A proper understanding of the term "latter days" or "last days" is necessary at this point if one is to gain a fuller insight into the way in which most millennialists interpret the prophecies of Scripture.

A Theological Word Book of the Bible says:

The word 'last' can be used in both testaments in a non-theological meaning (e.g. last words, II Sam. 23.1; last farthing, Matt. 25.8), but in conjunction with the word 'day' or 'time(s)' it develops an increasingly rich theological significance. In the OT it begins (as 'latter' or 'last' days) by indicating the farthest remove in time conceivable to a certain individual (e.g. Abraham, Gen. 49.1), and while this usage persists a long time, it becomes clear when the phrase is used in a Messianic prophecy that a new eschatological meaning has been attained (e.g. Isa. 2.2=Micah 4.1). There is another theological usage in the phrase 'first and last', which is used secularly by the Chronicler to express all the acts of a king (e.g. II Chron. 9.29), but theologically by a Deutero-Isaiah to indicate the sole sovereignty of God (Isa. 44.6). In the NT these uses are reflected, though, as our investigation leads us to expect, the last days are there identified both with the time contemporary with the events reported (e.g. Acts 2.17; cf. also Jesus' identification of the resurrection of the last day with his own presence in history in John 11.24,25), and with a time of preparation for the final consummation (II Tim. 3.1, etc.) as well as with the final manifestation of Christ (John 6.40; I Pet. 1.5). Another use of the word is in the distinction between the first and the last Adam (I Cor. 15.45), by which the parallels and the differences between Adam and Christ are drawn.<sup>21</sup>

The above quotation then continues in the following summary:

Clearly this variety of NT usage shows that the 'last' time of God's decisive action began in Jesus Christ (the kairos whose duration is not yet exhausted) and will end in its own 'last times' or 'days' which will herald the approach of the 'last day' in which Christ shall be finally revealed.<sup>22</sup>

By the nature of their theological position and the passages which they must use to support their views the millennialist must of

<sup>21</sup>A Theological Word Book of the Bible, edited by Alan Richardson, D. D. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955), pp 264 f.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p 265.

necessity reject this interpretation of the expression "latter days" or "last times." The following quotation from Hal Lindsey will illustrate this:

Dr. Kac, a Jewish medical doctor and noted Bible scholar, sums it up this way: "The phrase 'latter days' always refers in the Old Testament to the time of Israel's final and complete national restoration and spiritual redemption."<sup>23</sup>

That Lindsey himself has accepted the position of Dr. Kac is evident when he states in connection with Ezekiel thirty-eight:

Several times in the prophecy it is ascribed to "the latter years" (Ezekiel 38:8) and "the latter days," which have been previously noted (Ezekiel 38:16). These are definite terms which denote the time just preceding and including the events which will be climaxed by the second advent of Jesus Christ, who will come this time as the "reigning Messiah" to set up God's promised Kingdom.<sup>24</sup>

This same faulty basis undergirds much of millennial theology and results in the erroneous position that what the Scriptures have to say about the entire New Testament period must be compressed into a period of time of short duration at the very close of human history and of the Christian era. And this is done even in spite of such clear indications as that of Peter, when on the day of Pentecost he quoted a prophecy of Joel (2:28-32) that was to be fulfilled "in the last days" (Ac 2:17) and explains that what those who had seen and heard the events of that day were experiencing was in fact the fulfilment of that very prophecy of Joel (Ac 2:16).

#### The Antisemitic Forces and the Tribulation

With this proper view of "the latter days" one can more easily

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<sup>23</sup> Hal Lindsey, The Late Great Planet Earth, op. cit., p 51.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p 60.

understand the reason why the millennialists in our day try to find historical applications for those passages of Scripture which symbolically portray the enemies of the church throughout the New Testament period. To them the enemies referred to in these passages are only those who will oppress God's people (and remember that to them this refers to the nation of Israel) during the period of the great tribulation.

From a millennial point of view the enemies thus become the antisemitic forces, mentioned earlier in chapter VI,<sup>25</sup> which would supposedly plague Israel as a nation during the period of the tribulation. Hal Lindsey, as he speaks of these antisemitic forces, says:

"At the time of the end the king of the south shall attack him (Israeli leader)" (Daniel 11:40a).

We have identified the characters of this passage. The Arab-African confederacy headed by Egypt (King of the South) launches an invasion of Israel. This fatal mistake spells their doom and begins the Armageddon campaign. ". . . but the king of the north shall rush upon him (the Israeli leader) like a whirlwind, with chariots (mechanized army) and horsemen (cavalry), and with many ships" (Daniel 11:40b). . . .

Russia and her allies use this occasion to launch an invasion of the Middle East, which Russia has longed to do since the Napoleonic wars. Ezekiel 38 describes the development of this great Russian force, and its plan to attack Israel. . . .

The Russians will make a great tactical blunder by invading Israel. They will construe the defenseless posture of Israel, who will be trusting in the Antichrist's<sup>26</sup> protection, as an opportunity to finally conquer the great land bridge of the Middle East.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>For a detailed presentation of the various "tribulation confederacies" see pp 69 f.

<sup>26</sup>The reign of Antichrist is coincidental with the beginning and progress of the great tribulation according to many millennialists. See pp 70 f; also the quotation from Lindsey on p 94.

<sup>27</sup>Hal Lindsey, The Late Great Planet Earth, op. cit., pp 153 f.

When the Russians invade the Middle East with amphibious and mechanized land forces, they will make a "blitzkrieg" type of offensive through the area. . . .

The might of the Red Army is predicted. It will sweep over the Arab countries as well as Israel in a rapid assault over to Egypt to secure the entire land bridge. It is at this point that Russia double-crosses the United Arab Republic leader, Egypt. . . .

The Russian force will retrace its steps from Egypt to consolidate for a counter-attack in Israel. The Russians will be alarmed at the news of the Roman Dictator mobilizing forces around the world to put down this breach of peace. Apparently it will surprise the Russian leader who underestimated the revived Roman Empire's will to fight.

