

CHAPTER X

THE RESTORATION OF ISRAEL AND THE LAST JUDGMENT

The two events in millennial theology with which we are concerned in this chapter are in fact separated in point of time by the millennium. Yet, because each requires more detailed study and expanded treatment than would have been appropriate in their chronological setting, the matter of the restoration of Israel has been delayed to this point and combined within the chapter with the last judgment. The details of the conversion of Israel as a nation are woven by the vast majority of millennialists into the very fiber of their millennial tapestry. The last judgment, or, as it is often called, the Great White Throne Judgment, is the last of the several judgments which millennialists hold and occurs at the end of the supposed reign of Christ upon earth for a thousand years.

The Restoration of Israel

The general, current millennial view of the restoration of Israel goes back to the period of the tribulation, culminating in the battle of Armageddon, where God's judgment falls on those antisemitic forces which will have gathered against the Israeli nation and on the Antichrist himself, who will have turned upon Israel and even desecrated the rebuilt temple on the heights of Mount Moriah.¹

¹See chapter VIII.

Hal Lindsey says on this matter:

A careful distinction must be made between the "physical restoration" to the land of Palestine as a nation, which occurs shortly before the Messiah's coming and the "spiritual restoration" of all the Jews who have believed in the Messiah just after His return to the earth.

The "physical restoration" is accomplished by unbelieving Jews through their own effort. As a matter of fact, the great catastrophic events which are to happen to this nation during "the tribulation" are primarily designed to shock the people into believing in their true Messiah (Ezekiel 38; 39).²

Later on, after citing Revelation 13:7a in the New American Standard Bible, "And it was given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them," Lindsey goes on to say:

It is logical to ask at this point, how is he going to make war with the saints when they are gone from the earth? [Remember, Lindsey is a pretribulationist.] "The saints" are the people who are going to believe in Christ during this great period of conflict. After the Christians are gone God is going to reveal Himself in a special way to 144,000 physical, literal Jews who are going to believe with a vengeance that Jesus is the Messiah. They are going to be 144,000 Jewish Billy Grahams turned loose on this earth - the earth will never know a period of evangelism like this period. These Jewish people are going to make up for lost time. They are going to have the greatest number of converts in all history. Revelation 7:9-14 says they bring so many to Christ that they can't be numbered.³

Benson adds some insights for us into the millennial concept of the 144,000 of Revelation seven and fourteen. He asserts:

God will raise up 144,000 Jewish evangelists who will announce the imminence of Messiah's kingdom. The judgments of the tribulation period are designed to produce a purged and purified Israel to whom God will fulfill the promises He made to Abraham and David by covenant oath. Unlike Israel's attitude at the first coming of Christ, at His second coming the nation will officially and formally give Him a royal welcome. A regenerate and reconciled

² Hal Lindsey, The Late Great Planet Earth (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), p 48.

³ Ibid., p 111.

nation will receive the King and participate in the glories of His earthly reign.⁴

Millennialists try to circumvent the charge of having God simply impose faith on Israel as a nation in toto. Yet they do insist on the "literal" interpretation of Romans 11:26, where Paul states that "all Israel will be saved." Obviously trying to walk the tight rope between these two statements, Benson provides the following millennial solution:

When Christ returns to earth, He will deal with those rebels who survive the tribulation catastrophes. He will slay unsaved Jews and Gentiles with the blast of His nostrils. Think of it, at the time He inaugurates the kingdom, there will be no unregenerate people living in Immanuel's land!⁵

Yet in the very next words Benson speaks of the mass migration of all living Jews to Palestine, "Immanuel's land," where, "at the time He inaugurates His kingdom, there will be no unregenerate people." Benson continues: "It will take some time to regather dispersed Jews to the land of Palestine. Christ will not inaugurate the kingdom until every last one of them has returned from the ends of the earth."⁶

How does all of this square with the Word of God? There are even some millennialists, a minority, who do not go along with this aspect of millennial theology. Speaking of the end of the battle of Armageddon and the inauguration of Christ's millennial kingdom, Sharrit, although viewing the 144,000 of Revelation seven and fourteen as Jews, nevertheless rejects the idea of their world-wide evangelism program when he says:

⁴John L. Benson, The Future Reign of Christ on Planet Earth (Denver, Colorado: Micro-Books, 1974), p 23.

⁵Ibid., p 27.

⁶Ibid., p 27.

Everyone on Earth will see Jesus, on His throne, at this time! The door of salvation is now shut, just as Jesus said it would be. (Matt. 25:10) (Luke 13:25) There is no record of anyone being saved (born again) after the opening of the 6th Seal! So many preachers tell us that after the Rapture the 144,000 of the children of Israel will become world evangelists, and that millions will be saved, whereas, the Bible does not tell us that, in the least degree! To do so, God would have to give people a "second chance" to be saved! There is no Scripture for it! There are many Scriptures, on the contrary.

The 144,000 of Israel will be divinely protected from harm during the "Wrath of God" period, but there is no Scripture that they will ever preach the Gospel!⁷

Two things, however, are wrong with Sharrit's statements. In the first place, the 144,000 are not the number of Jewish "tribulation saints," but rather the number of the whole company of heaven (more on this shortly). Secondly, the day of salvation will have come to a close, not because the millennial reign of Christ has begun, but because the time of the period of grace has run out. All of mankind will have been judged and those who believe in Jesus as the Son of God and their Savior and Lord will already be securely resting in the glory of heaven, while those who have despised God's grace and have rejected the redemptive work of Christ will have been assigned to the torments and agonies of hell.

