The Preteristic Understanding of the Revelation 20 Millennium in Relation to Christ’s Kingdom: A Reformed Response.

By

Jeffrey S. Krause

Liberty University School of Religion

Bible 450-B07

For

Professor Michael Clifton O’Brien

11 February 2010

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture in this essay is taken by permission from the English Standard Version (ESV). Thomas Nelson (Ed.), Wheaton, IL: Good News Publishing. 2001
# Table of Contents:

- Opening Thesis ................................................. Page 3
- Foundational Argument: Revelations Dating ........... Page 3
- The Reign and Kingdom of Christ .......................... Page 8
- The Identity of the People of God ......................... Page 12
- The Meaning of the Millennium ............................ Page 16
- Conclusion ....................................................... Page 20
- Bibliography ..................................................... Page 22
Opening Thesis:

Much debate has arisen in the modern church as to the nature of the Revelation 20 millennium. Historically, great theologians such as Athanasius, Augustine and Edwards have maintained that this period of time is to be seen as symbolic; in effect, symbolizing the entire reign of Christ who is seated at the “right hand” of the Father. However, since the mid 1830’s, a new Eschatological system has arisen to challenge this view. Dispensational Premillennialism asserts that the “thousand year” millennium is a literal, physical reign of Christ on earth. In doing so, the Dispensationalists depart from the sound tradition of theologians who have held the former and more historic view. It is the intention of this essay to affirm the historic and Reformational position in regards to the millennium, which shows the Revelation 20 account as a symbolic image of the entire reign of the Christ and His triumphant church.

Foundational Argument:

In support of the author’s thesis, it must first be noted that this essay presupposes an early dating of the Apocalypse. Internal evidence suggests that the Book of Revelation was written prior to the fall of Jerusalem, or rather, pre A.D. 70. Time-texts such as “soon” (Rev. 1:1, 22:6, 7, 12 and 20), “near” (Rev. 1:3, 22:10) and “quickly” (Rev. 22:20) all indicate an imminent return of Christ in judgment to the addressee of the book; the Seven Churches of Asia. Next, the self evidence of Revelation indicates that the Temple (Herod’s Temple – Rev. 11:1-2) was still standing in the “holy city” (c.f. Isa. 48:2, Matt. 4:5, 27:53) at the time of Revelations penning.¹ It is vital to note two lines of support that indicate that the Temple in question is in fact, “Herod’s Temple.” First, there is no instance or indication of a future, rebuilt Temple within the pages of

¹ There is no account from the New Testament witness that speaks of the destruction. Although this is in affect, an argument from silence, it is still helpful to note. Matt. 24:1-2 speaks of the destruction of Herod’s Temple and when coupled with the fact that the Temple was the pinnacle of worship and the source of the Jewish leadership that falsely accused the Lord of Glory, then it is reasonable to assume that this event, if Preteristic, would have been mentioned.
the New Testament. Point in fact, the word “Temple” (ἱερὸν) is only cited within the pages of the New Testament in reference to Herod’s Temple (Matt. 24:1, 26:55), Jesus’ body (John 2:19-20), as the dwelling place of the Spirit within the believer (1 Cor. 3:16, 6:19), as God Almighty and the Lamb in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:22) and in reference to the church (Eph. 2:21).

However, ἱερὸν is never cited within the context of a future (rebuilt) Temple. In addition, Matthew 24:1-2 clearly indicates the identity of the Revelation 11 Temple in question where the Lord proclaims;

Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. But he answered them, “You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”

In these verses, the Lord Jesus clearly indicates “which” Temple would be trampled in the Revelation 11 account. First, in Matthew 23, the Lord pronounces the “seven woes” upon the Jewish leaders and Israel. This was the same Geo-political entity that “killed the prophets” (Matthew 23:34-35; c.f. Rev. 16:6), in the same land (“holy city” Rev. 11:2; c.f. Matt. 23:37) that was referred to as “Sodom” and “Egypt” (Rev. 11:8). Moreover, Jesus pronounces that the very “generation” to whom He is speaking to, would suffer the Matthew 24 judgment (Matt. 23:36, 24:34; c.f. Matt. 16:4, Matt. 16:28, Rev. 1:7) and would be “left desolate”

Thus, the “literal” meaning of the text indicates that the Temple in question is in fact

---

2 Matthew 24:1-2, English Standard Version; c.f. Luke 21:6 “As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.” Here the Lord clearly indicates “which” Temple is in view in the Apocalypse, Herod’s Temple.

3 “Behold, He is coming with the clouds” is an historic reference to a spiritual in judgment within the Old Testament. See Joel 2:1 “coming” and Isaiah 19 and the oracle concerning Egypt where the LORD is “riding on a swift cloud and comes to Egypt” in judgment. These verses support the judgment announced in Matt. 23-24 and Rev. 1 in respect of Rev. 11:1-2.