It is conjecture on this writer's part, but it appears that the Oriental powers, headed by Red China, will be permitted to mobilize its vast army by the Roman Dictator, thinking that they would be loyal to him against Russia. However, the Orientals will eventually double-cross him, and move a 200 million man army against the Antichrist.<sup>28</sup>

The Russian force will establish command headquarters on Mount Moriah or the Temple area in Jerusalem. . . .

As the Russian commander confidently prepares to meet the forces of the revived Roman Empire in Palestine, he seeks to utterly destroy the Jewish people. . . . Perhaps no other great army of history has ever been so totally destroyed as this one will be.<sup>29</sup>

Lindsey gathers most of his tribulation theology - with considerable embellishment, we might add - from Ezekiel 38 and 39, Daniel 11:40-45 and Joel 2:20. Emphasis has already been laid on the fact that millennialists fail to recognize the New Testament Israel to be identical with the New Testament church.<sup>30</sup> It is this basic misinterpretation which, in turn, causes the misinterpretation of the passages they use to support the various details of their position.

It does not take a prophet to see in our world situation at the present time the possibility of the events which Lindsey portrays actu-

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., pp 157 f.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p 160.

<sup>30</sup>See chapter VI, pp 75 ff.



ally happening, if some of Lindsey's details are overlooked for the moment. One need but keep abreast of the development of the world situation to know that the Middle East is indeed a hot-bed which could explode at a moment's notice, possibly plunging the world into an unprecedented confrontation of military forces.

The question before us, however, is not whether these things can or will happen, but whether these things are actually prophetically told us in the Scriptures. Are these events occurring in order that Scripture might be fulfilled, or are the millennialists, such as Lindsey, taking today's situation and imposing it upon the Scriptures?

To answer this question we must look at the details in Lindsey's portrayal of the tribulation period. These details become the essential parts of his position, because these are the very things which he insists are portrayed in the prophecies of Scripture. When this is done, however, we discover that he bases his position on statements which are not in harmony with the Word of God. That Lindsey's approach involves such an imposition of history on the Scriptures becomes clearly evident when, after an analysis of what is happening in the world today, he himself admits:

All this caused me to become a "prophecy freak," trying to find out whether the Bible has anything to say about this dilemma. . . . Besides, if we are headed toward an obvious climax in history, there must be something in the Bible about it.<sup>31</sup>

When the passages which Lindsey uses to establish the prophetic character of today's historical events are examined in the light of the whole of Scripture, one sees quite a different thrust presented

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<sup>31</sup> Hal Lindsey, The World's Final Hour (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), pp 14 f.

than that which Lindsey holds to be true. Bearing in mind that Old Testament Israel as the people of God becomes the New Testament church and that the "latter times" refer to God's final dispensation in human history, namely, the whole New Testament period, one gains an entirely different perspective than that of Lindsey - and, it might be added, one that is in full agreement with the whole tenor of Scripture.

Throughout her history the land of Israel has been a political football. Because of her strategic position - the "land bridge," as Lindsey calls it, between north and south - she has been involved in an ongoing sequence of one war after another. Her potential enemies have always lived in the north, south and east; the Mediterranean Sea provided somewhat of a natural barrier on the west. How natural, in Old Testament prophecy especially, to use these same terms and circumstances, with which God's people in the Old Testament were so familiar, as the framework for portraying the circumstances which God's people would experience in the New Testament era! Ezekiel, for example, is saying that God's people in the latter times will still be hemmed in by the enemy, even that the hostility of these forces would become more intense. But there is also the word of comfort which God gives to his people in this, that his judgment will ultimately befall all of the antichristian forces that would "take their stand and . . . gather against the Lord and against his Anointed One" (Ps 2:2).

What is happening in the world today is indeed foretold in the pages of holy Scripture, but 1) in a far more general way than Lindsey would have us believe, 2) with the scriptural focus on the church rather than the nation of Israel, and 3) as a part of the tribulation which the saints of God must endure in this life - possibly even of the

last great tribulation, which intensifies as the Lord's coming draws closer - but not as a prelude to a scripturally determined seven-year period of tribulation.

### Three and One-Half/Three and One-Half

A word needs to be said yet regarding the mid-point of the seven-year tribulation period. For some millennialists this merely marks the beginning of that section of the tribulation period which they refer to as the wrath of God. Most millennialists of our day associate the "abomination of desolation" of Daniel 9:27 with this event. In addition, the mid-tribulationists place the rapture of the church at this point in their millennial framework.

Sharrit has this to say on the tribulation mid-point:

We know, from the Prophet Daniel, that the Anti-Christ shall "confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate" (Daniel 9:27). So, the Anti-Christ will make a covenant with the Jews for seven years, and in the midst of the seven years (3½ years) he shall break it. This will probably be also when he will sit "in the temple of God showing himself that he is God," which the Jews will not accept.

This, now as we have seen, must happen before the rapture of the Church. It appears as if when this does happen, and this scripture is fulfilled, then the Lord Himself will come "in clouds of Heaven, with power and great glory," to rapture away His Church. Then, the "great tribulation" period of about 3½ years will be over. Remember, the Anti-Christ will only reign for 3½ years; then will come the awful "Wrath of God" upon the Anti-Christ, sinners and unbelievers for about 3½ years. Then, the Lord will come again on His white horse, with the armies of Heaven also on white horses, for the great Battle of Armageddon.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup>John T. Sharrit, Soon-Coming World-Shaking Events (Phoenix, Arizona: Christian Missionary Society, 1978), p 204.

The subject of the Antichrist was presented earlier in chapter VI.<sup>33</sup> The difficulty facing most millennialists, as pointed out in the earlier references, is that they fail to recognize the scriptural Antichrist as being the papal system with an unbroken sequence of individuals; rather, they insist that he is one specific person. This fact colors their theology and forces postponement of the manifestation of the Antichrist until the tribulation period. Thus from the millennial point of view placing the revelation of him who "opposes and exalts himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped, and even sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God" (2 Th 2:4) at the mid-point of the tribulation becomes a convenient and, for them, a logical explanation of what will happen after three and one-half years.