However, what Sharrit says about the "second chance" theology having no scriptural basis is absolutely correct. In passing, it is also worthy of reemphasis that it is a millennialist who here identifies this mass conversion of the Jews as "second chance" theology.

Before proceeding any further, a thought expressed in the quo-

⁷John T. Sharrit, Soon-Coming World-Shaking Events (Phoenix, Arizona: Christian Missionary Board, 1978), p 298.

tations from Lindsey needs to be examined more closely. This matter treats the means by which Israel is brought to faith in the Savior. Earlier, Lindsey was quoted as saying that "the great catastrophic events which are to happen to this nation during the 'tribulation' are primarily designed to shock the people into believing in their true Messiah (Ezekiel 38; 39)."⁸ In another quotation from Lindsey he stated that "the judgments of the tribulation period are designed to produce a purged and purified Israel to whom God will fulfill the promises He made to Abraham and David by covenant oath."⁹ In interpreting this passage Lindsey, as has been pointed out many times, takes a passage speaking of New Testament times and forcibly restricts it to a subsequent millennial age. Ezekiel is speaking of the safety of God's people and the vindication of his name by the New Testament preaching of the Gospel, the fruits of which are borne already in this life, but reach their perfection in the eternal - not a millennial - kingdom of Christ. In addition, the concept of faith worked by shock treatment, as Lindsey suggests, is simply incongruous with the clear statements of Scripture. That this preaching of the Gospel is the sine qua non of conversion is evident when, for example, St. Paul, on the heels of his quotation of Isaiah 52:7, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved," asks the following rhetorical questions: "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?" (Ro 10:14, 15a).

⁸ Lindsey, op. cit., p 48.

⁹ Ibid., p 111.

The words just cited from Romans ten are recorded interestingly in a longer section of Romans (chapters nine to eleven) where Paul is dealing especially with the matter of Israel and her relationship to Christ. From this section millennialists draw their erroneous conclusion, based on Romans 11:26, that a mass conversion of the Jewish nation will occur in conjunction with the inauguration of Christ's millennial reign. They ask, "Does not Romans 11:26 indeed say that 'All Israel will be saved'?" And there is no denying that this is precisely what Romans 11:26 says. But the term "Israel" must be understood in the sense that Paul used it and this can be determined only by the context.

Therefore, at the outset, it should be noted that an examination of the original text shows that Paul introduces the statement with the adverb ^{ei} OUTWS, not ⁱ TOTE. The use of ^{ei} OUTWS lays stress on the manner, not the time, of Israel's salvation. That manner is expressed in the remainder of verse twenty-six and in verse twenty-seven: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins." Paul is quoting the prophet Isaiah (59:20 f.) and the context in which Isaiah pens these words is one that clearly points God's people ahead - not to a millennial reign of the Messiah - but to the New Testament period when the love and grace of God becomes so clearly evident in the redemptive work of Christ, through whom the forgiveness of sins has become a historic reality for man.

It must be further pointed out that the vast majority of millennialists do not interpret "all Israel" literally. That is, although they emphasize the necessity for a literal interpretation of Scripture,

the millennialists will, far more frequently than not, view "all Israel" with limitations. They will speak in terms of Israel "for the most part" or "very many" of Israel; or, "not every single one, but Israel as a whole" (Luthardt); or, "enough of them to represent the race" (Voigt).¹⁰ But upon careful examination it becomes clear that Paul is not speaking of "all" in a hyperbolic figure of speech for "very many" or "for the most part." He indeed means to say "all Israel shall be saved," for "all Israel" refers to the whole body of those who by faith in Christ become the people of God. Thus "all Israel" is to be identified with "all the elect," whether Jew or Gentile; it includes the "full number of the Gentiles" (Ro 11:25) which are to be added to the church of Jesus Christ. Dr. Francis Pieper states in this regard:

In Romans 11 this construction of "all" is excluded because it stands in contrast to "in part." And this restriction of "all" is all the more inadmissible in the case of the advocates of a general conversion of the Jews. They assume two periods for Jewry: the one running parallel with the time of the Gentiles, during which only a part of Israel is blinded and always some of Israel are being saved; the second period, following the first, during which "all Israel" is saved. Hence they even sharpen the contrast of "all" with "in part." This very contrast, however, makes it utterly impossible . . . again to restrict "all Israel" in the second period of Jewry to a part, to "representatives" of Israel, etc. All who understand "all Israel" in Rom. 11:26 to mean Israel after the flesh may not restrict this term in any way, but must understand it to embrace all "individual Israelites," not one excluded. Yes, they must go even farther. "All Israel after the flesh" includes not only all Israelites living when the world ends, but also all previously deceased Jews. Consistency therefore demands that these exegetes . . . include a resurrection and conversion also of all Jews who died in unbelief. Then only do they have all Israel after the flesh. Whoever is not ready to include these has no right to appeal to Rom. 11:26 in support of his opinion.