4 Revelation 1:7 indicates and helps to affirm the current argument. John indicates that those whom pierced the Lord were witness to His return in Judgment; “Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him…” It is also helpful to note that the term “tribes” is used, which is a heavy indication of corporate Israel. Also, the translated word “earth” (γῆ) is equally translated as “land,” “country” and “ground” according to Strong’s.
“Herod’s Temple;” the very same Temple that was known to the generation to whom Jesus rebuked.

The last line of eternal evidence that will be used to establish an early dating of Revelation comes by way of Revelation 17. First, it is essential to note that the “great prostitute” spoken of in verse one is none other than corporate Israel herself. Throughout the Old Testament, Israel is referred to as the “whore” (Isa. 1:21, Jer. 2:20, 3:1, Ezek. 16:15, Hos. 4:12), as a “prostitute” (Ezek. 16:30-31, 33, 35, Hos. 9:1) and as one who commits “adultery” (Jer. 3:9, 23:14, Hos. 2:2). Being in Covenant with God, Israel was known as the Lord’s “bride” (Jer. 2:2, 2 Sam. 17:3 by inference) and a “wife” (Jer. 3:20, Ezek. 16:32, Hos. 2:2). In its ultimate rejection, the unfaithful wife Israel rejected its purposed “bridegroom” (Luke 5:34-35, John 3:29) and instead, committed “sexual immorality” with other nations (Rev. 17:2, 4, 18:3 – see the above descriptions of Israel’s unfaithfulness and prostitution). Thus, with all of these offensives, coupled with the rejection of the Messiah, she was labeled as the “synagogue of Satan” and was judged with the afore mentioned judgment by God for her unfaithfulness.

Next, Revelation 17:9-10 proclaims;

This calls for a mind with wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he does come he must remain only a little while.

It is of most importance to note that the apostle calls for his readers (those in the Seven Churches of Asia) to have a “mind with wisdom” in reference to the “seven heads” – of which “five of

---

5 In Hosea 2:2, YAHWEH is referred to as the “husband” and Israel as the unfaithful “wife” who committed adultery; “Plead with your mother, plead---for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband---that she put away her whoring from her face, and her adultery from between her breasts”

6 Contextually, the reference to the “synagogue of Satan” must apply to the Jews: “I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan”

7 Rev. 17:9-10 ESV
whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come…” Dr. Kenneth Gentry states the following in regards to this point;

On both early-date and late-date views, Revelation’s recipients live under the rule of Rome, which is universally distinguished by its seven hills. How could the recipients living in the seven historical churches of Asia Minor and under Roman imperial rule, understand anything else but this geological feature?\(^8\)

In addition, Dr. Gentry proclaims;

We learn further that the seven heads also represent a political situation in which five kings have fallen, the sixth is, and the seventh is yet to come and will remain for a little while. Remarkably, we must note that Nero is the sixth emperor of Rome. Flavius Josephus, the Jewish contemporary of John, points out that Julius Caesar was the first emperor of Rome and that he was followed in succession by Augustus, Tiberius, Caius (aka Caligula), Claudius, and Nero…That is, since the first five are dead, the sixth one is then reigning even as John writes. That would be Nero Caesar…When John writes, the seventh king/emperor “has not yet come.” That would be Galba, who assumes power in June, AD 68. But he only continues a “short space”: his reign lasts but seven months…the shortest reigning emperor to that time.\(^9\)

Thus, the evidence from Revelation 17 points to the identity of the “beast” as the seven emperors of Rome; with Nero Caesar being the reigning emperor of the day. Further supporting this view is the fact that Nero (Neron Kesar “nrwn qsr” in Hebrew) is the mathematical equivalent to the “mark” spoken of in Revelation 16 (six hundred and sixty-six or six hundred and sixteen in Latin).\(^10\) Gary DeMar explains;

When we take the letters of Nero’s name and spell them in Hebrew, we get the following numeric values: n=50, r=200, w=6, n=50, q=100, s=60, r=200 = 666…There is a curious variation on 666. Some manuscripts read 616. Why would a copyist make such a number change? “Perhaps the change was intentional, seeing that the Greek form Neron Caesar

---

\(^8\) Gentry, Kenneth. *Navigating the Book of Revelation: Special Studies on Important Issues.* Fountain Inn, SC: Goodbirth, 2009; pg. 18
\(^9\) Ibid. Gentry; pg. 18-19
\(^10\) The oldest know MSS fragment of Revelation (P155) reads 616.
written in Hebrew characters \((nrwn\ qsr)\) is equivalent to 666, whereas the Latin form Nero Caesar \((nrw\ qsr)\) is equivalent to 616.\(^{11}\)

To further establish this point, F.W. Farrar in “The Early Days of Christianity” proclaims the following about the historical understanding of the “person” of the Beast;

