

THE 'COMINGS' OF CHRIST IN REVELATION 2-3

Robert L. Thomas
Professor of New Testament

Six of the seven messages of Christ in Rev 2-3 contain references to His coming. In three instances He promises to come and deliver His faithful from persecution, and in three He threatens to come and judge the unfaithful. In all six His coming is imminent, whether for deliverance or for judgment. The only way this can happen is for the deliverance—the rapture of the church—and the judgment—the beginning of Daniel's seventieth week—to occur simultaneously. The two chapters provide three more passages that refer to His coming indirectly. The forecast in these too is for His return at any moment. A survey of other relevant NT passages reflects the same dual imminence for the two events. The phenomena surrounding these predicted comings lead inevitably to the conclusion that Christ's return for His church must be pretribulational, because this is the only way to explain satisfactorily how the two future events can be simultaneous.

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In Revelation 2-3 Christ speaks of His coming explicitly in six of the messages to the seven churches of Asia. He does so in three of the messages through a form of the verb ἔρχομαι (*erchomai*, "I will come"¹) (2:5, 16; 3:11). In two of the messages he does so with the verb

¹Though ἔρχομαι (*erchomai*, "I will come") is present tense, contextual nuances in Revelation and the verbal idea of "coming" warrant construing it as a futuristic use of the present tense. The same understanding prevails in the verb's use in John 14:3: "I will come again and receive you to Myself."

ἐγὼ ἔρχομαι (I come) (2:25; 3:3). In one message ἐγὼ εἰσερχομαι (*eiserchomai*, "I enter") refers to his coming (3:20). Smyrna is the only church that receives no word about a coming of the Lord.

The 'comings' fall into two categories, one with overtones of encouragement and the other with the tenor of threat and judgment. 'Comings' for judgment lend themselves to interpretations somewhat controversial than those pertaining to deliverance and blessing, though the latter (3:20) poses a special challenge to interpreters. The following discussion delves first into the positive 'comings.' Then it will investigate the timing and nature of the negative ones.

The next step will be to examine the implications the 'comings' in Revelation have for the timing of the church's rapture. Next will come an inquiry into three references to Christ's return in the seven messages. Lastly, this essay will discuss briefly how the rest of the NT aligns with results of the study.

'COMINGS' FOR DELIVERANCE

Thyatira (2:25)

Among the promises of deliverance for the faithful, the word *Thyatiran* church in 2:25 is the earliest: "other than [this], hold fast what you have until I come." The loyal in the church had already received high marks for their works (2:19) and for their freedom from the defilements of Jezebel (2:24). Christ has just promised them exemption from any further burden (2:24b). The urgency of this promise in v. 25² is the urgent need³ that they continue to hold fast in the face of opposition they already faced, i.e., the pressure exerted by Jezebel and her followers.

The incentive to do so was the nearness of Christ's return. No matter how severe enemy pressures might become, the followers of Christ had the assurance that His return was imminent.⁴ All they had to do was hold out a little longer until their Lord would rescue them from the clutches of evil. The form $\epsilon\lambda\theta\epsilon\iota\varsigma$ ($\epsilon\lambda\theta\epsilon\iota\varsigma$, "I will come") refers to Christ's return as it does to His return in the message to Sardis (3:3). The truth of His coming provides motivation for their action here as it does in five of the other six messages.

²Note the force of $\alpha\lambda\lambda\omicron\tau\epsilon$ (*plēn*, "other than [this]") in v. 25 (Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation: Exegetical Commentary*, Kenneth Barker, gen. ed. [Chicago: Moody, 1992] 230).

³The aorist imperative $\kappa\rho\alpha\tau\eta\varsigma\alpha\tau\epsilon$ (*kratesate*, "hold fast") focuses on urgency (Thomas, *Revelation* 2:25).

⁴"Imminent" means "ready to take place" (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* [Springfield, Mass: Merriam-Webster, 1993] 580). In the context of the present discussion, it means that no biblical prophecy remains to be fulfilled prior to the predicted event. The present discussion does not permit a detailed response to Robert H. Gundry's attempt to distinguish "imminence" with "expectation" (cf. *The Church and the Tribulation* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977] 29-43). He is seemingly oblivious to the necessity of a pretribulational rapture created by his definition of "imminence" he endorses: "a possibility of occurrence at any moment" (ibid. 29). A pretribulational view removes that possibility and thereby the imminence of Christ's return.