It is evident, then, that only they give "all Israel" its full value who, with Luther and the majority of Lutheran exegetes, un-

¹⁰Francis Pieper, D. D., Christian Dogmatics (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), Vol. III, p 527.

derstand it really to mean all Israel, namely, all spiritual Israel, the whole number of the elect among the Jews. In several ways the wording of the text demands this view of "all Israel" as the spiritual, or elect, Israel.¹¹

In summary on this point Dr. C. H. Little says:

We therefore conclude: Paul does not teach a universal conversion of the Israelitish nation, or even one in which a large part, or the great majority of the nation shall be converted in the last times and saved.

We have the key to what Paul means by "all Israel" in the preceding part of the Epistle, in Rom. 9:6, where he says: "For they are not all Israel which are of Israel"; and from Rom. 11:5, where he says: "Even so at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace." "All Israel" accordingly refers not to the nation of the Jews, or to the Jewish people as such; but to the true Israel, the elect remnant, or as Paul elsewhere expresses it, "the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16).

The meaning of the Apostle is simply this: When the Gospel has finished its work among the Gentile nations and the full number of the Gentiles, among whom the Jews are scattered, is gathered in, the end will come, and will usher in full, eternal salvation for all true believers as constituting the true Israel, the spiritual children of Abraham (Rom. 4:16).

The teaching of Paul is, that Israel as a nation will remain hardened in part unto the end; that the Jewish race will be scattered among the Gentiles until Christ's Second Coming, only a remnant of them being saved during the New Testament dispensation.¹²

A few comments in regard to the millennial interpretation of the 144,000 of Revelation seven and fourteen are now in order. It has been noted in the earlier quotations that most millennialists insist on a literal interpretation of this figurative number as well as on identifying this group as Jews.

In Revelation 7:4-8 we read:

¹¹Ibid., p 528.

¹²C. H. Little, D. D., S. T. D., Disputed Doctrines (Burlington, Iowa: The Literary Board, 1933), p 44.

Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel. From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben 12,000, from the tribe of Gad 12,000, from the tribe of Asher 12,000, from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000, from the tribe of Manasseh 12,000, from the tribe of Simeon 12,000, from the tribe of Levi 12,000, from the tribe of Issachar 12,000, from the tribe of Zebulun 12,000, from the tribe of Joseph 12,000, from the tribe of Benjamin 12,000.

In both the Old and New Testaments the number twelve has special significance. The number twelve is used in both testaments as a symbolic number representing the church, made up of the whole number of mankind which embraces Christ as Savior in their relationship to God. The church of the Old Testament was made up of the twelve tribes of Israel; the church of the New Testament centers around the twelve apostles and their message, as they preached and wrote by divine inspiration about God's forgiving grace in Christ. Squaring the number twelve would indicate that this number of 144 is representative of both the Old and New Testament churches. Further multiplication of the number by one thousand would figuratively express a large number. The number 144,000 thus is not an exact number. To God the number of the elect is known, but to us it is not, except in this figurative form of 144,000. This group of 144,000 is the same group which John identifies in Revelation 7:9, the verse immediately following the passage cited earlier. Here John refers to "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language."

The fact that twelve tribes are identified with the figure of 12,000 for each does not change this divine intent for the message it is to convey. Rather, it tends to establish it. First of all, each number is identical and, secondly, the tribal names do not exactly correspond with the land division of Canaan, the Promised Land. Dr. Paul

E. Kretzmann observes:

The enumeration of the tribes is also made simply to get the number twelve, in accordance with the ancient way of figuring. It is for this reason that Joseph is substituted for Ephraim, and that Dan is omitted; Levi is mentioned with the rest, because in the Church of Christ there is no distinctive priesthood, but all belong to the royal priesthood.¹³

Thus we may properly identify this 144,000 as the Israel of God, made up of believing Jews and Gentiles, for the Old Testament Israel of God flows into and becomes the New Testament Israel of God, made up of the whole number of those who by the Holy Spirit embrace Christ as Savior.

A look at the details surrounding the use of this figurative number will also bear this out. In Revelation 7:4 we are informed that 144,000 is the number of those who were sealed. To assume that this group of 144,000 is only a part of, or even a separate group from, the "great multitude that no one could count" (Re 7:9), would mean that the others would not have been graciously sealed by God. In Revelation fourteen the 144,000 are identified as those who had the name of the Lamb and his Father's name written on their foreheads (Re 14:1). According to verse three they alone would learn the new song which they sang "before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders." Because all of God's elect are indeed sealed by him and because all of the saints in eternal glory will be singing this new song, the number obviously refers to all who will enjoy the blessings of heaven. Thus the number can neither be restricted to a number with literal intent nor to an individual nation.

¹³Paul E. Kretzmann, Ph. D., D. D., Popular Commentary of the Bible (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1922), New Testament, Vol. II, p 613.

The Last Judgment

There remains little to be said about the last judgment. Chapter V dealt in part with the matter of the four judgments to be found in millennial theology, of which the last judgment is one.¹⁴ Furthermore, millennial writers do not spend a great deal of time on this matter. When the supposed millennium draws to a close, what follows becomes anticlimactic. So much emphasis is placed on the millennial reign of Christ that the last judgment and even "the new heavens and the new earth," of which most of them speak, are given comparatively little attention.