In view of the nature of the prophecies of Scripture, however, one ought to expect symbolic and figurative language. Seven, denoting completeness, is expressive of the totality of a unit. Three and one-half, denoting incompleteness, must be understood simply to indicate something which occurs during the course of the unit, without necessarily pin-pointing the exact mid-point.

Seven days or one week indicates that it is a complete period, but of short duration. From the standpoint of God, with whose revelation we are dealing and with whom "a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day" (2 Pe 3:8), the tribulation of the saints through the New Testament period is short. Even from the standpoint of the individual Christian the time for tribulation for him dur-

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<sup>33</sup>See pp 73-80.

ing his lifetime here on earth is in fact brief, compared to the endless ages of eternity in glory with God and his Christ. This understanding is confirmed by Jesus himself when he told his disciples: "In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me" (Jn 16:16). It is the same Jesus, the Lord of the Church, who comfortingly assures his people at the close of the Book of Revelation: "Yes, I am coming soon" (Re 22:20)!

### The Wrath of God and the Battle of Armageddon

Sharrit has this to say on the wrath of God and the battle of Armageddon:

The "Wrath of God" does not begin until after the opening of the 6th Seal! The words "Wrath of God" are not mentioned in the Book of Revelation until at the opening of the 6th Seal. However, it is mentioned many times after that, up to the Battle of Armageddon.

The "Wrath of God" does not take place on Earth until after the "wrath of Satan," known as the Great Tribulation, is all over. The "wrath of Satan" is his last effort against the Church of Jesus Christ. The Christians will all be raptured, and taken into heaven, before the "Wrath of God" begins! The wrath of Satan is against the Christians, whereas, the "Wrath of God" is against the world of sinners and unbelievers!

At the opening of the 6th Seal, the sinners and unbelievers all see Jesus Christ, coming on His Throne! They are in total derision! They will see then that the Bible is true!<sup>34</sup>

Sharrit then quotes Revelation 6:15-17. These verses portray the reaction on earth among those who have rejected the grace of God in his Son, Jesus Christ. Sharrit stresses particularly verse seventeen by underscoring it. Verse seventeen reads: "For the great day of their wrath is come, and who can stand?"

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<sup>34</sup>Sharrit, op. cit., p 297.

Subsequently, Sharrit continues in his description:

At the opening of the 8th Chapter, of the Book of Revelation, the 7th Seal is opened! There is silence in heaven for the space of half an hour! THEN! - begins the outpouring of the "Wrath of God" upon the Earth! - such Wrath that is almost staggering!<sup>35</sup>

In passing, it should be noted once again that Sharrit, as he presents "God's Schedule for the future," divides the final week (seven years) of Daniel 9:27 into a three-and-a-half year period for the great tribulation and equates the second three-and-a-half year period with the wrath of God.<sup>36</sup>

It has been pointed out earlier with considerable emphasis that millennialists insist upon what they call a literal interpretation of Scripture.<sup>37</sup> Worthy of note here is the fact that in using the sixth seal and Revelation 6:15-17 as his references, Sharrit has simply by-passed the words of verses twelve to fourteen, where we find portrayed by John the actual opening of the sixth seal. These verses read:

I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place (Re 6:12-14).

This is a re-echoing of what the Savior himself told his disciples in Matthew twenty-four, where Jesus, citing the Old Testament, says:

Immediately after the distress of those days "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken." At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p 298.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p 273.

<sup>37</sup> See especially pp 5 ff.

they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other (Mt 24:29-31).

When these words of Christ are placed alongside of the words of John in Revelation 6:12-14, it becomes obvious that both are speaking of the same dramatic event. That event is the final coming of Christ for the judgment of the world. This indeed will be an outpouring of the wrath of God upon the unbelieving world. However, the Scriptures themselves make it clear with the concomitant eruptions of nature that Christ's coming in his wrath marks the end of time. If one will but allow the Word to speak for itself, one must come to the conclusion that what is presented here is far more than just another step in the history of man, even when we place it near the end. This is the obvious fallacy of millennialists such as Sharrit, who sees these events as the threshold into a new period of three and a half years' duration, which they call the wrath of God, followed by the battle of Armageddon, the millennium, and then the great white throne judgment; all of this before they finally reach the end of time.

Describing the battle of Armageddon, which Sharrit calls "Invasion from Space," he states:

The Battle of Armageddon is a battle between Satanic worldly armies and Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The armies of the nations of the world will gather in Palestine, with the Anti-Christ World Ruler as their leader, to make war against Jesus Christ, as He returns from heaven on a white horse, with the armies of heaven on white horses. No doubt they will have all of their nuclear weapons, guided missiles, and every other imaginable weapon, hoping that they will be able to kill Jesus Christ, as He returns.<sup>38</sup>

To support his position Sharrit cites Revelation 16:13-16 and 19:11-20:3. The former reads as follows:

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<sup>38</sup>Sharrit, op. cit., p 307.

Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty. "Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed." Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon (Re 16: 13-16).

Revelation 19:11-20:3 reads as follows;

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one but he himself knows. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great."

Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

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 (Re 19:11-20:3).

Subsequently Sharrit adds this note:

You will notice that the World Ruler and the False Prophet were



cast into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.. At the end of the one thousand year reign of Christ upon the Earth, Satan himself will also be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the World Ruler and the False Prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever. You see here the absolute proof of ETERNAL PUNISHMENT FOR THE DEVIL (SATAN), THE WORLD RULER AND THE FALSE PROPHET. At the Great White Throne Judgment, "whosoever was not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire" which is the SECOND DEATH for all sinners and unbelievers!<sup>39</sup>

Lindsey for one is a part of that group of millennialists which disagrees with Sharrit's statement that "the Battle of Armageddon is not a battle between nations, as most people believe."<sup>40</sup> In describing what he calls "The Greatest Battle of All Time," Lindsey says:

With the United Arab and African armies neutralized by the Russian invasion, and the consequent complete annihilation of the Russian forces and their homeland, we have only two great spheres of power left to fight the final climactic battle of Armageddon: the combined forces of the Western civilization united under the leadership of the Roman Dictator<sup>41</sup> and the vast hordes of the Orient probably united under the Red Chinese war machine.<sup>42</sup>

Later, in answer to the question, "What and Where Is Armageddon?" Lindsey writes:

Armageddon is a byword used through the centuries to depict the horrors of war. Dr. Seiss sums up its true significance as follows: "Harmageddon (Armageddon) means the Mount of Megiddo, which has also given its name to the great plain of Jezreel which belts across the middle of the Holy Land, from the Mediterranean to the Jordan. The name is from a Hebrew root which means to cut off, to slay; and a place of slaughter has Megiddo ever been."<sup>43</sup>

Lindsey refers to Joel 3:9-14, in which the prophet speaks of this same valley under the name of the valley of Jehoshaphat. The passage reads:

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p 310.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p 307.