All the earliest Christian writers on the Apocalypse, from Irenaeus down to Victorinus of Pettau and Commodian in the fourth, and Andreas in the fifth, and St. Beatus in the eighth century, connect Nero, or some Roman Emperor, with the Apocalyptic Beast.\(^{12}\)

Farrar’s comments not only support thee afore mentioned argument of the identification of the “beast,” but they also show the historicity of such a line of reasoning for the cited arguments in toto. Given that the Apocalypse was written to a specified group of people, within the first century, who were under tribulation, and that these prophecies were to happen “soon” and “shortly,” and Jesus return was “near,” it is reasonable and proper to conclude a pre A.D. 70 dating. Likewise, it has been established that corporate Israel was to suffer judgment to the generation to whom Jesus spoke (Matt. 23-24) for her breaking of her Covenantal vows to her bridegroom. Hence, the preponderance of the evidence and the plain meaning of the time-text establish the author’s case. If Revelation was written prior to A.D. 70 and the message was to have direct meaning as to the trials and tribulations that the addressed churches were suffering through, then this has a significant bearing upon the Revelation 20 millennial text, in relation to when and how Christ is to reign upon the earth. A late-date understanding with a literal meaning supports a “physical” reign of the Christ in some sense. However, a early-date understanding of the Book of Revelation, which uses a “literal in context” method of hermeneutic, supports a spiritual reign of Christ and assigns a near total Preteristic fulfillment to the Apocalypse directed towards those addressed in chapter one by the apostle; the seven churches of Asia.

\(^{11}\) DeMar, Gary, \textit{Last Day’s Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church}. Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 1999; pg. 258-259

\(^{12}\) Farrar, F.W. \textit{The Early Days of Christianity}. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1882; pg. 472
The Reign and Kingdom of Christ:

When will Christ reign and in what manner? Is the reign of Christ, as the Futurist proclaims, to take place in a millennial kingdom, with Christ literally upon the earth? Or rather, is the Christ presently reigning from Heaven while seated at the “right hand” of the Father, in sovereign control? To answer this question, Acts 2:32-36 must first be addressed. Here, Luke proclaims;

This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.' Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.\(^{13}\)

Within this Acts chapter 2, passage it is obvious that Jesus is currently reigning in Heaven. It is vital to note that Peter makes reference to Psalm 110:1 to demonstrate this very fact; that Jesus is seated at the “right hand” of the Father enthroned. The great reformer John Calvin proclaims;

He being therefore exalted by the right hand of God The right hand is taken in this place for the hand or power, in like sort as it is taken everywhere in the Scripture. For this is his drift, to declare that it was a wonderful work of God, in that he had exalted his Christ (whom men thought to be quite destroyed by death) unto so great glory…For these words, to “sit at the right hand of God,” import as much as to bear the chief rule, as we shall afterward more at large declare…The Lord said unto my Lord. This is the most lawful manner of ruling, when as the king (or by what other title so ever he be called) doth know that he is ordained of God, therefore David pronounceth that the commandment to reign was given unto Christ by name…he is made Lord of heaven and earth, which sitteth at the right hand of God.\(^{14}\)

Noting Calvin’s words, it is obvious to see the Reformed and historic position on this text. Jesus, whom is in Heaven, is seated next to the right hand of the power\(^ {15}\) of the Father and is currently reigning. Point in fact, the Lord Jesus Himself declared His enthronement prior to His

\(^{13}\) Acts 2:32-36 ESV
\(^{15}\) Here, the Lord Jesus uses the second person plural to indicate to His audience an event that they will witness within their lifetime or generation; “And Jesus said, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." (Mark 14:62; c.f. Matt. 23:36, 24:34)
crucifixion on a number of occasions. First, Luke 22:69 states; “But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God.” Next, Mark 14 provides the reader with conclusive evidence of the enthronement of Jesus. When the Lord is questioned as to His identity and is asked if He is the Messiah, the Lord Jesus states unequivocally; “And Jesus said, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:62, ESV). There are a number of points to draw from this section of Scripture. First, the Lord Jesus uses the term “I Am” in answering the Jewish leaders. This is an obvious draw on His Deity and Messianic office (“ego eimi”; c.f. Jn. 8:58, Ex. 3:14). Next, the Lord uses the words “you will see” therefore identifying the group of individuals that will witnesses the next clause, which is Jesus being exalted “at the right hand” (c.f. Rev. 3:21) of Power and “coming with the clouds of Heaven.” Who is it that will see the Lord’s “coming” according to the text? It is the very individuals to whom Jesus is speaking, the Jewish leaders.16

Likewise, in Matthew chapter 16:27-28, the Lord tells the disciples the timing and nature of both His coming and the arrival of His kingdom when He proclaims;

For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.