Sharrit calls the last judgment "the Great White Throne Judgment,"¹⁵ a name which he gets from Revelation 21:11. He correctly identifies those who are condemned to the lake of fire as "every man, every woman, every boy or girl, who has spurned the love of God for them, and continued in their sinful rebellion and unbelief against God."¹⁶

Benson's emphasis in the last judgment is on Satan's condemnation. He writes:

When the thousand years have run their destined course, God will release Satan from his prison house. A thousand years in chains will restrict the devil's wicked activities but will not change his wicked inclinations. He will immediately launch a campaign to destroy the millennial saints and Jerusalem - the religious and governmental center of the Messiah.

Satan will appeal to the last generation of children born to millennial saints. Evidently thousands of these children will neglect the time of their probation by refusing to trust Christ as

¹⁴See pp 56 ff.

¹⁵Sharrit, op. cit., p 315.

¹⁶Ibid., 316.

their Saviour. Satan will deceive them into thinking they are capable of vanquishing the King and overturning His kingdom of righteousness and holiness.

Perhaps under the guise of going to Jerusalem to worship at some annual feast, Satan will lead a countless number of sinners in an attack upon the capital city. Fire from Heaven will fall upon the rebel crowd, annihilating them. The devil's final fling over, God will sentence him to everlasting torment in the lake of fire.¹⁷

Lindsey, speaking of the Messianic (i.e., millennial) kingdom and the end of human history, writes:

This kingdom will begin in time with mortal subjects (Revelation 20:4-6), last 1000 years, and at the end of that time some of the children of the believers who started in the kingdom will apparently prove to be unbelievers and start a rebellion against Christ and His rule. Christ will bring swift judgment upon them before the rebellion reaches the actual fighting stage (Revelation 20:7-10).

After this event there will be no more human history with mortal men. All unbelievers, it seems, will be judged in the crushing of the last rebellion which is led by God's old adversary, Satan. Satan will have been bound for a thousand years, but is released momentarily so that he could reveal the rebellion in the unbelieving hearts of those who rejected Christ as Savior (Revelation 20:7, 8). All who remain as mortals will be changed into immortality at this point, and the Kingdom of God will not cease, but simply change form and be reestablished in a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21)!¹⁸

There can be no question but that the great white throne judgment, as Sharrit calls it, is the final judgment. The point is, however, that this is not a separate judgment from those previously mentioned in Revelation, as, for example, the judgment upon the Antichrist and his followers in chapter eighteen. These are all the same judgment, but viewed from different perspectives. The embellishing details added to the scriptural account of the last judgment are necessitated in millennial theology by their intrusion with the earthly reign of

¹⁷Benson, op. cit., pp 57 ff.

¹⁸Lindsey, op. cit., pp 177 f.

Christ into the panoramic view of New Testament history which the Book of Revelation affords. But these embellishments ought not surprise one; they are typical of millennial spokesmen. We concur with Lindsey that "after this event," namely, the final judgment, "there will be no more human history of mortal men."¹⁹ It is what has been forced into the immediately preceding period that is distressing, disturbing and confusing to many souls.

Of the matter of Christ's eternal kingdom only little mention is made, as stated earlier, because it becomes anticlimactic. Lindsey, for example, devotes just four paragraphs, a few lines over a single page, to his discussion of the new heavens and the new earth in The Late Great Planet Earth.²⁰ The fourth paragraph is the short statement: "That's where we want to be!"²¹ But one must wonder if that is his real goal - or is it the millennium itself, on which he, characteristic of millennialists, expends so much verbiage?

¹⁹Ibid., p 178.

²⁰Ibid., pp 178 f.

²¹Ibid., p 179.

CHAPTER XI

SUMMARY CHAPTER

When one reads any two millennial books written by different authors, the chances are extremely high that he will find two theological positions presented which differ considerably in the details and most likely and to some extent in the basics. The variety of millennial theology is thus almost as numerous as the individuals who espouse millennialism. This lack of uniformity makes it impossible to take all millennialists and place them into a common mold. Each time a millennial position is stated, there may well be a rebuttal by a millennialist, insisting that this is not his position.

Although presenting difficulties such as the one just mentioned, this lack of uniformity is understandable when one views millennial theology in the light of Scripture. One then finds that it has no solid biblical foundation. Millennialism is based on a fanciful rationalization of scripture passages which seem to support its views. In order to "draw out," if you will, what they want to find in the Scriptures, millennialists must "put into" the Scriptures what they would like to hear it say. This they do by starting with preconceived notions, adding unwarranted inferences and stirring into this human concoction their often-times overzealous fascinations. The end result is a series of deductions and conclusions, which from their point of view fit neatly together into their millennial scheme of things, but in reality have no

support where, above all, it is needed, namely from God's revelation.

Because the concept of a millennium comes from outside of the Scriptures and because this concept can be made biblically "valid" only by superimposing it on passages which are speaking of something altogether different, each millennialist will have his own method and manner of "proving" what he would like to call a scriptural position. In view of this the purpose of this summary chapter will be to pinpoint the fallacies and the resulting dangers of millennialism and then to set forth briefly that which the Scriptures clearly state in regard to the last days.

The Fallacies and Dangers of Millennialism

For the sake of highlighting each of the following, numbers have been assigned to each of the ensuing points. The division admittedly is purely arbitrary. In analyzing the points one will find some overlapping. In each case, however, the point itself was felt to be sufficiently important to warrant separate treatment, even though the same matter may be touched upon in a related connection.