<sup>41</sup> The Antichrist in Lindsey's theology.

<sup>42</sup> Hal Lindsey, The Late Great Planet Earth, op. cit., p 162

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., pp 163 f.

Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare for war! Rouse the warriors! Let all the fighting men draw near and attack. Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears. Let the weakling say, "I am strong!" Come quickly, all you nations from every side, and assemble there. Bring down your warriors, O Lord! "Let the nations be roused; let them advance into the Valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the nations on every side. Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats overflow - so great is their wickedness!" Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision (Jl 3:9-14).

Lindsey then continues:

Joel reveals that it is in this very place that the Messiah will destroy the armies of the world and establish his kingdom of true peace and everlasting happiness. He also confirms the world-wide assemblage of armies there.<sup>44</sup>

Subsequently, Lindsey adds this closing comment:

As the battle of Armageddon reaches its awful climax and it appears that all life will be destroyed on earth - in this very moment Jesus Christ will return and save man from self-extinction.<sup>45</sup>

When discussing the battle of Armageddon there is obviously a lack of unanimity among the millennialists as to who the contestants will be in this great battle. On the other hand, millennialists do associate this battle with the Valley of Jezreel, or Jehoshaphat, and the mountain (Hebrew, har) of Megiddo (Har Megiddo assuming the form Harmageddon, or Armageddon). However, the primary concern ought to be what the Scriptures say about this battle and how its statements are to be understood.

The battle of Armageddon symbolically depicts the last and final death struggle of all of the antichristian forces "against the Lord and against his Anointed One" (Ps 2:2) under the tutelage of Satan himself.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p 164.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p 168.

He it is that gives them their direction, their power, their support and their delusive hope of final victory.

The biblical reference for the battle of Armageddon is Revelation 16:16: "Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon." Two verses earlier John states: "They go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty" (Re 16:14). All of the forces of the unbelieving world are assembled in this final, climactic attempt to overthrow Christ and to avoid what they now know to be real and imminent, the final judgment.

Who is it that gathers these kings and their forces together? John tells us in verse thirteen: "Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet." John speaks of the dragon, the first beast and another beast. He identifies the dragon as "that ancient serpent called the devil or Satan, who leads the whole world astray" (Re 12:0). The first beast and the other beast he identifies in chapter thirteen. They represent the sum total of all antichristian forces aligned together under Satan in order to accomplish the overthrow of Christ and his people.

Thus it is the Antichrist, who exercises power and authority from Satan (Re 13:2), who is the initiating and coordinating force behind the gathering together of the kings of the world in the battle of Armageddon. For the comfort of God's people, however, John, writing by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, announces the certainty of God's victory with the pouring out of the seventh bowl and the subsequent announcement, "It is done!" (Re 16:17). The battle is over. The

futile attempts to overthrow God and his Christ are to no avail. No sooner is the announcement of the ultimate victory of the Almighty God proclaimed than the description of the judgment is given (Re 16:18-21). What a blessed and reassuring comfort for God's people that not even the gates of hell shall prevail against his church (Mt 16:18)!

## CHAPTER IX

### THE MILLENNIUM AND REVELATION TWENTY

#### The Millennium

Written upon the cornerstone of the United Nations building is a quotation of a part of a prophecy. It reads: ". . . they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isaiah 2:4).

This is a noble thought and has been quoted often by men who seek peace for this troubled world. There is a problem in the phrase, however, and we believe this is why the United Nations will never bring a lasting peace to the world. This quotation has been taken out of context. The meaning of the passage speaks of the time when the Messiah would reign over the earth out of Jerusalem and judge between nations in a visible, actual, and historic Kingdom of God on earth. The people of the earth will come to the Lord in that day and ask Him to teach them His ways. Knowledge of God will be universal (Isaiah 2:3). This is the era for which Jesus taught us to pray in the Lord's Prayer, ". . . Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).<sup>1</sup>

With these words Lindsey begins what he calls "The Main Event." Indeed, the millennial kingdom is the ultimate goal of millennial theology. In addition to basing his portrayal of the millennium on Isaiah two, Lindsey refers to Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13-14 in the following manner:

Jesus dared to be the One who would fulfill two of the best-known prophecies concerning the Messiah's coming in glory to rule the earth. The first is from the Psalms, predicted before 1000 B.C.: "The Lord (God, the Father) said unto my Lord (God, the Son), Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy foot-

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<sup>1</sup>Hal Lindsey, The Late Great Planet Earth (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), pp 169 f.

stool." (Psalm 110:1).

The second is from Daniel, predicted about 550 B.C.: "I saw in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed" (Daniel 7:13, 14 KJV).<sup>2</sup>

The initial verses of Isaiah chapter two speak of "the last days." In the previous chapter detailed reference was made to the fact that this expression refers especially to the Messianic age - the whole New Testament period<sup>3</sup> and is not of necessity a reference to the final period immediately preceding the end of time and the judgment of Christ upon the unbelieving world.

From his reference to the Lord's Prayer and the second and third petitions Lindsey provides an excellent illustration of the manner in which millennialists allow this perversion of the Scriptures in regard to the millennium to color their interpretation of all of Scripture. Jesus is referring in the second petition of the Lord's Prayer to the coming of his kingdom of grace into the hearts of men as they embrace him as their Lord and Savior. There is no indication in the text, in the context, or in the whole of Scripture that Jesus is here focusing our attention on a millennial, earthly kingdom. His statement that the kingdom of God comes unnoticed and is to be found within us (Lk 17:21) precludes the kind of kingdom that Lindsey portrays.

