

Does the Book of Revelation Teach the Doctrine of Premillennialism?

By Allen Dvorak

Introduction:

- I. Illustration: The mother of the sons of Zebedee requested of Jesus that her sons, James and John, be given positions of prominence in His kingdom (Matthew 20:20-28; see also Mark 10:35-45).
 - A. Jesus responded by noting that greatness in the kingdom would be a matter of service, not position.
 - B. Jesus told a parable about the kingdom as He approached Jerusalem because some supposed that the kingdom of God would appear immediately (Luke 19:11-27).
 - C. Earlier in His ministry, the people who had observed the feeding of the 5,000 wanted to take Jesus by force and make Him king, but Jesus withdrew to prevent this (John 6:15)!
- II. As Pontius Pilate interrogated Jesus about His kingship, Jesus made a revealing comment about the nature of His kingdom.
 - A. **John 18:36 (ESV)** ³⁶ Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.”
- III. Objectives of our study:
 - A. Give a general description of dispensationalism, with emphasis on its eschatology
 - B. Note the nature of apocalyptic literature
 - C. Discuss the fulfillment of the 2 Samuel promise to David in the existing kingdom
 - D. Offer an explanation of the teaching of Revelation 20

Body:

I. **Basic Tenets of Dispensationalism**

- A. Michael J. Lester defines dispensationalism as follows:
 1. “Dispensationalism is a system of historical progression consisting of a series of stages in God’s self-revelation to man, anchored by a historical-grammatical hermeneutic which results in a distinction between Israel and the Church and which also unifies progressive revelation around a doxological purpose.”¹
 2. He breaks down his definition into three “essentials”:
 - a. A normal, historical grammatical hermeneutic
 - 1) “The first non-negotiable is a recognition that a commitment to the practice of consistent, normal, literal, historical-grammatical method of Bible interpretation is mandatory. This is our hermeneutical approach.”²
 - 2) “Showers explains that dispensationalism is ‘convinced that the historical-grammatical method should be employed for all of Scripture, including those prophetic passages related to Israel and the Kingdom of God.’ This method of

¹ Lester, 39.

² Ibid., 28.

Bible interpretation is a key component within dispensationalism and is the foundation for the entire system.³

- 3) “This distinction [between Israel and the church – asd] (and others) is born out of a system of hermeneutics which is consistently followed and which is usually called the grammatical-historical or ‘natural’ method of interpretation. This method includes the principle that words are to be interpreted as having their usual or literal meaning unless the text, or context, of a given passage clearly indicates that they are to be taken figuratively. In other words, dispensationalism is a logical outgrowth of the principle of literal interpretation, for it is strict adherence to this principle that leads to the corollary that the Bible is to be interpreted dispensationally. In fact, no one will ever properly understand (or even fairly attack) dispensationalism who do not view it in this light. The dispensationalist became such because, as a faithful exegete or interpreter, he endeavored to follow *consistently* the grammatical-historical method. This approach, in turn, requires the literal interpretation of many passages which others take in a figurative sense. Some exegetes profess to adhere to the grammatical-historical method, but in crucial instances they often tend to spiritualize certain passages in such a way as to violate a valid and consistent hermeneutics. Dispensationalism, then, represents an honest attempt to be faithful to the sound hermeneutical principles of normal and contextual interpretation and to the doctrine of progressive revelation.”⁴
 - 4) “By the way, this default position – even for the prophetic portions – is not without warrant. The dispensationalist looks to the biblical record, at the fulfilled prophecies, and uses that as a baseline on how to interpret the remaining prophecies still unfulfilled. When the Old Testament prophesied that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5.2), He was literally born there. When Isaiah prophesies that the Messiah would be in a rich man’s tomb (Isaiah 53.9), He was literally placed within the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. In Psalm 34.20, it’s prophesied that no bones will be broken for the Messiah – this is exactly what happened. With this precedent, when a dispensationalist reads about a temple in Jerusalem during the Millennial Kingdom, he has no other option than to believe that the temple will be literally rebuilt. When a dispensationalist reads that the Son of David will establish a kingdom with no end (Isaiah 9.6-7) of David will establish a kingdom with no end (Isaiah 9.6-7) 12; Isaiah 9.7; Luke 1.26-33), he cannot accept a spiritual fulfillment that Jesus has already done that. People may disagree with the conclusion, but they can’t fault us for inconsistency here. This is where the hermeneutical process takes us.”⁵
- b. A distinction between Israel and the church
- 1) “In the context of this discussion, continuity seeks to find a continuous theme from the Old Testament to the New Testament. Those on the continuity side find only one people of God - there is no distinction between the church and

³ Lester, 42. Lester quotes Renald Showers, *There Really is a Difference! A Comparison of Covenant and Dispensational Theology*. No page number cited.