Philadelphia (3:11)

The deliverance promised to the church in Philadelphia in 3:11 is what Christ promised the church in Thyatira. Its admonition to "hold what you have" is along the lines of His earlier word for believers to hold the faith and not compromise because of persecution (cf. 2:25). This is a sort of motto for the faithful in each church.⁵ This time, however, rather than emphasizing the command stresses continuance and durability.⁶

The motive for tenacity in 3:11 is an anticipation of Christ's near deliverance. The basis for the anticipation is the promise that comes immediately after He describes the impending "hour of trial" in 3:10. The words $\epsilon\rho\chi\omicron\mu\alpha\iota\ \tau\alpha\chi\upsilon$ (*erchomai tachy*, "I will come soon") express His promise in this instance. $\epsilon\rho\chi\omicron\mu\alpha\iota$ (*Erchomai*, "I will come"), of course, sounds the theme of the whole book as stated in 1:7: "Behold, He comes with the clouds, and all will see Him, even those who pierced Him, and all the families of the earth will mourn over Him. Yes, amen." Incidentally, this is the fifth in a series of promises to the faithful in the Philadelphian church (cf. one promise in 3:8, two in 3:9, and one in 3:10).

The appending of "soon" ($\tau\alpha\chi\upsilon$, *tachy*) to His promised coming makes explicit what is only implicit in 2:25. It heightens the expectancy that He is coming to deliver the faithful from their difficult circumstances was not to be. The abruptness of the promise heightens its emphasis. Its placement immediately after His word about the coming "hour of trial" implies that this coming will accomplish the deliverance promised in v. 10. The attention to immediate coming that the addition of "soon" brings is a principal note throughout the book. John's first note is in 1:1a in his use of the comparable $\epsilon\upsilon\theta\upsilon\sigma\tau\omicron\varsigma$ (*euthoustos*, "soon"): "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants the things that must happen soon." It is a note that sounds repetitively throughout the book: "And behold, I will come soon" (22:7a); "Behold, I will come soon" (22:20); "Yes, I will come soon" (22:20).⁸

Another understanding of *en tachei* ("soon") in 1:1 has assigned it the meaning of "speedily." It refers the expression to the speed with which

⁵Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman, 1932), 6:319.

⁶The command is present imperative of $\kappa\rho\alpha\tau\epsilon\theta\epsilon\upsilon$ (*krateo*, "I hold fast") as compared with the aorist imperative in 2:25 (Thomas, 1—7291 n. 68).

⁷Thomas, 1—7290.

⁸Richard Bauckham cites 1:1, 3; 2:16; 3:11; 22:7, 10, 12, 20 in observing that Revelation has "most of the NT documents the feature of 'imminent expectation': 'John's prophecy is a `what must soon take place.' . . . This cannot mean only that the great conflict of the church and the Empire is soon to *begin*, for the parousia itself is also said to be soon" (*The Theology of Revelation* [Cambridge: University Press, 1993] 147). He errs, however, in theorizing that temporal imminence conflicts with eschatological delay in the book because he fails to

will transpire once they have begun. Proponents have cited the phrase in five passages to support this meaning (cf. Luke 18:8; Acts 12:7; 22:18; 16:20),⁹ but in at least two of the five the meaning is debatable (cf. Luke 16:20). They have also noted the necessity of attributing error to the meaning "soon" is correct. After all, it has been nineteen hundred years since the prediction and much of what the book prophesies has not yet begun to happen.

This view does not do justice to the major emphasis of the book: the emphasis upon the shortness of time before fulfillment. That is repeatedly instrumental in bringing encouragement to God's people in their persecution. They do not have to wait long for relief to come, so that is an incentive to persevere. To say that relief will come "speedily" or in due sequence provides no encouragement, but to say that it will come "soon" does.

The words "for the time is near" in 1:3b provide reinforcement for the meaning of *en tachei* ("soon") in 1:1 the meaning of imminence. Fulfillment of the events at any moment was and remains the hope of the church. John was mistaken in this expectation. Those who think he was fail to recognize that the Apocalypse on occasion computes time in relation to the divine approval standard that differs from the strictly human approach.¹² John simply states the imminence of the events foretold without attempting to set a time date which they must occur.