Points of interest in these verses include; (1) the coming of the Son of Man as previously mentioned in Mark 14:62, (2) payment for actions (judgment), (3) “there are some standing here” in reference to the disciples and (4) the coming of the Son with His Kingdom. Again it is seen, that the Lord Jesus and His Kingdom had arrived! Point in fact, Jesus makes it clear that some of the disciples, with whom Jesus walked, would witness the “coming” of this Kingdom. Therefore

---

16 Thus establishing the point previously made in regards to Rev. 1:7; “Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth (land) will wail on account of him.”
implying that some would be dead and some left to live. Simple logic declares that if only “some” are left to witness the coming of the Kingdom, then some were already asleep that would not witness the Kingdom. Thus, the most common interpretation of the Dispensationalist is dismantled and found wanting. Meaning, the classical Dispensational interpretation of this verse proclaims that the “coming of the Kingdom” in verse 28 is in actuality, the “Transfiguration” that took place only six days later. However, this is simply untenable considering the previously cited verses. As it has already been noted, the statement that only “some” would be left necessarily implies that some would not be left. Again, Gary DeMar states; “If we adopt the view that the transfiguration is the fulfillment, we must conclude that most of the people with whom Jesus spoke were dead within a week of Jesus’ prediction (Matt. 17:1).”18

Moving on we see a remarkable statement in Matthew 12:25-28 in regards to the timing of the Kingdom. It is here that Jesus declares the present nature of the Kingdom that is already at hand;

Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. (Emphasis added) 19

The Greek word translated “upon” in the previously stated verse, is the word ἐφ’20 which has various meanings such as “on,” “before” and “among.”21 It directly correlates the arrival of the Kingdom with the ministry of the Christ (c.f. Matt. 3:2; 4:17; Mark 1:15); thus fully supporting

---

17 This is the very thing that transpired within the first century. The Apostle John, the author of Revelation, bore witness to the “coming” of the Son on the clouds in judgment (Rev. 1:8). Jesus without question was referring to this very fact in John 21:22, when in reply to Peter about the future of the beloved disciple proclaimed; “Jesus said to him, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!”
18 Ibid. DeMar; pg. 44.
19 Matt. 12:25-28 ESV
thee afore mentioned argument. Great clarity is also found in Isaiah 9:6-7 where the text proclaims that a Son will be born and “the government shall be upon his shoulder” (v. 6) and that He will be seated “on the throne of David and over his kingdom” (v. 7). Again it must be noted the amazing similarities and continuity between the already cited texts. And again, the reader is drawn back to Acts 2:31-34 where the apostle Peter proclaimed;

…he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.(emphasis added) 22

Dr. Kenneth Gentry clarifies the meaning of the “right hand” of God in relation to the Kingdom and its expansion therein with this statement;

Christ’s personal presence on earth is not needed for the expansion of His kingdom. All of this kingdom expansion will be directed and blessed by the ever-present Christ, Who is now enthroned as King at the right hand of God, ruling and reigning over the earth. (Emphasis added) 23

Gentry is correct in proclaiming that the Messiah’s presence is not (physically) needed for the expansion of His kingdom. The Christian has God within him in the form of the Holy Spirit and the omnipresent Triune God is ever present within His creation. Likewise, as it has been demonstrated, Jesus is currently seated “at the right hand” of the Father, until all of His enemies are crushed under foot. Moreover, the Kingdom, the present Kingdom in which Christ is Covenant head is “like a mustard seed” and is continually growing (Mark 4:30-32). Is one to infer that there is a Kingdom of God with the absence of a ruler? Likewise, the very nature of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) is to make disciples “of the nations” (v. 18), with Christ ruling as the Covenantal head with “all authority” upon the earth (v. 18). Thus, Christ was to be

22 Acts 2:31-34 ESV
23 Gentry, Kenneth. He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology. Tyler , TX: Institute of Christian Economics , 1992; pg. 119
in Heaven, seated next to the Father but could still proclaim; “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (v. 20). Meaning, Christ is currently ruling with “all authority” in a non-physical manner. He is working out His perfect and holy plan whereby the nations will become disciples (v. 19) and will become obedient to His Law (v. 20). Lastly, the summary of this position can be found in the words of the late Theologian and scholar Dr. Greg L. Bahnsen when he proclaims;

Christ does not settle for a part-time or restricted reign as King...Paul teaches, “he must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet,” concluding with the defeat of death itself at the general resurrection (I Cor. 15:25-26). All opposition in all areas will be overcome by the King. And as it is, it will be an indication that the Messianic kingdom is coming. Christ taught His disciples to pray: “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). That prayer is a continual reminder to us that the coming of the kingdom means the doing of God’s will, and that the reign of Christ (His kingdom) through our obedience comes precisely here on earth.24

**The Identity of the People of God:**

In Jeremiah 31:31-33, the Lord pronounces the coming of the new era of Salvation History, namely, the New Covenant. Within the verses of this chapter, great clarity is brought to the discussion as to the identity of the people of God;

Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.25

Here, the Lord describes the New Covenant that is to be made. However, it is vital to notice too whom this Covenant is made with. Is this “New” Covenant with the Gentile nations or with the “foreknew” and “ordained” (“προγνωσκόμενος” Rom. 11:2; c.f. Rom. 8:29) people of God, Israel?