⁴ Barker.

⁵ Lester, 120-121. There appears to be an error in the text here; I have preserved the text as it appears in Lester’s book.

Israel. The terminology that describes the continuity side runs the full spectrum - from the church being the replacement for Israel, to the church being the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies ... Discontinuity sees a different plan unfolding in the New Testament. Previously, God had worked through His people, the nation of Israel. Now, He is working through a different group - the local church. The closer one leans toward discontinuity, the more they fall on the spectrum of dispensational theology.”⁶

- 2) “Dispensational eschatology in no way minimizes the Cross or despiritualizes the millennial kingdom. The contingent offer of the Davidic kingdom by Jesus was bona fide, and it was not a spiritual kingdom that He announced. That does not mean that dispensationalists fail to recognize the rule of God in the heart today, but the body of believers today constitutes the church, not the Davidic kingdom. The sometime distinction between the kingdom of heaven and kingdom of God is not an issue at all. All shades of theological thought recognize different kingdoms or different aspects of the rule of God even though different labels may be attached to them. The question is whether the church is recognized as a distinct purpose of God today and whether or not a place is given for the literal fulfillment of the Davidic, Messianic, earthly, and spiritual kingdoms in the future Millennium on this present earth. The recognition of the distinctiveness of the church and consistently literal interpretation of Israel’s promises are the bases of a dispensational eschatology.”⁷

c. God’s glory is the unifying purpose for history

B. The classic dispensationalist sees seven dispensations in the Scriptures.⁸

1. Innocence (Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden)
2. Conscience (Adam through the flood judgment)
3. Human or civil government
4. Promise or patriarchal rule
5. Law (Sinai to Calvary)
6. Church (grace)
7. Millennial Kingdom (fullness of times)

C. Dispensationalists and premillennialism

1. “Premillennialism is the default position of dispensationalism (though, in fairness, post-tribulational Covenant Theologians also hold to a premillennial reign of Christ).”⁹
2. “Premillennialism is the teaching that Christ’s second coming will inaugurate a visible kingdom of righteousness that will comprise the whole earth. The term ‘dispensationalism’ refers to a system of scriptural interpretation that stresses literal

⁶ Lester, 46-47.

⁷ Ryrie, 185.

⁸ I have not developed these in the outline since that is a primary topic of another lecture.

⁹ Lester, 57.

fulfillment of prophecy as well as distinctions in God's administrative program historically, that is, 'dispensations.'"¹⁰

3. Generally, the theory of premillennialism is as follows: (a slight adaptation of W. E. Blackstone's theory)¹¹
 - a. In the Old Testament, after God called the nation of Israel out of Egyptian bondage, when they desired a king, God permitted them to have one over their nation for the purpose of teaching the Israelites and preparing them for the Christ who would come and be a universal king, that is, over all the nations.
 - b. At the first coming of Christ, He intended to set up an earthly kingdom as it was in the days of Solomon, but was rejected by the Jews.
 - c. Because of this Jewish rejection, Jesus did not establish the kingdom as He had planned, but rather postponed it, establishing the church instead to fill the gap.
 - d. When Christ comes the second time, He is coming for the purpose of preparing for the establishment of the kingdom that He came to build the first time He came into the world. These preparations will take several steps:
 - 1) First, the righteous dead will be resurrected and, with the living saints, will be "raptured" into the skies to be with Christ for a period of seven years. Of all this, the unbelieving world will hear and see nothing, except that the people in question will have disappeared.
 - 2) Since there will not be a single true believer left in the world, wickedness will be running rampant during a period of "tribulation" on the earth, a seven-year period of time.
 - 3) Many believe that the Antichrist will appear during this tribulation period and that God will begin to deal with the physical nation of Israel again as His chosen people.
 - 4) Most premillennial views include the national conversion of the Jews to Christ.
 - 5) At the end of the great tribulation, Christ will come down with a heavenly army and fight the Battle of Armageddon, overthrowing all wickedness on the earth and at the same time resurrecting the "tribulation saints," those individuals who were converted to Christ during the tribulation period.
 - e. Jesus will establish His millennial kingdom and will reign in Jerusalem on the throne of David for the period of 1,000 years. During this time, Satan will be "bound."
 - f. After the 1,000 years, Satan will be loosed for a little season, there will occur the revolt of Gog and Magog and their defeat, the final resurrection of the wicked will take place and then the last judgment (the judgment at the great white throne) will take place.
 - g. The righteous will go to heaven and the wicked will be consigned to an eternal hell.