The same outlook applies in the message to Philadelphia: Christ states the imminence of His coming without setting a time limit for it to happen. It is an event that could come at any moment, suddenly and unexpectedly.¹³ It provides a motivation to be tenacious, because He will reward His own. Thus the faithful must hold fast "that no one take your crown" (3:11).

Laodicea (3:20)

The reference to Christ's return in the message to Laodicea comes in the verb *eiseleusomai* (*eiseleusomai*, "I will enter") in 3:20: "Behold, I stand at the door and knocking; if any hears My voice and opens the door, I will enter to him and will eat supper with him, and he with Me." This reference to His second advent is not quite as obvious as those in 2:25 and 3:11, but the identification of the coming in 3:20 hinges upon the connotation of the verb used earlier in the verse. Is it the door of the human heart or the eschatological door through which Christ will enter at His second advent?

⁹E.g., John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1966) 35.

¹⁰Alan F. Johnson, "Revelation," in *EBC*, ed. Frank E. Gaebel (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982) 12:416; Homer Hailey, *Revelation, an Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985) 12:416; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 64-65.

¹¹Thomas, 1—755.

¹²*Ibid.*, 55-56.

Regarding the former possibility, opinions vary over whether it is of an unbeliever,¹⁴ that of a believer,¹⁵ or that of any person regardless of spiritual condition.¹⁶ Depending on which it is, Christ would be offering forgiveness of sins, the opportunity of returning to fellowship, or an invitation to meet whatever the need might be, respectively. The truthfulness of these variations is apparent, but it is problematic for all three that the figure of Christ knocking at the door of *human hearts* is absent from this context.¹⁷

A reference to the eschatological door has strong support. Such a reference to Christ's return had wide usage among early Christians (cf. Matt 24:33; Mark 13:35; Luke 12:36; James 5:9).¹⁸ The source of the imagery, Song of Sol 5:1 ff., has a comparable eschatological sense in Luke 12:35-38.¹⁹ The sense of an eschatological door also fits the pattern of three other messages where a reference to Christ coming follows a command to repent (cf. 2:5, 16; 3:3) as this verse does (cf. 3:19).

An objection to this sense has been that Christ appears as a judge and rewarder of the faithful rather than as a preacher of repentance in the passages where "door" is eschatological.²¹ The objection overlooks, however, because that verse depicts Christ in very much of a judgmental sense, an eschatological sense suits the context of 3:19 also in responding to the call to repentance through a personal willingness to open the door.

An apparent difficulty with the eschatological view lies in the suggestion that it conditions Christ's return on a positive human response rather than the sovereign purpose of God (cf. Acts 1:6-7). This presents a situation similar to that discussed later, where that advent apparently depends timeously on a negative human response to a command to repent (cf. 2:5, 16; 3:3). The problem is more apparent than real, however. The promised entrance of Christ and consequent fellowship with the one opening the door come in two phases: a preliminary phase that is simultaneous with initial saving faith and a second phase one at the time of Christ's second advent. To experience the preliminary phase assures participation in the ultimate phase. Saving faith assures participation in the supper with Christ, which the promise views as imminent, but the

¹⁴Richard Chenevix Trench, *Commentary on the Epistles to the Seven Churches in Asia* (London: Parker, Son, and Bourn, 1960) 279.

¹⁵William Kelly, *Lectures on the Revelation* (London: G. Morrish, n.d.), 87; Isbon T. Beale, *Apocalypse of John* (New York: Macmillan, 1919) 491.

¹⁶Albert Barnes, *The Book of Revelation* (New York: Harper, 1851) 1571.

¹⁷Beckwith, *Apocalypse* 491.

¹⁸Robertson, *Word Pictures* 6:323.

¹⁹James Moffatt, "The Revelation of St. John the Divine," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, ed. Robertson Nicoll, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.) 5:373.