1. Millennialists are guilty of adopting a false and piecemeal exegesis.

In chapter IX the fact was stressed that millennialists appeal to Revelation twenty as the basis for their assumption of an earthly reign of Christ for a thousand years. Here, by taking this symbolical number literally, by forcing some of the elements in the context into its service and by ignoring other elements that refuse to fit into the millennial scheme of things, chiliasts impose upon this apocalyptic chapter a doctrine which is taught neither there nor elsewhere in the

Scriptures.

Turning then to Old Testament prophecies which describe in figurative language the glory of the church during the New Testament period, a glory which indeed is hidden from the world because of its blindness, millennialists again assume a literal interpretation, fail to recognize what are presented as marks and signs of the New Testament era and place them into a glorious and almost perfect millennial kingdom. Yet, in spite of their insistence upon a literal interpretation, they themselves are forced to take certain terms figuratively in these very same prophetic passages and thus refute their own argument. For example, "the top of the mountains, . . . exalted above the hills" in Isaiah 2:2 (KJV) is figuratively understood to refer to Mount Zion, as is also the expression "the mountains will drip new wine, and the hills will flow with milk" in Joel 3:18.¹

The millennial interpretation of passages such as these simply circumvents the exegesis which is clearly and explicitly set forth in the New Testament. Jesus himself specifically told his twelve disciples: "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. For I have not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Mt 10:34). Thus the millennial reign of Christ with an unprecedented period of peace and prosperity cannot be the proper understanding of and, therefore, cannot be the correct exegesis for the Old Testament prophecies they press into the service of their millennial dream. Rather, these passages are speaking of the New Testament period in terms known and understood by

¹Francis Pieper, D. D., Christian Dogmatics (Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), Vol. III, pp 522 f.

God's people of the Old Testament.

The danger of this kind of false and piecemeal exegesis seems rather obvious. With such an approach to Scripture one can impose almost any theological view on the Scriptures. By doing this the very unity of the Word is undermined and ultimately the faith of weak souls is weakened even more, because they in confusion don't really know what to believe as the real basis for their faith.

2. Millennialism denies that this is now God's final dispensation.

By transferring that glory which God bestows upon the church from the period of the New Testament and placing it into a millennial kingdom, millennialists make this New Testament era an intermediate dispensation of God and thus deny that this period is the final age in the world's history.

Peter is in full agreement with the rest of Scripture when he speaks of the last days as days in which there will be "scoffers, . . . scoffing and following their own evil desires" (2 Pe 3:3). The thrust of their ridicule is identified by their question, "Where is this 'coming' he promised?" (2 Pe 3:4). Peter responds by speaking of the "present heavens and earth" being "reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men" (2 Pe 3:7). He identifies the delay in the Lord's coming as being the result of God's patience, "not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Pe 3:9). Upon the very heels of this statement Peter points out that "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" (2 Pe 3:10). Peter, again

in total agreement with the rest of Scripture, focuses our attention in these last days on the coming judgment without even a hint of a thousand years of peace and prosperity for the church and an earthly kingdom for Christ.

The danger of the millennial denial of this being God's final dispensation is that millennialism thus interpolates an entire dispensation into the Scriptures, of which it knows nothing. Surely Peter, and with him Christ and the other apostles, would have focused our attention on "the main event" (as Lindsey calls it²) were such a millennial kingdom a coming reality. The result is that the urgency of the gospel call in these last days is lost and moves the focal point of Christianity from a present blessed relationship with Christ that will give us by God's grace a blessed, eternal relationship with him to a millennial reign of Christ and his church on earth. A shift in emphasis of the Christian's hope and an attitude of complacency are inevitable consequences of such an unscriptural teaching, both of which are inherently dangerous to Christian faith and thus to salvation.

3. Millennialism ignores the biblical use of "the latter days" and related terms.

Millennialism views the latter days, particularly as it is used by the Old Testament prophets, as the seven-year tribulation period, ending with the wrath of God, and the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth. For them such an interpretation is necessary in order to fit

²Hal Lindsey, The Late Great Planet Earth (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), p 169.

in the various facets of their millennial theology.

The Scriptures themselves, however, teach us the proper understanding of these terms, such as "the latter days," "the last times," etc. It is true that the Scriptures use these terms to indicate even in New Testament times a future event. Paul spoke of "terrible times in the last days" and spoke of them as still being future from his vantage point in 2 Timothy 3:1. Peter likewise spoke of "scoffers" who were still to come "in the last days" in 2 Peter 3:3. Jude said much the same thing as Peter in verse eighteen of his letter. Yet there are also passages which identify the entire New Testament era as being that period of time which we call "the last days" or "the last times." The above quotations are not in conflict with this truth; they merely indicate a development which was yet to occur within the framework of "the latter days." The writer of the letter to the Hebrews, for example, speaks of the last days as already having begun when he declares: "In these last days" God "has spoken to us by his Son" (He 1:2). Peter echoes this same thought. In his first epistle Peter states that we "through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Pe 1:5), but then goes on, later in the same chapter, to assert that Christ "was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times" (1 Pe 1:20).