¹⁰ Lester, 29.

¹¹ I am indebted to Ferrell Jenkins for this summary and his work in this area. Blackstone was a dispensationalist.
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4. “Dispensationalists are almost always pretribulational when it comes to the Rapture.”¹²

D. The Millennial Kingdom – a critical component of dispensationalism

1. “Of course, the thousand-year reign of Christ on the earth is also a feature of dispensational eschatology, as it is of nondispensational premillennialism. The difference between the dispensational and nondispensational views of premillennialism is not in the fact of the coming millennial kingdom (for both include it in their systems) but in the integration of the kingdom into their overall systems. The doctrine of the millennial kingdom is for the dispensationalist an integral part of his entire scheme and interpretation of many biblical passages. For the nondispensationalist the millennial kingdom is more like an addendum to his system ... A millennial kingdom fully integrated into the whole theological system is a feature of normative dispensational premillennialism.”¹³
2. “It is one’s understanding of the Davidic/Messianic kingdom that differentiates various theologies. The amillennialist sees that kingdom as the church ruled by Christ. The covenant premillennialist understands the church as the new Israel but also recognizes the future reign of Christ in the millennial kingdom. Almost all progressive dispensationalists do not say that the church is the new Israel, but they teach that the Davidic/Messianic kingdom has been inaugurated and is now operative with Christ on the throne of David in heaven and will operate on this earth in the future Millennium. The normative dispensationalist also does not see the church as the new Israel but understands the fulfillment of the Davidic kingdom promise not happening now but in the Millennium.”¹⁴
3. How do dispensationalists answer the argument that the kingdom is already in existence? The view of “normative” dispensationalists is that during the incarnation of Jesus, He offered an earthly kingdom to the Jews, a kingdom which they rejected.
 - a. “The kingdom which Christ faithfully offered while on earth was the very same earthly, Messianic, Davidic kingdom which the Jews expected from the Old Testament prophecies. But it is a matter of history that such a Kingdom was not ushered in at the first advent of Christ.”¹⁵
 - b. “This kingdom was at hand, that is, it came nigh, when Jesus, the King, came. So much so, that the favored disciples witnessed a foretaste of its glory and power on the Mount of Transfiguration. But the Jews rejected it and slew their King. They were not willing to have this man reign over them, and therefore the Kingdom did not ‘immediately appear.’”¹⁶
 - c. “This we believe is the true explanation of the subject. The Kingdom did come 'nigh' when Christ came, and had they received Him, it would have been manifested, but now it is in abeyance, or waiting until He comes again.”¹⁷

¹² Lester, 92.

¹³ Ryrie, 173-174.

¹⁴ Ibid., 182-183.

¹⁵ Ryrie, *The Basis...*, 93.

¹⁶ Blackstone, 83.

¹⁷ Ibid., 88.