Likewise, the reference to Psalm 110 focuses on the exaltation of Christ, which begins with his descent into hell to proclaim his victory over sin, death and the devil, not with his establishment of an

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p 172.

<sup>3</sup>See pp 110 ff.

earthly reign of a thousand years. What is described in Psalm 110:1 points to the reign of Christ which has been going on since that event took place almost two thousand years ago.

We agree with Lindsey that there is a connection between Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13-14, but not the connection which Lindsey asserts. Already at the time of his ascension into heaven Jesus declared: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Mt 28:18). Thus also here the point in time when "the Son of man" was given "dominion, and glory, and a kingdom" was at the very beginning of his state of exaltation and the exercise of that "dominion, and glory, and a kingdom" extends throughout the New Testament period, culminating in the "dominion, and glory, and a kingdom" which he will exercise throughout eternity in his heavenly kingdom.

A word must yet be said on Lindsey's reference to Isaiah 2:3 and the universality of the knowledge of God. Isaiah speaks in a similar vein in chapter eleven, where he writes: "for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (v. 9) and, again, in chapter fifty-four: "All your sons will be taught by the Lord" (v. 13). Jeremiah, likewise, speaks of this same, universal knowledge of God when he pens the words of the Lord: "they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest" (Jr 31:34). The question is not whether, but when and how, this will occur. The answer Jesus himself gives us when he, even referring to these and similar prophecies, declares: "It is written in the prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me" (Jn 6:45). Thus the Savior instructs us that prophecies such as these are fulfilled as the gospel spreads and men are

brought to faith in him. Professor Wilbert Gawrisch says: "The earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord because the Gospel of Christ will be carried to the ends of the earth."<sup>4</sup>

John L. Benson sees the vindication of Christ and the Gospel in a millennial reign of Christ on earth, rather than an eternal vindication of the saints in the bliss of heaven with the unbelieving world in the agonies of hell. He writes:

History has a goal and . . . is moving purposefully in a pre-designed direction. History is going someplace, and all of the seeming contradictions and paradoxes fit into an intelligent plan. . . .

All things are moving purposefully toward one climactic era in which Christ will figure as the Lord of history. History will reach its grand consummation at a time when Christ unites Heaven and earth under one government and brings earth into harmony with Heaven. . . .

Historical circumstances surrounded His rejection; historical circumstances will surround His ultimate exaltation. History was the context of His redemptive work, and history will be the context of His Messianic work. As history was the witness of His sufferings, so shall history become the witness of His glory. . . .

The historical vindication of Christ will require a thousand years. . . . 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.<sup>5</sup>

Premillennialism is pessimistic about the outcome of the church age, but it is optimistic about the outcome of history, for it believes the coming of Christ will introduce a Golden Age of history - the dispensation of the fulness of time. It maintains that all history has been moving toward this final epoch in history in which Christ will solve every human dilemma and restore Planet Earth to Edenic beauty, productivity, and harmony. This is

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<sup>4</sup>Wilbert R. Gawrisch, Eschatological Prophecies and Current Misinterpretations (Mequon, Wisconsin, n. p.). p 32.

<sup>5</sup>John L. Benson, The Future Reign of Christ on Planet Earth (Denver, Colorado: Micro-Books, 1974), pp 5 ff.



the millennial hope. . . .

The premillennial view of the goal of history is the view of the Old Testament prophets. Isaiah 2:4 envisions a time of international peace under the administration of Israel's Messiah. Isaiah 9:6, 7 anticipates the increase and perpetuity of the Davidic government as executed by the divine Son. Isaiah 11:3-5 predicts the triumph of righteousness, equity, and justice. Isaiah 11:6-8 pictures the return of Edenic conditions among brute creatures. Isaiah 35:1, 2 describes the reclamation of desert wastes. Isaiah 35:5, 6 anticipates a time when physical defects will be nonexistent. Isaiah 60:1-5 looks forward to the salvation of the Gentiles on a universal scale.

It is easy to duplicate these prospects in all of the prophets. The point is, the Old Testament prophets held a view of history which looked to the coming of the Messiah as the only solution to the present crises and chaos. At His coming they believed He would elevate Israel to political supremacy over the nations; He would restore the social order; He would introduce ecclesiastical changes; He would dispense equal justice. And He would initiate a lasting peace and prosperity.<sup>6</sup>

One who listens to what the Bible has to say must agree with Benson in many of the points which he makes. There is indeed purpose to and a goal for all of history. All things are headed for a climax with divine design. This will occur, however, when Christ comes again to ring down the curtain on the final act of this world's history as we know it, not, as Benson supposes, in the establishment of a millennial reign of Christ here on earth. Benson becomes guilty of transferring the perfect, eternal society of heaven to a thousand-year period in which there will be an almost perfect society on earth, made up solely of Christians, a supposition which has no basis whatever in the Word of God. In addition, Benson is guilty of postponing the Scriptural portrayal of the entire New Testament period until the time of the millennial reign of Christ.

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp 11 f.

Benson, it would seem, has lost sight of the fact that we in the New Testament are already living in a "climactic era" which began with the coming of Christ in the flesh, which was the real fulness of time (Ga 4:4 KJV), his redemptive work by both his active and passive obedience and his subsequent exaltation. On the cross he accomplished all that was necessary for man's salvation, "for by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy" (He 10:14). By his resurrection from the dead he proved his divine power over sin and death and even hell itself. Throughout this entire New Testament period Christ has been reigning as the Lord of history. This is not a function that has been delayed to the time of an imaginary earthly reign of Christ. To illustrate, Paul, for example, is not speaking of some future "climactic era" when Christ will become "the Lord of history"; he is speaking of a past appointment and an on-going function in a present "climactic era" when he writes to the Ephesians of the exalted Christ: "God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, his body, the fulness of him who fills everything in every way" (Eph 1:22, 23).