There just is no justifiable way to skirt the message of these clear passages of Scripture! And the dangers of such an abandonment of the biblical use of these terms by the millennialists is two-fold. On the one hand, there is the danger that Christians will imbibe a false sense of security. If the great tribulation is not to occur un-

til some future date, one may well be inclined to feel that he or she need not be so alert and watchful for Satan's attacks and the pitfalls to faith in Christ. On the other hand, there is the danger that Christians will not realize the glory which is properly theirs here and now as the children of God and citizens of Christ's kingdom of grace. If the real glory is not to be a reality until the millennial reign of Christ, then all of this must still lie in the future. Even without millennial theology Christians need to be reminded again and again of the present reality of the glory of God's people through faith in Christ. Peter points this out when he encourages Christians with the words: "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pe 2:9).

4. Millennialism ignores the biblical description of the time before the end of the world as being a time when sin would abound.

Jesus told his disciples extensively of the signs of the end of the world and the coming judgment. In Matthew chapter twenty-four he spoke of great distress, unequalled in the history of man. Of this tribulation he stated that "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). Subsequently, just a few verses later, Jesus added: "Immediately after the distress of these 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'" (Mt 24:29).

In spite of the clarity with which passages of Scripture, such as the one just mentioned, speak, millennialists nevertheless insist

that between the tribulation period and the final judgment there will be a thousand-year reign of Christ on earth. Furthermore, they insist that this will be a period of peace and prosperity, of a glorious and well-nigh perfect state of being for the church. Here, too, millennialists have chosen rather to follow a visionary, utopian view than to listen to the Word of God and to hear what it really has to say.

The danger in all of this is that constant, unrelenting preparation for the trying times of the great tribulation seem much less urgent, particularly if one espouses the pre-tribulation theory, that the church of Christ will be snatched away from the earth before the tribulation even begins. All of the admonitions of Scripture to be ready for the Lord at his coming to judge the world in righteousness have thus been soft-pedaled and, indeed, may be disregarded as belonging to another age and to other people.

5. Millennialism contradicts the biblical teaching that the receiving of the saints and the rejection of the ungodly occur simultaneously.

With the multiple resurrections, judgments and comings of Christ it is obvious that a number of clear passages of the New Testament particularly must be taken figuratively - and this in spite of the fact that it is the millennialists who "insist" on the literal interpretation, while accusing those who reject millennialism of interpreting Scripture figuratively. It is only by assuming such a figurative interpretation that one can by-pass the clear statements of Scripture that link the reception of God's people and the rejection of the unbelieving world into a single, concurrent event.

In Matthew 25:31-46 Jesus speaks of his coming in glory to

judge the nations as they are all gathered before him. On his right are the righteous; on the left, the cursed. He speaks to both groups, vindicating the righteous by pointing to their good works as the outward evidence of their faith in him as their Savior and pronouncing condemnation upon the ungodly, their lack of good works before God being the outward evidence of their lack of faith in Christ. The picture which Christ here details for us is one that certainly indicates that this two-fold action is one that, though it has two parts or phases, nevertheless is a single event.

The kind of allegorizing of Scripture to suit a preconceived and extra-biblical notion, as is the case with millennialism, has been shown throughout the history of the church to be dangerous ultimately even to faith in Christ itself. Without regard for context or without allowing Scripture to interpret itself the floodgates have been opened and the way has been cleared for allegorizing away a great deal of what Scripture has to say, even in the vital matters that directly effect the very heart and purpose of the gospel - man's salvation.

6. Chiliasm lacks a scriptural basis for its millennial kingdom of Christ.

When Jesus told Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world. . . . My kingdom is from another place" (Jn 18:36), he meant what he said. On another occasion, when the Pharisees, much like modern millennialists, asked him when God's kingdom would come, Jesus answered, "The kingdom of God does not come visibly, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you" (Lk 17:20, 21). In the Upper Room Jesus told his disciples, "I am going there," i.e.,

to his Father's house, to heaven, "to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back," not to establish an earthly kingdom in which they would reign with Christ, but to "take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going" (Jn 14:3, 4). Thomas then asked about the place and the way and Jesus responded: "I am the way. . . . No one comes to the Father except through me" (Jn 14:6). Obviously Jesus was not pointing his disciples ahead to an earthly kingdom of near perfection, but to the heavenly kingdom of absolute joy, peace and security with its absolute perfection.

Nowhere do the Scriptures point to a coming of Christ to inaugurate a new dispensation of a millennial reign on earth. And the danger of this assumption is that it beclouds the Christian's hope of a blessed eternity by replacing this scriptural emphasis with the unscriptural delusion of a millennial kingdom here on earth where Christians will reign with Christ in an earthly kingdom.

7. Millennialists distinguish between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Christ.

For the millennialist the kingdom of God in the New Testament is the kingdom established by Christ at his coming, known in the New Testament also as the kingdom of heaven. John the Baptist prepared the people of his day for the coming of this kingdom (Mt 3:2). Jesus himself often spoke of this kingdom in his dealings with individuals (as, for example, Nicodemus, Jn 3:3, 5) as well as in his public preaching (Mt 6:33; Mk 10:14; Lk 4:43; et al.). Millennialists, however, refer the expression "the kingdom of Christ" to his millennial

reign. In the New Testament the kingdom of Christ is never referred to by this specific expression; it is usually designated with a pronoun referring to Christ, e.g., my kingdom, your kingdom, or his kingdom. An examination of the scripture passages which use these expressions, however, will indicate that this is a kingdom that is not distinct and separate from the kingdom of God, but rather identical with it, only viewed from a different perspective. When the thief on the cross asked Jesus to remember him when he came into his kingdom, the Savior responded by saying, "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Lk 23: 42, 43), that is, in the kingdom of God or the heavenly kingdom, but in its final, glorified form. By virtue of our redemption in Christ, Paul declares that the Father "has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves" (Col 1: 13). Notice the past tense; the act of rescuing accomplished the bringing into his Son's kingdom.