II. The Nature of Apocalyptic Literature

- A. The word “apocalyptic” is related etymologically to the Greek word *apokalupsis* (ἀποκάλυψις) which means “*an uncovering; prop. a laying bare, making naked*” (Thayer, 62). This Greek word is translated “revelation” in Revelation 1:1.
- B. The *primary* purpose of apocalyptic literature is not to hide, but to “uncover” or “reveal” a message. Apocalyptic literature, however, employs signs and symbols which would be largely unintelligible to those unfamiliar with them, thus hiding the meaning of the book from some readers. In this respect, the purpose of the literary form is like that of parables (cf. Matthew 13:10ff).
 1. “Apocalyptic literature flourished during a time of some great national crisis when a formidable enemy threatened the life of the people--a time of trial and stress.”¹⁸
 2. A distinguishing characteristic of apocalyptic literature is the use of visions and symbols.
 - a. “The apocalyptists give full rein to their imaginations in extravagant and exotic language and in imagery of a fantastic and bizarre kind. To such an extent is this true that symbolism may be said to be the language of apocalyptic. Some of this symbolism no doubt had its origin in the fertile imaginations of the apocalyptists themselves through their experiences of dreams, visions and the like. But for the most part they were using stereotyped language and symbols which belonged to a fairly well-defined tradition whose roots went back into the distant past.”¹⁹
 3. Ray Summers makes the following important observation about the interpretation of apocalyptic literature:²⁰
 - a. “For this reason the ordinary rules of interpretation cannot be followed. Usually the words of any passage of Scripture must be understood in their plain and natural sense, unless there is some reason to take them figuratively. The presumption is always in favor of the literal meaning; if one takes it otherwise, he must show the cause. This is not the case in Revelation. In this book, presented in pictorial form, one must assume that the symbols are to be taken figuratively unless there is good reason for regarding them as literal. There are few places where literal language is used in the midst of symbolical, but these stand out in bold relief as Greek words stand out in a context of English.”
- C. One may already be able to see the possibility of difficulties when apocalyptic literature is approached with a “normal” or literal method of interpretation. Interpreting figurative language in a literal manner can make for some bizarre conclusions.
 1. In addition to the figurative language characteristic of apocalyptic literature, some numbers in Scripture are generally understood to be used symbolically to convey certain ideas.
 - a. The number “7” is typically recognized as representing perfection.
 - b. The number “3” is typically associated with deity.

¹⁸ Hailey, 19.

¹⁹ Russell, 122. Cited by Jenkins, 39.

²⁰ Summers, 48.

2. Commenting on the number of servants of God sealed (Revelation 7:4-8), Gentry writes:²¹
 - a. “Inarguably, an elevated symbolism is here presented. If nothing else, the perfect rounding of numbers along with the exact and identical count in each of the tribes bespeak a symbolic representation. The number ‘1000’ is frequently used in Scripture as an indefinite, yet significantly large number (Psa. 90:4; Dan. 7:10; 2 Pet. 3:8; Heb. 12:22.)”
3. How does the dispensationalist interpret numbers in the book of Revelation?
 - a. Gentry comments: “As Chilton has observed: ‘Many rush from their first profession of faith to the last book in the Bible, treating it as little more than a book of hallucinations, hastily disdaining a sober-minded attempt to allow the Bible to interpret itself – and finding, ultimately, only a reflection of their own prejudices.’ Too often such a situation is due to the temptations presented by biblical scholars who gear their works for the popular market. This seems to be especially true of dispensational theologians. For instance, Charles Ryrie – an able scholar and probably the leading dispensationalist theologian of the present day – has written of Revelation: ‘How do we make sense out of all those beasts and thrones and horsemen and huge numbers like 200 million? Answer: Take it at face value.’ Later he gives an example of the usefulness of his ‘face value’ hermeneutic in seeking the correct interpretation of Revelation 9:1-2 (the locusts from the abyss): ‘John’s description sounds very much like some kind of war machine or UFO. Demons have the ability to take different shapes, so it is quite possible that John is picturing a coming invasion of warlike UFOs. Until someone comes up with a satisfactory answer to the UFO question, this possibility should not be ruled out.’ Such an interpretation makes one wonder whose face determines the value!”²²
- D. The “normative” dispensationalist doesn’t necessarily interpret Revelation 20 in a literal fashion because of presuppositions about apocalyptic literature.
 1. He sees a literal millennial kingdom on earth because he interprets the Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming kingdom in a literal fashion, i.e., as applying to the physical nation of Israel.
 2. Pairing those prophecies with the mention of a millennial reign in Revelation 20, he is compelled by consistency to his hermeneutic to regard that reign in a literal fashion *despite the nature of apocalyptic literature*.