---

25 Jer. 31:31-33 ESV
The identity of this people is “the house of Israel” and “Judah” (v. 31) or rather, the commonwealth of Israel herself. Verse 32 describes this as a “New” Covenant with the “fathers” of Israel; therefore, displacing or abrogating the Old Covenant that was broken due to thee afore mentioned unfaithfulness. Verse 33 describes this very same concept. The “Covenant” described with “the house of Israel,” is none other then the “church” and the eternal promise of God’s faithfulness with Israel is subsequently confirmed (“I will put My law...on their hearts, and I will be their (Israel’s) God, and they (Israel) will be my people”).

Further Old Testament support for this concept is found in the latter part of Ezekiel 37, where the Lord declares that “David” will be “King” over Israel with one ruling Shepherd (v. 24). Israel shall dwell in the land of the fathers forever, for the “Prince” (Jesus) shall reign and have dominion (v. 25). At this time, a (new) Covenant will be made with Israel (Matt. 26:26-28; c.f. Dan. 9:27) of an “everlasting” nature (v. 26). This text is undoubtedly speaking of the church; to whom the New and everlasting Covenant is made. Yet, the subject of the Covenant is none other then the people of Israel. Please note that the promise made falls under the rubric of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 17:7-8, 13, 19) which is described as a; “covenant between me and

26 Thus, if this were the only Old Testament evidence to support the ongoing, one people of God concept, then it would be ample evidence to presume that Israel spoken of within the text is in fact the church. The New Covenant was made with the people of Israel, yet includes only those in Covenant with YAHWEH. Ezek. 36:22-32 describes this very concept, as well as the totality of Ezek. 37.

27 In Dan. 9:24-27, “the Prince” is said to bring in “everlasting righteousness” and to “atone for iniquity.” Here, the “anointed one” (the Prince) will be “cut off” (v. 26), and the people of the “Prince” will destroy the city and bring an “end to sacrifices.” The “end to sacrifices” follows the “firm Covenant” made with the many for one week. This account, then future, is undoubtedly speaking of the life and ministry of the “anointed Prince” Jesus Christ. First, contextually, there is no warrant to assume that “the people of the prince to come” is the “anti-Christ.” There is nothing in the text that allows the insertion of an unqualified individual. Rather, the Lord Jesus is referred to as the “Prince” and the “anointed one” both individually and in connection with one another. Verse 25 connects these two titles “anointed one, the Prince” with verse 26 referencing the individual titles of “anointed one” and “people of the Prince to come...” These accounts are describing the same individual (Jesus) who did in fact establish a “firm Covenant” (Matt. 26:26-28) with the many and that was “cut off” within the middle of the seventieth week at His crucifixion. The “end of sacrifices” was symbolized in Matt. 27:51 with the tearing of the Temple curtain and was realized in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 where the sacrificial system was permanently ended; as prophesied by the Lord Jesus in Matt. 23:38-24:34 and in particular, Matt:24:1-2. Hence, clarity is found in the disciple’s question; “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?” Meaning, when will be the end of the Jewish aîn (τελος).
you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you” (Gen. 17:7). Likewise, within this Covenantal promise, Abrahams “offspring” are described as the “number of the stars” in Genesis 15:5. Allen P. Ross explains:

…the Lord took him outside to gaze at the heavens, for his seed would be as innumerable as the stars of the heavens. This comparison now joins the one in 13:16 ( “the dust of the earth”) to convey the abundance of the promise and also to call for greater faith from the one who is childless.28

Meaning, the “everlasting Covenant” (Gen. 17:7) with Abraham would produce descendants as numerous as the “dust of the earth” (Gen. 13:16) and as abundant as the “number of the stars” of the sky (Gen. 15:5). Further, these “offspring” were to be blessed and were to inherit an “everlasting” promise (Gen. 18:19) with the Lord Jesus as their Covenantal head (Isa. 9:6-7; c.f. Ps. 145:13). This understanding of the people of God is the very concept that the reader sees throughout the Pauline Corpus. Galatians chapter 3 indiscriminately speaks of the “gentiles” as included in the Abrahamic promise; “so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles…” (Gal. 3:14). Paul goes on to explain that the “offspring” are those who are in Christ (v. 16); whereby the Gentile believers are assimilated into the singular promise made to Abraham. Moreover, in Ephesians chapter 2, Paul describes the Gentiles as once “separated from Christ,” where they were “alienated from the commonwealth of Israel” and “strangers to the covenants of promise” (v. 12). Here Paul describes the “many” Covenants29 of the singular promise made to Abraham and includes the Gentile believers into that singular promise; thus, being declared as the “offspring” of Abraham through Jesus Christ, the one Covenant head (v.