The millennialists' dichotomy of God's kingdom is, to say the least, confusing. Such an unwarranted cleavage between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Christ beclouds the simple statements of Scripture and makes that which indeed can be understood by the vast majority of humanity something complex - and unscriptural!

8. Millennialism is Judaistic in its emphasis on the material and secular nature of Christ's millennial kingdom.

Among the Jews prior to and at the time of Christ there was a burning hope for a Messiah who would defeat the Romans and reestablish the glory of the kingdom of David. Even the disciples of Jesus reecho this visionary dream when they ask Jesus shortly before his ascension

into heaven, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Ac 1:6). This is the identical mode of thinking that marks the theology of the vast majority of millennialists. This concept underlies the millennial teaching of the earthly reign of Christ, his kingdom even being established in Palestine, the same territory over which David had ruled.

Throughout the entire New Testament, as has already been pointed out, the emphasis in the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of Christ, if you will, is on the spiritual, rather than any temporal or secular side of the kingdom. Christianity is an "otherworldly" religion. It sets our goal in the heavenly mansions. It designates us as strangers and pilgrims on our way to our heavenly home - not on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land for Christ's millennial reign.

When one makes of Christ's kingdom a temporal and secular kingdom, the focal point which Scripture itself sets for us is abandoned. When millennialism focuses the attention of its adherents onto a worldly kingdom, almost perfect though it may be, it takes the heavenly kingdom out of focus by the very nature of the kingdom to which millennialists hold. Do the words of Paul have a significant application here when he states: "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men" (1 Cor 15:19)?

9. Millennialists ascribe an unscriptural preeminence to the Jews as a nation.

Through the whole warp and woof of millennial theology there is for most millennialists a thread of Jewish prominence that is interwoven into chiliasm. It is caused by a failure to recognize the fact

that the Old Testament people of God have flowed into and become a part of the New Testament church. There is still in millennialism the conviction that the Old Testament promises of God to his people are to be fulfilled among the Jews as a nation rather than seeing them fulfilled in the blessings which God has bestowed and continues to bestow upon his New Testament people. Thus they press the "literal" interpretation of these passages to the point where they go beyond what the Scriptures themselves say and in so doing deny, for example, the strong arguments of Paul in Ephesians 2:11-22. In this passage Paul stresses the fact that in the New Testament church the uncircumcised Gentiles and the circumcised Jews have now been made one in Christ, that those who once had been foreigners and aliens have now become "fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household" (Eph 2:19).

In overlooking this New Testament truth millennialists obviously reject the concept that God's grace is channeled to man solely and alone through Christ and his redemptive work. Thus to that extent it takes away and robs Christ of the glory, honor and praise which he rightly deserves (Php 2:9-11). Further, there is the inherent danger in this misinterpretation of the Word that there is no real urgency to bring the gospel to the Jews as a nation, for according to millennial thinking God has his own special method of dealing with the Jews as a nation, still regarded by them as God's chosen nation even in this New Testament period.

10. The millennial mode of conversion of the Jews runs counter to the mode of conversion set forth in the Scriptures.

The Scriptures know of only one way by which man can enter in-

to a blessed relationship with Christ: sola gratia, sola fide, sola Scriptura! That is, through the message of the gospel the Holy Spirit must create faith in the redemptive work of Christ, through whom God has made his undeserved, forgiving love a reality for fallen mankind.

Paul asserts that "faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God" (Ro 10:17, KJV). Millennialists, however, see a mass conversion of the Jews being accomplished, not by the preaching of the Word, but by the exercise of God's judgmental power over the enemies of the Jews as a nation at the great battle of Armageddon. And this in spite of the fact that there is no solid basis in Scripture on which to base such a dream!

The danger of such a theological position becomes obvious when one begins to establish exceptions to the biblical principle of salvation by grace through faith without the deeds of the law (Eph 2:8, 9). This is not a denial of the omnipotence of God, who indeed can work as he himself sees fit. It is, however, a recognition of the fact that God in his Word has bound us to look for him to exercise his grace only through the gospel message.

11. The millennial concept that each dispensation is in itself entirely complete and wholly sufficient destroys the unity of the Old and New Testament churches.

Common among millennialists is the view of dispensationalism that in each dispensation God operates differently. This is true even of those who espouse a three dispensation history of mankind, the Old Testament, the New Testament and the millennial dispensations. For these millennialists the Old Testament dispensation was marked by

God's rule through his law; the New Testament, through grace; and the millennial, through Christ's visible and personal rule with his church in an earthly kingdom.