III. A King on David’s Throne

- A. Elements of the promise made to David (2 Samuel 7:12-16)
 1. The kingdom of David’s offspring would be established (v. 12).
 2. David’s offspring would “build a house” for the Lord’s name (v. 13).
 3. The Lord would establish the throne of his kingdom forever (v. 13).
 4. David’s throne would be established forever (v. 16).
- B. Solomon fulfilled some of these elements.

²¹ Gentry, 224.

²² Ibid., 10-11. He cites David Chilton, *Paradise Restored*, 153, and Charles Ryrie, *The Living End*, 37.

1. **1 Kings 2:12 (ESV)** ¹² So Solomon sat on the throne of David his father, and his kingdom was firmly established.
 2. **1 Kings 3:6 (ESV)** ⁶ And Solomon said, “You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant David my father, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you. And you have kept for him this great and steadfast love and have given him a son to sit on his throne this day.
 3. **1 Kings 5:5 (ESV)** ⁵ And so I intend to build a house for the name of the Lord my God, as the Lord said to David my father, ‘Your son, whom I will set on your throne in your place, shall build the house for my name.’
 4. **1 Kings 1:47 (ESV)** ⁴⁷ Moreover, the king’s servants came to congratulate our lord King David, saying, ‘May your God make the name of Solomon more famous than yours, and make his throne greater than your throne.’ And the king bowed himself on the bed.
 5. **1 Chronicles 29:23 (ESV)** ²³ Then Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord as king in place of David his father. And he prospered, and all Israel obeyed him.
 6. Lester comments on the concept of dual fulfillment: “Other theological perspectives bring in an “already, not yet” hermeneutic. This prophecy has already been fulfilled partially, but not yet completely fulfilled. It attempts to find a middle ground. Rather than giving a black and white answer – that is, the prophecy is either fulfilled or it isn’t – they add an “in-between” answer. I’m not sure that this helps solve hermeneutical issues as it leads to subjective interpretation.”²³
- C. The throne of David represented leadership of God’s people.
1. **Jeremiah 22:1–2 (ESV)** ¹ Thus says the Lord: “Go down to the house of the king of Judah and speak there this word, ² and say, ‘Hear the word of the Lord, O king of Judah, who sits on the throne of David, you, and your servants, and your people who enter these gates.
 2. **Luke 1:32 (ESV)** ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David,

IV. The Time of the Kingdom

- A. The Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, had a dream. In contrast to the “magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers and the Chaldeans,” Daniel was able to identify the dream and give its interpretation by divine revelation (Daniel 2).
1. The king had seen an image made of various materials.
 2. A stone, cut out by no human hand, struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, breaking them into pieces.
 3. While the other materials of the image were broken into pieces and carried away by the wind, the stone became a great mountain that filled the whole earth.
- B. The interpretation of the dream: five kingdoms (Daniel 2:31-45)
1. Four kingdoms
 - a. Gold head of the image represents the Babylonian kingdom (vv. 32, 38).

²³ Lester, 118-119.

- b. Silver chest and arms represents the Persians (v. 32).
 - c. Bronze middle and thighs represents the Greeks (vv. 32, 39).
 - d. Legs of iron and feet partly of iron and of clay represents the Romans (vv. 33, 40-43).
 - 1) Note that some premillennialists identify the feet of iron and clay as a kingdom separate from the Roman empire of the first century. Suggestions for the identity of this separate kingdom include the Holy Roman Empire and the modern-day European Union.
 - 2) Such an identification allows the establishment of the Davidic kingdom to be delayed quite some time, even into the future.
 - 3) However, normative dispensationalists argue that the kingdom Jesus offered and the Jews rejected was, in fact, the Davidic kingdom anticipated in 2 Samuel 7.
 - 4) This raises the interesting question: If Jesus knew that the earthly Davidic kingdom wasn't actually to be established until much later, why did He preach that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17)?
2. A fifth kingdom (vv. 44-45)
- a. "And in the days of those kings" – the time of the establishment of the fifth kingdom
 - b. This fifth kingdom would bring the four kingdoms to an end just like the stone cut from a mountain. This kingdom would never be destroyed and would stand forever (vv. 44).
- C. "The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure."
1. **Matthew 3:1–2 (ESV)** ¹ In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, ² "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."
 2. **Matthew 4:17 (ESV)** ¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."
 3. Jesus has been made both Lord and Christ!
 - a. David spoke about the resurrection of the Christ in Psalm 16 (Acts 2:25-28) because of the prophecy of 2 Samuel 7 (Acts 2:30-31).
 - 1) **Acts 2:36 (ESV)** ³⁶ Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."
 - b. Psalm 2 also mentions the enthronement of the Son (see especially v. 6).
 - 1) The early church connected this psalm with the treatment of Jesus by Herod and Pilate (Acts 4:23-28).
 - 2) In his sermon of Acts 13, Paul connected the coming of Jesus with 2 Samuel 7 (see v. 23). He also connected the coming of Jesus with Psalm 2:7 (Acts 13:32-33).
 - a) **Acts 13:23 (ESV)** ²³ Of this man's offspring God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised.