It is disturbing to note how Benson defers not only this role of Christ as Lord of history to a millennial kingdom, but other aspects of the Savior's life and work as well. Christ's "ultimate exaltation" he projects into the future. But God has already "exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name" (Php 2:9). It seems obvious that Benson is afflicted with a fanatical blindness when he even separates Christ's "redemptive work" from his "Messianic work" by placing Jesus' work as Savior into the historical past, but his work as Messiah into the future. Such a dichotomy is

unfortunate and confusing, to say the least. As the Anointed One, the Christ, the Messiah, he was set aside for the office of being man's Redeemer. The two roles that Benson sees are in reality one; they cannot be separated. What has obviously happened is that Benson sees the role of Christ as Messiah in the exclusive focus of Israel as a nation and their involvement in the millennial kingdom.

In addition to his blatant assertion that "the historical vindication of Christ will take a thousand years,"<sup>7</sup> Benson follows the pathways of the dispensationalists who see yet another aeon, or age, - the millennial era - following this present age by having "a Golden Age of history - the dispensation of the fulness of time" follow "the church age."<sup>8</sup> But such a view is not only without supportive evidence in the Scriptures, but is, in fact, contrary to what the Word says. Jesus did not speak of a millennial reign on earth that would immediately precede the end. Rather, while instructing his disciples on the last things, he told them: "This gospel of the kingdom" (the same kingdom referred to in Luke 17:21 as "the kingdom of God . . . within you") "will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end" - not a thousand-year period of peace and prosperity - "will come" (Mt. 24:14).

#### Further Characteristics of the Millennial Kingdom

Millennialists generally agree that Christ's coming for the millennial kingdom will be sudden, visible, in glory and with clouds. Except for the purpose of his coming, we agree with the above. How-

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp 7 f.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p 11.

ever, even here we see a differing point of view, one which even seems to overlook the fact that "nothing is impossible with God" (Lk 1:37) and that Christ's second coming is not merely another step in the course of the history of man, but the end of all things (2 Pe 3:10). Lindsey, for example, suggests that "the sign of the Son of Man" (Mt 24:27) "perhaps . . . will be a gigantic celestial image of Jesus flashed upon the heavens for all to see. This," he continues, "would explain how all men suddenly recognize who He is and see the scars from His piercing at the cross."<sup>9</sup>

Especially interesting, however, is Lindsey's interpretation of Christ's coming with clouds. Bearing in mind that millennialists underscore the fact that they insist upon a literal interpretation of Scripture as opposed to a mystical or figurative one, it is somewhat surprising to hear Lindsey say:

It is significant to note that many references to Christ's return speak of His return accompanied with "the clouds of heaven." We believe that the clouds refer to the myriad of believers who return in white robes with Jesus. Believers are referred to as "a cloud of witnesses" in Hebrews 12:1.<sup>10</sup>

The use of the preposition ἐπί in the phrase ἐπὶ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ("on the clouds of the sky") in order to show accompaniment is simply beyond the scope of this particular Greek word. The closest New Testament usage that one can find is in legal language, where the word may be used in the sense of "before" (Mk 13:9; Ac 23:30; 25:14; 1 Cor 6:1; 2 Cor 7:14, et al.), but never in the sense of "with." As a matter of fact, the very next phrase in Matthew 24:30, from which Lindsey has taken the expression "the clouds of heaven," is μέτα

<sup>9</sup>Hal Lindsey, op. cit., p 173.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p 173.

δυνάμειος καὶ δόξης πολλῆς ("with power and great glory").

These, namely power and great glory, are his accompaniments and μετά is the appropriate preposition to use to show this accompaniment. Further, it seems obvious that the identification of the clouds as being "the clouds of the sky" precludes taking the expression in a figurative sense. It might further be pointed out that the word for clouds used in Hebrews 12:1 is not νεφέλη as in Matthew 24:30, but νέφος. This is the word that is commonly used in early Christian literature in a symbolic sense, either as a symbol of darkness or figuratively of a throng or host,<sup>11</sup> as we have in Hebrews 12:1.

When speaking of the millennium, millennialists tend to be carried away with supplying all sorts of imaginary details to fill in the gaps in their piece-meal theology, which already from the outset is based on a faulty interpretation of Scripture. Benson, for example, speaks of the citizens of the millennial kingdom and identifies the regenerate Jews and Gentiles who survived the great tribulation as the "charter members."<sup>12</sup> Since they are alive when Christ comes, they continue in their unglorified state, while the Old Testament believers, the saints of the church age and the tribulation martyrs will possess glorified bodies.<sup>13</sup> Benson, providing nothing by way of scriptural support, expresses the opinion that the glorified saints during the period of the millennium will not make their residence on earth but in the New Jerusalem. He then even goes so far as to say: "Some suggest the like-

<sup>11</sup>William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Christian Literature (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp 538 f.

<sup>12</sup>John L. Benson, op. cit., p 29.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p 30.

lihood that this eternal city will circle earth as a satellite throughout the millennial age."<sup>14</sup>

Many millennialists believe that only Christians will be living at the beginning of the millennial age. Lindsey asserts that at his return Christ will divide the sheep from the goats (Mt. 25:41-46) and his sheep, the believing portion of the survivors of Armageddon, will enter his millennial kingdom, while the goats, the unbelieving portion, will be cast away.<sup>15</sup>

Benson, on the other hand, shows another side of millennial theology. His position is less committal. He says that no one can be "fairly certain"<sup>16</sup> that there will be no unregenerate Jews or Gentiles in Palestine as the millennial kingdom begins. He even provides an alternative as he speaks of the make-up of world population outside of Palestine. He says:

It is possible that every unsaved Gentile on earth will be destroyed when Christ judges the Gentile nations in the Valley of Jehoshaphat. Or, possibly, Gentile peoples who are not present in Palestine and who do not participate in the military assault against Israel and against Christ will be spared destruction and will await evangelization.<sup>17</sup>

Benson says of the millennial age that it "is at least a partial return to the conditions of Eden before the tragic fall of man."<sup>18</sup> Yet, in much the same context, he supposes that "periodically a divine judgment will remove those sinners born during the millennium who do not trust the Savior-King by the time they reach 100 years of age."<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p 31.      <sup>15</sup>Hal Lindsey, op. cit., p. 178.