---

29 This is an obvious reference to the Abrahamic, Mosaic and Davidic Covenants, with the latter two falling within the rubric of the Abrahamic Covenant itself.
The apostle Paul describes this very same concept throughout the Epistle to the Romans where he declares;

> For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.\(^\text{30}\)

And again in Romans 9;

> But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring\(^\text{31}\)

In both of these citations, Paul identifies the “people of God” (as Israel) and does not separate Gentile from Jew or Church from Israel. Rather, Paul speaks of the Gentile inclusion as the “offspring” of Abraham and “children of the promise.” To be “a Jew” in regards to the promise meant to the apostle that one must have received the “circumcision of the heart.” Thus, Paul finds no distinction between Jew and Gentile or Abraham’s seed and the church in regards to a singular people under Christ.\(^\text{32}\)

The afore mentioned facts, coupled with the singular promise allows the reader to ascertain the proper understanding of the relation between the church and Israel. Here, the question must be asked, “Is it not the same promise (Abrahamic) for both Jew and Gentile; for both church and Israel? Meaning, was not Abraham (or David) justified by the same Covenant head (Christ) that Paul was justified under and under the same Abrahamic rubric?\(^\text{33}\) He most certainly was!

Abraham is counted as the man of faith (Rom. 4:1-5, Heb. 11:8-10) and a proper response to the

---

\(^{30}\) Rom. 2:28-29 ESV

\(^{31}\) Rom. 9:6-8 ESV

\(^{32}\) However, it must be noted that Paul does in fact draw a distinction between Jews and the church in regards to the “people of the circumcision” where Jews were bringing disorder within the church; which is the basis of the Epistle to the Galatians. Also, Romans 11 seemingly uses “Israel” in the sense of corporate; possibly of a future, eschatological salvation whereby a great number of Jews of the “flesh” are justified.

\(^{33}\) Although it is noted that Abraham’s being counted “as righteous” came prior to the ratification of the Covenant in latter portions of Gen. 15. However, Abraham’s response was due to the initial promise found in Gen. 12:1-3.
promise insured his posterity. Moreover, texts such as Ephesians 1 (c.f. Rom. 8:29-30) explain to the reader that the elect of God were foreordained “before the foundation of the world” (v.3) to receive an “adoption as sons” through “Jesus Christ,” the Covenant Head. This is an election that applies to both the old and new era of Salvation History.

Simply put, the Old Testament saints were saved in Christ and thus, are a part of the church itself. Christ’s finished work on the cross was retroactive to the old era saints and as a result, they partake in the same salvific event as the new era saints, by the same Savior. This is the very same Savior that the now included Gentiles are assimilated through. Thus, it is seen that the elect, in both the old era of Salvation History and in the new, are assimilated under the same Covenant head and into the same promise, regardless of the Covenant (Eph. 2:12). Therefore, the reader can conclude that the promise, as found in Abraham and under Christ is for all eras of Salvation History. Thus, the church extends back into the Old Testament witness, therefore precluding the two people of God concept that is so prevalent in Dispensationalism.

The Meaning of the Millennium:

In addressing the meaning of the Revelation 20:1-6 “millennial” passages, it must first be noted that this is the only area in Scripture that attaches a “one-thousand year” time period unto the reign of the Christ. It must also be noted that; “the mention of the thousand-year reign occurs in the most figurative and difficult book in all of Scripture.” Next, the author asserts the classical Postmillennial understanding to the term “thousand” as a symbolic reference of “quantitative perfection.” It would be helpful to pause for a moment to ask a question. If one were within the first century and a member of the “seven churches” that the Apocalypse was addressed to, how would one go about understanding the term “thousand” – what resources

---

34 Ibid. Gentry; *He Shall Have Dominion.* Pg. 334
would they have used? Considering basic hermeneutical principles, where the original audience and historical setting must be taken into account, the only reasonable answer is to proclaim that the original audience deciphered this “letter” through the Old Testament writings. When the Old Testament Scriptures are evaluated in regards to the term “thousand,” the very concept being argued is seen. The “Torah” on more then one occasion uses this term (thousand) to signify the entirety of the subject; or an immense period of time. Dr. Kenneth Gentry explains:

The proper understanding of the thousand-year time frame in Revelation 20 is that it is representative of a long and glorious era and is not limited to a literal 365,000 days. The figure represents a perfect cube often, which is the number of quantitative perfection. The thousand here is no more literal than that which affirms God’s ownership of the cattle on a thousand hills (Psa. 50:10), or promises Israel will--be a thousand times more numerous (Deut. 1:11), or measures God’s love to a thousand generations (Deut. 7:9), or expresses the desire for a thousand years in God’s courts (Psa. 84:10), or compares a thousand years of our time to one of God’s days (Psa. 90:4). 35