- b) **Acts 13:32–33 (ESV)** ³² And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, ³³ this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, “ ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you.’ ”
- c. The implication of the quotations in Hebrews 1:5a (Psalm 2) and 1:5b (2 Samuel 7) is that Jesus has already become the fulfillment of them (since it is affirmed that He has inherited a more excellent “name” than the angels).
- D. After Pentecost, the kingdom is no longer spoken of as being in the future, but rather as being in existence.
1. Jesus is reigning on David’s throne (Acts 2:29-36; compare Hebrews 1:3; 3:3-6 and 1 Chronicles 29:23).
 2. The Colossians were translated into the kingdom (Colossians 1:13-14).
 3. John was a partaker in the kingdom (Revelation 1:6, 9).
 4. At the final coming of Jesus, He will “deliver up,” rather than “set up,” the kingdom (1 Corinthians 15:24-28).
 5. Ryrie notes that progressive dispensationalists believe that “Christ has *already* inaugurated the Davidic reign in heaven at the right hand of the Father, which equals the throne of David, though He does not yet reign as Davidic king on earth during the Millennium.”²⁴
- E. The Jews, even the disciples, were confused about the nature of the kingdom of Christ.
1. Like the premillennialists of our day, they believed that the Christ would set up a kingdom like that of David and Solomon; they believed that He would be the king over an earthly kingdom, sitting on the throne of David in Jerusalem (John 6:15; Luke 19:11; Acts 1:6).
 2. **Jeremiah 22:30 (ESV)** ³⁰ Thus says the Lord: “Write this man down as childless, a man who shall not succeed in his days, for none of his offspring shall succeed in sitting on the throne of David and ruling again in Judah.”

V. The Rejection of the Messiah

- A. The view of normative dispensationalists is that the Davidic kingdom was offered by Jesus, but the Jews rejected Jesus, effectively postponing the kingdom.
1. “We recognize a universal kingdom over which God rules the entire world (1 Chron. 29:11; Ps. 145:13). We recognize the Davidic/Messianic kingdom over which our Lord will rule in the present-earth Millennium. (Reconstructed dispensationalism teaches that Christ has already begun that rule on the Davidic throne in heaven.) We understand a mystery form of the kingdom as announced and illustrated in Matthew 13. And there is the kingdom of His dear Son (Col. 1:13) into which believers enter by the new birth. ... It was this Davidic kingdom that Jesus offered and not the general rule of God over the earth or His spiritual reign in individual lives. If it were the spiritual kingdom Christ was offering, then ‘such an announcement would have had no special significance whatever to Israel, for such a rule of God has always been recognized among the people of God’ (McClain). The kingdom the Lord preached was something different from either the general rule of God in His overall sovereignty or

²⁴ Ryrie, 193.

the rule of God in the individual heart. Therefore, when a dispensationalist says that the kingdom is postponed, he is speaking of the Davidic kingdom, but he also affirms the continuing presence of the universal kingdom and the spiritual rule of God in individual hearts today. God does not rule in only one way or through only one means.²⁵

2. “Dispensational eschatology in no way minimizes the Cross or despiritualizes the millennial kingdom. The contingent offer of the Davidic kingdom by Jesus was bona fide, and it was not a spiritual kingdom that He announced.”²⁶
3. “To sum up: The Cross is in no way minimized by the teaching of the postponement of the kingdom. The postponement relates to the outworking of God’s purpose in the church, the body of Christ, and certainly the Cross is central to this work of God. Further, even if there had been no church as a part of God’s program, the Cross was necessary to the establishing of the Messianic kingdom. In both purposes of God—the church and the kingdom—the Cross is basic. That is the teaching of dispensationalism, and instead of minimizing the cross of Christ it magnifies it.”²⁷