<sup>16</sup>John L. Benson, op. cit., p 31.      <sup>17</sup>Ibid., p 32.      <sup>18</sup>Ibid., p 44.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p 42.

To prove this point he uses Hebrews 9:12, 28 and 10:10-12. Perhaps you will agree that these passages say nothing whatever about the matter of which Benson is speaking. These passages read as follows:

He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption (He 9:12).

So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him (He 9:28).

And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God (He 10:10-12).

Considerably more might be said about the characteristics of the millennial age as millennialists see them. Reading one millennialist after another leads one to the view that finally each has his own preconceived picture of the details making up the millennium itself. This is not surprising, since they are pursuing a course uncharted in Scripture. And, therefore, one can hardly expect the Scriptures to provide the details.

One final quotation that seems appropriate in this connection is taken from John T. Sharrit. In it he sets forth a scripturally untenable hypothesis regarding the time - and the length - of the millennium and will lead us directly into a discussion of the thousand years and Revelation, chapter twenty. He writes:

Yes, Jesus Christ is going to soon reign over this Earth for a period of 1000 years!

It has been almost 6000 years, according to Bible genealogy, since God created Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Man was in complete dominion of the Earth until he sinned and sold out to Satan. Since then Satan has been in the background, ruling the Earth through the leadership of mankind. Man had made a failure, as we

all see at the present time.

The Bible says that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years! When God created the Earth, he created everything in six days and rested on the seventh day. "And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it; because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made." It appears as if God will let man rule the Earth for 6000 years, which will soon be up, and then let His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, have the rulership for the last 1000 years, before He creates a "New Heaven and a New Earth."<sup>20</sup>

### Revelation Twenty

There is not a single scriptural reference to the duration of the Messiah's reign covering a thousand year period except in Revelation twenty, where the expression "a thousand years" occurs five times. There are indeed other passages which use the expression, "a thousand years" (Ps 90:4; Ec 6:6; 2 Pe 3:8), but these are found in a totally unrelated context and do not speak of the time of the Messiah.

Yet a great deal of emphasis is placed on this thousand-year reign of Christ. Millennialists, though they may - and do - differ greatly on many of the details in their theology, agree on this point, that Revelation twenty provides the basis for their doctrine. Thus the question finally reaches the focal point at this critical issue: Does Revelation twenty support the millennial doctrine?

Before dealing specifically with chapter twenty, however, it will be beneficial to grasp the overall intent of the Book of Revelation. Prof. Wilbert Gawrisch succinctly states the purpose of the book in this way:

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<sup>20</sup>John T. Sharrit, Soon-Coming World-Shaking Events (Phoenix, Arizona: Christian Missionary Society, 1978), p 311.



It may be said of the Book of Revelation in general that it is a description of the travail and triumph of Christ's church from the apostolic age to its consummation in glory. Its theme is "Look, he is coming!" (Re 1:7; 22:20). It records "what must soon take place" (Re 1:1). In vivid imagery it delineates the struggle between the disciples of Christ and the disciples of the Dragon. It is obvious, however, that Revelation is not a chronological table of events. If it were, Christ's statement that "the Son of Man will come at an hour when he is not expected" (Mt 24:44) would be only partly true. Particular events could be checked off as they occur; and if certain prophecies have not yet been fulfilled, one could well conclude that the day of Christ's second coming is still in the distant future. In this very book, however, Jesus says, "Behold, I come like a thief" (Re 16:15). The eschatological signs of his coming have been and are being continually and cumulatively fulfilled in the history of the New Testament church. We may therefore expect Christ's return in glory at any time.<sup>21</sup>

In the previous chapter the frequently occurring insistence of millennialists to make the Book of Revelation one which deals almost exclusively with the seven-year tribulation period and the subsequent millennial reign of Christ was noted.<sup>22</sup> Prof. Gawrisch's comments, quoted above, suggest that the application of the book is much more general and portrays the vicissitudes of the church throughout the New Testament period. This becomes crystal clear when he approvingly cites the words of Prof. John Meyer: "All of Revelation has significance for the church of all times."<sup>23</sup>

Further, Prof. Gawrisch rightly points out the fact that here we are dealing with "a book that teems with symbols, pictures, and figurative language."<sup>24</sup> On some occasions the figurative language is explained; on others, it is not. With this, Prof. Gawrisch also presents a warning that is well-taken and in place: "Whatever interpretation may be given, it is important to remember . . . that an interpre-

<sup>21</sup>Wilbert R. Gawrisch, op. cit., p 33.

<sup>22</sup>See pp 106 ff.

<sup>23</sup>Wilbert R. Gawrisch, op. cit., p 34.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p 33.

tation of a symbolic passage must never be at variance with the truths taught in clear, non-figurative passages."<sup>25</sup>

Now turning to Revelation chapter twenty, it becomes clear that here too we are dealing with figurative language. In the opening verses (verses one to three) figurative expressions are obvious in the key and the great chain, in the Abyss, or bottomless pit, in the act of locking and sealing the Abyss, and in the dragon. The key, the great chain and the process of locking and sealing the Abyss symbolize power and authority. The Abyss, or bottomless pit, is a figurative name for hell (compare Re 20:3 with 2 Pe 2:4 and Re 20:14). The symbol of the dragon is explained in the text itself, when it speaks of "the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan" (Re 20:2). In this connection Dr. C. H. Little properly asks: "Why, in the midst of so many symbolical terms, should 'the thousand years' be singled out alone for separate treatment and made to stand for a literal number?"<sup>26</sup> He then continues with the answer:

The whole context calls for its correspondence with the imagery of the other items. All the more is this the case, since the expression occurs nowhere else in Scripture in reference to the duration of the Messianic reign.<sup>27</sup>

It is especially verses one to six of Revelation twenty on which the millennialists focus their attention. Therefore, these are the verses which require special consideration.