Noting Gentry’s comments and adding that Revelation is extremely Jewish in its nature and highly symbolic, where a great majority of the structure and material is obtained via the Old Testament Scriptures, it is reasonable to conclude that this “millennium” is to be viewed as a symbolic reference to the reign of Christ. Moreover, verses 1-6 are highly symbolic in nature. Was the angel “literally” holding a key to the bottomless pit? Is Satan “literally” a “dragon” and a “serpent” or rather, is he an angel? Will Satan “literally” be bound with a chain? 37 Will an immaterial being such as Satan be held in a “literal” pit? Did John “literally” see the immaterial “souls” of the beheaded? Is the “mark” on the “foreheads and hands” spoken of in verse 4 a

35 Ibid. Gentry, pg. 335
36 Gentry proclaims; “John self-consciously takes on the mantel of the classical prophets (much like John the Baptist) and in doing so he structures his grammar to mimic the Hebrew of the Old Covenant prophets, whose material he abundantly adopts, often reapplying them...In fact, he organizes his material around Ezekiel’s structure...” Navigating the Book of Revelation; pg. 159-160.
37 Point in fact, Jesus describes the “binding of the strongman” (Satan) in reference to the coming of the Kingdom in Matt. 12:22-32; “But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house.” Matt. 12:28-29 ESV
“literal” mark; or rather, is it not more consistent to interpret these “marks” as the words and Commandments of God via the Old Testament witnesses? These verses taken in their literal sense, deny both the Old Testament witness that John draws from and the nature of Christ’s Kingdom. Rather, since the context dictates “symbolism,” then one should take the passage in question as symbols, looking to the Old Testament as a guide throughout the Apocalypse.

Moving on, verse 4 speaks of the “beheaded saints” reigning with Christ for a “thousand years.” However, it has already been established in a previous section that Christ is currently reigning, seated at the “right hand” of Power. Thus, this reigning confirms the historic Preteristic position of the Kingdom, whereby the Christ reigns from Heaven. Moreover, there is no text that proclaims a literal, “earthly reign” of Christ upon the earth; although this concept is often superimposed upon the text itself. This reign spoken of is from Heaven, as is apparent by the designation of “thrones” (Rev. 20:4). Throughout the Apocalypse, thrones are within view. In fact, the word “throne” or “thrones” is used thirty-seven times in the Revelation of Jesus Christ and in all but three of those instances it is in reference to the throne(s) in Heaven. The outlying instances are never in reference to God, the Lamb or the Saints, but rather, to the “Beast” and Satan. Also, it is helpful to add once again that God is an immaterial being, and therefore, is not literally seated upon a throne. Thus, even the reigning of the Saints with Christ is foretold in a “spiritual” sense, the very concept one sees via the New Testament witness. Dr. Gentry explains;

38 The precedent set forth in the Old Testament regards these “marks” as symbolic of the words and Commandments of God. The “forehead” is in reference to the mind where the Israelite was to love the LORD with their entire might and will. The “hand” is in reference to action, where the Israelite was to perform the Commandments and the Law. “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” (Deut. 6:4-9 ESV)

John opens with: “and I saw” (Rev. 20: 1a). This is strongly suggestive of its symbolic import and is evidence against a strictly literal interpretation of the one thousand...Revelation 20:4-6 speaks of the saints living and reigning with Christ, which is elsewhere presented as a **spiritual reality in the present experience of God’s people** (1 Cor. 13:2 1-22; Eph. 1:3; 2:6; Col. 3:1-2). This reigning of the saints with Christ on thrones pictures the kingdom of Christ, which is already established.  

Further support for the present argument, that the Revelation 20 millennial passages are to be viewed as the symbolic entirety of Christ’s reign from Heaven, is found in the exegete David Chilton;

In essence, the question of the Millennium centers on the mediatorial Kingdom of Christ: When did (or will) Christ’s Kingdom begin? And once we pose the question this way, something amazing happens – something almost unheard of in Christian circles: Unity! From the Day of Pentecost onward, orthodox Christians have recognized that Christ’s reign began at His Resurrection/Ascension and continues until all things have been thoroughly subdued under His feet, as St. Peter clearly declared (Acts 2:30-36). “The Millennium,” in these terms, is simply the Kingdom of Christ. It was inaugurated at Christ’s First Advent, has been in existence for almost two thousand years, and will go on until Christ’s Second Advent at the Last Day. In “millennial” terminology, this means that the return of Christ and the resurrection of all men will take place after “the Millennium.”  In this objective sense, therefore, **orthodox Christianity has always been postmillennialis**.  