B. The rejection of the Messiah was clearly prophesied (Isaiah 53:3; Psalm 22)!

VI. Revelation 20

- A. The apocalypse of John is the revelation of God’s plan to avenge the persecution of His people.
 1. While we could spend much time studying the specific application of Revelation to the readers of the apostle John’s day, we don’t want to miss the overriding message of the book...which is the same as all apocalyptic literature...*in the end, God will win.*
 2. The book of Revelation pictures a struggle between Jesus Christ and Satan. Persecuted saints were and are a part of that struggle.
 3. The good news is that Jesus wins! Regardless of how hopeless the battle may seem here on earth, the dragon won’t win ultimately.
 - a. Viewing Revelation is like reading a book where you skip to the last chapter of the story and find out how it ends.
 - b. The saints of John’s day needed to know that their struggle would eventually be victorious.
- B. Although many interpret Revelation as being almost entirely eschatological in its focus, John gave some chronological markers for the fulfillment of the apocalypse.

²⁵ Ryrie, 182–183. Ryrie cites McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, 303.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 185.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 177. In a footnote, Ryrie comments on the “postponing” of the kingdom: “One readily admits that the dispensational concept concerning the offer and rejection of the kingdom at the first advent of Christ is inadequately described by the word *postponed*. That word views the matter from a human standpoint and in relation to the kingdom program for Israel only. From the divine perspective, of course, nothing is ever postponed, for all events are taking place according to God’s perfectly preplanned order and right on schedule. **Also, from God’s viewpoint the fulfillment of Israel’s promised kingdom was never scheduled until the second advent, though it was offered at the first advent** (emphasis mine – asd). The word *postponed* is justified only from the human viewpoint and only in relation to the kingdom purpose. Nevertheless, its use does have justification, and it has been found helpful in conveying the idea involved. Though one could wish for a more inclusive word, there does not seem to be sufficient reason for rejecting it completely. See the discussion by Stanley D. Toussaint (“The Contingency of the Coming of the Kingdom,” in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands*, ed. Charles H. Dyer and Roy B. Zuck [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994], 226–27).

1. John began and ended the book with the warning that the prophesied events were to transpire soon.
 - a. “things which must shortly take place” - Revelation 1:1
 - b. “for the time is near” - Revelation 1:3
 - c. “I am coming soon.” - Revelation 3:11
 - d. “the things which must shortly take place.” - Revelation 22:6
 - e. “Behold, I am coming quickly” - Revelation 22:7 (the “coming” in this context is the Lord's coming in judgment upon the harlot)
 - f. “Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand.” - Revelation 22:10²⁸
 - g. “And behold, I am coming quickly,” - Revelation 22:12
 - h. “Surely I am coming quickly.” - Revelation 22:20
 2. The main storyline of the apocalypse is God’s judgment against the great harlot.
 3. I believe that some of the events of Revelation 20, however, are eschatological in their fulfillment.
- C. As already noted, the concept of an earthly reign of Jesus in the future is based on a literal, historical-grammatical method of interpreting king/kingdom prophecies made to Israel. The duration of that reign, however, is drawn from Revelation 20.
- D. Some things NOT found in Revelation 20:
1. After a brief summary of premillennialism and the millennial reign, Hailey states:
 - a. “The theory must read into the passage (vv. 1-10) all that it claims to draw from it, for the following are not mentioned in the text: (1) the second coming of Christ, (2) a bodily resurrection, (3) a reign of Christ on earth, (4) the literal throne of David, (5) Jerusalem of [sic] Palestine, (6) conversion of the Jews, or (7) the church on earth. A theory that rests on a passage of Scripture in which not one of its peculiar tenets of doctrine is found cannot be true.”²⁹
 2. Although Hailey is correct about those seven things not being mentioned in the pericope under consideration, it is not the claim of the dispensationalist that this passage teaches all these details found in premillennial theory.
- E. Observations about Revelation 20:1-10:
1. The thousand-year period is:
 - a. The time during which Satan is bound
 - b. The time during which the martyrs reigned with Christ
 - c. The time during which those who shared in the first resurrection (the martyrs?) will reign with Christ (see 2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 22:5)
 2. Is this millennium a literal period of time?