The angel coming down out of heaven is the Savior himself. In

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p 33.

<sup>26</sup>C. H. Little, D. D., S. T. D., Disputed Doctrines (Burlington, Iowa: The Lutheran Literary Board, 1933), p 36.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., pp 36 f.

chapter one he himself asserted this fact when he declared: "I hold the keys of death and Hades" (v. 18). The purpose of his coming according to this passage was to seize and bind Satan by throwing him into the Abyss and locking and sealing it over him. This Christ did when on the cross as the Seed of woman he crushed the head of Satan (Gn 3:15) by breaking his power. John tells us that "the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work" (1 Jn 3:8). Likewise the writer of the letter to the Hebrews asserts: "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death - that is, the devil" (He 2:14). It was then that Satan was bound for "a thousand years."

That this understanding is in harmony with the rest of Scripture is evident when we look at two other references which speak - not in future terms, but in past terms - of this binding of Satan. In Jude six it is stated: "And the angels who did not keep their position of authority but abandoned their own home - these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day." Peter says that "God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment" (2 Pe 2:4). With the accomplishment of his redemptive work, Christ broke Satan's controlling hold upon mankind.

How, then, are we to understand the expression, "a thousand years"? The thousand years designates the period beginning with the first coming of Christ and continuing until he comes again in judgment. In showing the significance of the symbolism in the number itself, Prof. Gawrisch says:

The number ten represents completeness. We think of the ten

plagues, the Ten Commandments, the ten virgins, ten minas, ten servants, and ten cities in the parables of Jesus (Mt 25:1; Lk 19:13, 17). So a thousand, which is ten raised to the third degree, represents the highest degree of completeness.<sup>28</sup>

This symbolic use of the number ten is evident also elsewhere in the Book of Revelation. For example, in chapter two, verse ten, the Lord of the church, addressing himself to "the angel of the church in Smyrna" (v. 8), declares: "I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days." Prof. Gawrisch continues:

Despite the insistence of Chiliasts that "year" must mean a period of 365 days, "year" is used in the Scriptures in Luke 4:19 to designate a period other than an actual year. The "year of the Lord's favor" is the New Testament time of grace. It is identical to the thousand years of Revelation 20.<sup>29</sup>

Earlier Prof. Gawrisch had made the statement, "It is a definite period of time, as we see from verse 3 where John uses the definite article, τὰ χίλια ἔτη. But its actual duration is known only to God."<sup>30</sup>

A word needs to be said yet regarding "the first resurrection," spoken of in Revelation 20:5, 6. This expression, as was noted earlier where extended discussion was given to it, is used as a proof text for a divided resurrection.<sup>31</sup> At this point, however, a view of the proper understanding, that is, a view that is in total agreement with the whole of Scripture, is in order. Prof. Gawrisch gives us this insight into the meaning of this expression:

The thrones which John saw remind us of Jesus' promise to His disciples, "I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Lk 22:

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p 36.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p 36.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p 35.

<sup>31</sup> See pp 46 ff and 55 ff.

29-30). Seated on these thrones are those who were beheaded because of their loyalty to Christ. They sealed their faithful testimony with martyrdom. They had not worshiped the beast or its image. John described this beast in chapter 13. It represents the brute force of all forms of antichristianity at work in the world. It opposes and persecutes Christ's church (Re 13:7). The saints had not received the mark of the beast on their foreheads or their hands. They did not permit the world's antichristian principles to govern their thoughts or their actions.

Who are these martyrs? They are not only those who, like John the Baptist, were actually beheaded. They represent by synecdoche the entire assembly of believers who have remained faithful to the end and received the crown of eternal life. Throughout their life on earth Paul's words to the Romans applied to them, "For your sake we face death all the day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered" (Ro 8:36, quoting Ps 44:22). Every disciple of Jesus is, like Paul, "always being given over to death for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor 4:11; cf. 2 Cor 6:9).

These saints have died. Nevertheless, they live and reign with Christ during the thousand years (v. 4). The verbs ἔζησαν and ἐβασίλευσαν are constative aorists. The action is viewed as a whole, irrespective of the time involved. In this instance it is durative as not only the sense of the words but also the accusative of time (χίλια ἔτη) used with them shows.<sup>32</sup>

Thus the first resurrection is the resurrection from spiritual death.

All men are, by nature, dead in transgressions and sin (Eph 2:1). When

the Holy Spirit carries on his gracious work in the hearts of men and thus brings them to faith in Christ Jesus, he makes them "alive unto God" (Eph 2:5).

As he discusses the reign of the saints with Christ on earth, Prof. Gawrisch further points out:

Neither Christ's reign nor that of his saints is like the rule of the kings of the earth, who maintain their power by force of arms. It is, rather, . . . a spiritual reign. Christ reigns by testifying to the truth (Jn 18:37). His disciples reign with Him by their testimony to and their confession of His Gospel. During their life, by their death, and even after their death Christ's followers testify to the truth of the Gospel. Through their testimony Christ enters men's hearts with His saving grace. His Gos-

<sup>32</sup>Wilbert R. Gawrisch, op. cit., p 37

pel continually proves itself to be "the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes it" (Ro 1:16). In times of persecution, again and again the blood of the martyrs became the seed of the church. To this day the testimony of faithful witnesses of the past, of men like Luther and Chemnitz, Gerhard and Quenstedt, Walther and Hoenecke, the Piepers, Schaller and Meyer, and the many other orthodox teachers of the church continues to bear fruit and to extend Christ's royal reign of grace in the hearts of men.

Referring to this living and reigning with Christ during the thousand years, John says, "This is the first resurrection" (v. 5). That he is not using the word "resurrection" in the ordinary sense is clear from the fact that he specifically states that he saw the souls of those who were beheaded. "Resurrection" in the ordinary, everyday sense refers to bodies which are restored to life. In 1 Corinthians 15, the chapter in which Paul discusses the resurrection at length, he takes up the question, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" (1 Cor 15:35). By applying the term "resurrection" to the souls he sees in this vision, John indicates that he is using this word in a different sense.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p 38.