Chilton goes on to add;  

The reign of the saints is thus analogous to their worship: The whole Church, in heaven and on earth, worships together before the Throne of God, “tabernacling” in heaven (7:15; 12:12; 13:6). To ask whether or not the saints’ worship is heavenly or earthly is to propose a false dilemma, for the Church is both heavenly and earthly. Similarly, the Church’s sphere of rule includes the earth, but it is exercised **from the Throne in heaven**.  

When this “Kingdom Now” concept is coupled with the Postmillennial hope, the future creation and current Kingdom takes on its full meaning. Christ is currently reigning and will make the nations His disciples per the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). The gates of Hell

---

40 Ibid. Gentry; *He Shall Have Dominion*, pg. 335.  
42 Ibid. Chilton, pg. 204
will not prevail against the church (Matt. 16:18) but rather, the mustard seed will grow to its full size, encompassing the entire world (Luke 13:18-19). All of the nations will funnel into Zion to learn and gain instruction at the “mountain of the Lord” and will walk in the path of the Law of the Lord (Isa. 2:3). It is the concept of the “Now – Not Yet” aspect of the New Heaven and the New Earth, promised “to a nation not called by my name” that will result in the partial reversal of the curse, only to find its fulfillment in the bodily return of Christ “on the last day” (John 6:40). It is the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham, where his “offspring” will be as numerous as the stars of Heaven (Gen. 15:5). Lastly, it is the concept that Jude sets forth when he proclaims; “to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen” (Jude 1:25).

**Conclusion:**

It has been demonstrated that the *Revelation of Jesus Christ* was pertinent to its readers in its first century audience. Although the Apocalypse was written for the modern reader, it was not written to the modern reader. Rather, Revelation was penned prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, as the preponderance of the internal evidence shows. Thus, the apostle had his original audience in mind for the entirety of the vision; to tell his readers that which would “soon take place” (Rev. 1:1). Likewise, Acts 2:32-36 and texts associated with it clearly show that the Lord Jesus is currently reigning from Heaven, at the “right hand” of the Father. Jesus made it clear throughout His earthly ministry that the Kingdom had arrived (Matt. 4:17, Mark 1:15).

43 A designation between the Old and New era of redemptive history where there is a contrast drawn between corporate, Geo-political Israel and the Spiritual Israel of the church. The New Heavens and the New Earth is also a reference to the end of the Jewish economy. John Owen writes; “The time when the work here mentioned, of planting the heavens, and laying the foundation of the earth, was performed by God, was when he ‘divided the sea’ (v. 15), and gave the law (v. 16), and said to Zion, ‘Thou art my people’ – that is, when he took the children of Israel out of Egypt, and formed them in the wilderness into a church and state. Then he planted the heavens, and laid the foundation of the earth – made the new world; that is, brought forth order, and government, and beauty, from the confusion wherein before they were. This is the planting of the heavens, and laying the foundation of the earth in the world.” (See 2 Pet. 3) Chilton, pg. 214.

It has also been demonstrated that the “people of God” are not split into two distinct groups; namely, Israel and the church. Rather, Jeremiah 31 clearly teaches that the New Covenant order would be made with the people of Israel, in reference to the church. Likewise, it has been demonstrated that the Covenantal headship of Christ governed both era’s of redemptive history, where the multiple Covenants are attached to the singular promise made to Abraham; with the new era describing the Gentile inclusion as the “seed” and “offspring” of Abraham. Thus, ruling out a future return to the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, where corporate Israel reigns with Christ in His earthly, millennial kingdom.\(^\text{44}\)

Lastly, it had been demonstrated that the term “thousand” was used throughout the Old Testament to signify a great duration, a high number and more pointedly, quantitative perfection. The highly symbolic nature of Revelation, specifically chapter 20, disallows a literal meaning of the term “thousand.” The chapter is wrought with symbolism, from the “chain” that binds Satan, to the “thrones” in which the Saints occupy. Also, it has been demonstrated that the Kingdom reign is not in fact an earthly reign, but rather, a Heavenly one, where the throne of God spiritually presides. Finally, the reader is brought “full circle” by the words of David Chilton, who demonstrates the relation of Acts 2:30-36 to the Revelation 20:1-6 text. Here, the reader is reminded by Chilton that the church has universally recognized the enthronement and reign of Christ to have taken place at His resurrection; again disproving the Dispensational understanding of the Revelation 20:1-6 text and the nature of the Lord Jesus Christ’s Kingdom within that system. Noting these truths, the author is justified in proclaiming; “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10).

\(^\text{44}\) Note: Heb. 8:13 with the Old Covenant being labeled obsolete; Heb. 9:11-14 in reference to the inadequacy of the Sacrificial system and 1 Pet. 3:18 statement of Christ’s death “once for all.”
Bibliography