The inevitable consequence of this brand of theological thinking is to provide a sequence of assorted ways by which man is reconciled to God. This is particularly evident among dispensationalists, for by their very approach to the matters of salvation they bring into question God's ability to come up with a workable plan for man's salvation. They - almost blasphemously - charge God with a series of trial and error approaches which simply leave man hanging in the balance.

It is difficult to follow this type of theological thinking in the light of clear and undeniable passages of Scripture. Man's salvation rests upon Christ, through whom we are redeemed, not with gold or silver, but with his precious blood (1 Pe 1:18, 19), "who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world" (1 Pe 1:20, KJV). The Savior himself, referring to the Old Testament, declares: "These are the Scriptures that testify about me" (Jn 5:39). Long before the Sinaitic law was given, Adam and Eve were assured of a Savior who would come to destroy Satan and his work (Gn 3:15). And the precedence, both in time and importance, of the gospel over the Sinaitic law is established by Paul when he points out that God established a covenant of grace with Abraham, which Abraham accepted by faith, and that the subsequent giving of the law 430 years later did not and could not overturn that covenant of grace (Ga 3:15-18).

12. Millennialism replaces Christology with eschatology as the central doctrine of Scripture.

In reading millennial literature one will find strong emphasis on Christology. However, the stress in their brand of Christology is such that it removes the redemptive work of Christ from the apex and places his millennial reign as the great climax. One is reminded again, for example, of Lindsey's reference to this as "the main event."³

The whole thrust of millennial theology revolves around this pivotal point of Christ's coming again to establish an earthly kingdom. But enough has already been said to counteract this focal point of millennial theology. As children of God we need to see where he has placed the emphasis in his Word and that is upon Christ as the Savior of all men.

13. Millennialism perverts the scriptural teaching on Christian hope.

By their insistence upon the additional millennial kingdom of Christ, chiliasts confuse the kingdoms of grace and glory. Speaking of the kingdoms of grace and glory, Dr. Francis Pieper notes in this connection:

the two kingdoms differ widely . . . with respect to the external conditions of their members. The citizens of the Kingdom of Grace are subject to cross and tribulation. Only after they have entered the Kingdom of Glory is their lowliness changed into glory. . . . By confusing, in this respect, the Kingdom of Grace and the Kingdom of Glory, chiliasm subverts the plain teaching of Scriptures and perverts the hope of the Christians.⁴

Subsequently Dr. Pieper also comments:

The chiliasts give to Christ an additional kingdom, the millennium. This caricature of the Kingdom of Grace and of Glory, which is entirely the product of man's fancy, perverts the hope

³Ibid., p 169.

⁴Pieper, op. cit., Vol. II, p 389.

of the Christians, turning their thoughts away from the eternal glory of heaven (Phil. 3:20-21: "Our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Savior," etc.; 1 Cor. 1:7; John 17:24; etc.) and fixing them on some illusory glory to be had here on earth.⁵

14. Millennialism causes an adverse effect on the spiritual life of Christians.

An adverse effect on Christian life is the inevitable result of millennialism's perversion of the Christian hope. Dr. Francis Pieper forcefully speaks on this fallacy of millennialism and the ensuing danger when he says:

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; not as the world giveth, give I unto you" (John 14:27), and: "These things I have 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.⁶

A Brief Summary of the Biblical Revelation

Concerning the Events of the Last Days

The Scriptures describe the last days of the world immediately preceding Christ's second coming as days of ever increasing distress

⁵Ibid., Vol. II, p 393.

⁶Ibid., Vol. III, pp 526 f.

and tribulation for the church militant. The intensification of that distress will continue until God, for the sake of the elect, terminates the history of this world as we know it by sending his Son back to earth (Mt 24, et al.).

The Son of God will return to earth visibly and in glory (Ac 1:11). He will be accompanied by his holy angels (Mt 16:27). His purpose in coming will be to judge the world in righteousness (Ac 17:31). All men, having been raised from the dead (Jn 5:28), will be gathered before his judgment throne (Mt 25:32). For the unbeliever it will be a terrifying experience, causing great mourning among those who have despised God's grace and rejected Christ's salvation (Mt 24:30). For the believers it will be a day of joy and excitement, the fulfilment of what has been long expected and awaited (2 Pe 3:11, 12).

On the Savior's right hand will be the believing righteous, arrayed in the righteousness of Christ (Re 19:8), whose works are the evident fruit of the Holy Spirit's work of regeneration in their hearts (Mt 25:31-40). On the left will be the ungodly, whose lack of faith is attested by their lack of good works acceptable to God (Mt 25:31-40; He 11:6). The righteous will be invited to share the inheritance of the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world (Mt 25:34), while the unrighteous will be cast away "into eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Mt 25:41).

It is to this blessed goal of everlasting glory that the Scriptures point us. When we became children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, we were made aliens and strangers on earth (He 11:13), individuals who now by the grace of God have a new, better and brighter home to look forward to in the heavenly mansions which Christ has gone to

prepare for us (Jn 14:2, 3).

In the meantime it is necessary for us to work to his honor and glory as we await that final summons, when our gracious God in his unfathomable love calls us out of this vale of tears into the eternal blessedness of heaven. The wait is but for a little while (Jn 16:19-21). The Savior himself has assured us: "Yes, I am coming soon" (Re 22:20). And with a heart filled with longing anticipation we say with John: "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (Re 22:20)!

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