²⁸ Compare Daniel 8:26 in which Daniel was told to “seal up the vision, for it refers to many days in the future.”

²⁹ Hailey, 390.

- a. Many interpreters (premillennialists in general/dispensationalists in particular) have reasoned thus and have attempted to determine the terminals of this millennium.
 - b. Are other details of the text to be understood literally? The key? The bottomless pit? The great chain?
 - c. We must remember the nature of apocalyptic literature, i.e., the extensive use of symbols.
 - d. If not literal, what does the millennium represent?
 - 1) “the full and complete period of time in the mind and purpose of God”³⁰
 - 2) “This period of time is not intended to be a literal, exact period of time.”³¹
 - 3) “We have seen that, as the number *seven* connotes a fullness of *quality* in Biblical imagery, the number *ten* contains the idea of a fullness of *quantity*; in other words, it stands for *manyness*. A thousand multiplies and intensifies this (10 x 10 x 10), in order to express great vastness (cf. 5:11; 7:4-8; 9:16; 11:3, 13; 12:6; 14:1, 3, 20). Thus, God claims to own ‘the cattle on a thousand hills’ (Ps. 50:10). This of course does not mean the cattle on the 1,001st hill belongs to someone else. God owns all the cattle on all the hills. But He says ‘a thousand’ to indicate that there are many hills, and much cattle (cf. Deut. 1:11; 7:9; Ps. 68:17; 84:10; 90:4). Similarly, the **thousand years** of Revelation 20 represent a vast, undefined period of time (although its limited, provisional nature as a pre-consummation era is underlined by the fact that the phrase is mentioned only six times in this chapter). It has already lasted almost 2,000 years and will probably go on for many more.”³²
 - 4) “I believe with Wallace, Milligan, and others that the ‘1,000 years’ does not speak of a period of time at all. It speaks of a state of affairs, a condition of things. When it applies to the binding of Satan, it means he is perfectly and altogether bound. When it applies to the saints, it speaks of their perfect and total victory and triumph. The use of the number ‘1,000’ is fairly common. You remember how often we have read of thousands and ten times ten thousand, etc. This is to convey the idea of bigness, exhaustiveness... ‘Thousand’ speaks of bigness, completeness, totality.”³³
3. Although the binding of Satan might suggest total inactivity, the binding of Satan has a very specific result: he is unable to “deceive the nations any longer” (v. 3; see 1 Peter 5:8-9; Ephesians 6:10-18).
 - a. Satan gave his authority to the sea beast, using an empire to do his bidding (13:2-4; 17:1, 15)
 - b. Notice that when Satan is released, he does precisely what he was restricted from doing during his imprisonment (20:7).
 - 1) Satan gathers Gog and Magog to fight once again against God’s saints, but he is defeated and thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur (20:8-10).

³⁰ Ibid., 394.

³¹ Ogden, 356-357.

³² Chilton, 506-507.

³³ McGuiggan, 292-293.

- 2) This lake was prepared especially for the devil and his angels (20:14; Matthew 25:41, 46).
4. My conclusion is that Revelation 20:7-15 speaks to events that will occur at the end of time.
 - a. “Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them... Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire” (20:13-14).
 - b. “The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Corinthians 15:26).

Conclusion:

- I. Since the emphasis of dispensationalist eschatology is on the present-earth millennial reign of Christ, the commitment of dispensationalism to a literal hermeneutic is of critical importance.
 - A. “Consistent literalism is at the heart of dispensational eschatology.”³⁴
- II. Apocalyptic literature features the extensive use of symbolic language not intended to be taken literally.
- III. Although the normative dispensationalist denies the present existence of the “Davidic kingdom” (by which they mean an earthly, physical kingdom), the Scriptures clearly present Jesus as enthroned in fulfillment of the promise to David in 2 Samuel 7.
- IV. Normative (classical) dispensationalism begins with a misunderstanding of what God promised to David and then imprints that misunderstanding on the symbolic millennial reign of Revelation 20.

³⁴ Ryrie, 171.

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