²⁰J. P. M. Sweet, *Revelation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, Pelican, 1979) 109.

initial saving faith does not affect the timing of that supper. The faith already begun fellowship with Christ, but in another sense, present fellowship is only a down payment on the ultimate fellowship that has not yet begun.²²

Because of a failure to recognize the dual nature of fellowship with Christ, some have limited the promise's application to the point of conversion and thus make it more of an evangelistic plea than an offer to prepare for the Lord's coming.²⁴ The evidence is quite convincing, however, that the timing of the promise's fulfillment is at Christ's return. In addition to evidence already cited, the "eschatological" *idou* (cf. *idou*, "behold") in v. 20 argues for this meaning (cf. 3:8, 9) as do the broader context of the message (3:16, 17) and the analogy of five of the other six messages with their references to Christ's return and the broader context of Revelation (cf. 16:15).

A confirming consideration is the promise of participation in the supper with Christ later in 3:20. Most recognize this correctly as a reference to the marriage supper of the Lamb, which pictures fellowship in the future kingdom (19:9; cf. Matt 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 12:25-28; 22:30).²⁵ Eating with the Messiah and ruling with Him, as in 3:21, commonly come together in an eschatological sense.²⁶ The supper aspect of the promise is sufficient by itself from the perspective of 3:20 as eschatological.

'COMINGS' FOR JUDGMENT

Ephesus (2:5)

The earliest threat of judgment against one of the Asian churches is in Revelation 2:5, where the Lord warns the church at Ephesus, "Remember, therefore, who you have fallen, and repent and do the first works. But if not, I will come and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent." He admonishes this body to return to its first love (cf. 2:4), but if they choose not to do so, he threatens to take severe action against the church. The nature of that severe action is the issue to be resolved.

Wide opinion has it that it is a special coming in judgment to the church.

²²Revelation 3:20 has another possible explanation that draws upon the Semitic idiom explained below in connection with 2:5. The sense of the verse would be, "Behold, I am outside the door and knocking; if any hears My voice and opens the door, *when I enter to fellowship* with him, and he with Me." This too points to an eschatological coming of Christ.

²³E.g., Trench, *Epistles*, 279; Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament* (London: Longmans, 1864) 4:592; Charles, *Revelation* 1:100; G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, NCB (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 107.

²⁴Walvoord, *Revelation* 98; Johnson, "Revelation" 12:459.

²⁵J. B. Smith, *A Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald, 1961) 95; Beckwith, *Apocalypse*; E. W. Bullinger, *The Apocalypse* or "The Day of the Lord" (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1906) 107.

church alone, a type of coming that supposedly fits the context more naturally. Lee notes that the threat applies to only one lampstand, not several or all. Mounce sees this understanding as more compatible with Christ's walk in the midst of the churches.²⁹ A reference to a special coming also coincides with the meaning of 2:22, it is said,³⁰ but the same debate exists there in the message to Thyatira as exists here in the one to Ephesus. Caird prefers this explanation, pointing out that Christ does not speak of a worldwide crisis but a crisis in the church privately.³¹

The "special coming" approach does not give adequate attention to the book's broad context, however. If this were only a private coming to one church, it would bear no relationship to the apocalyptic part of Revelation (4:1–22:5), which is the heart of the twenty-two chapters. It also fails to notice the connection between the threat with the theme verse of the book, 1:7, where the present tense of the verb, ἐρχεται (*erchetai*, "He comes"), speaks of Christ's eschatological coming. This verb repeatedly refers to Christ's return throughout the book (1:7; 2:16; 3:11; 16:15; 22:7, 12, 20). An immediate visitation of judgment hardly does justice to the technical eschatological sense the book carries in a book of this nature. Aune perceives that this and other words with negative aspects of the parousia in Revelation 2–3 signal a threat of eschatological judgment.³² Since references to Christ's second coming in the messages to Thyatira, Philadelphia, and Laodicea already surveyed, the natural course is to adopt the view that this too is an eschatological coming, one to punish the rebellious, not to reward the faithful, however. The objection that Christ will not come personally to earth to inflict the punishments detailed in Revelation 19 overlooks the fact that neither does He come personally to earth according to the "special coming" explanation. Making this a reference to an eschatological coming has the advantage over the "special coming" view, however, in that He does come personally to earth to climax the judgments of the coming hour of trial and of Armageddon.

Connecting the threat with Christ's second advent raises another question, however. Because failure to repent apparently triggers this coming for the unrepentant as it does the ones in 2:16 and 3:3, how could it refer to the parousia? The observation that it is inaccurate to have the return of Christ depend on the refusal to repent is the principal reason that some do not refer this to eschatology.

²⁷Beasley-Murray, *Revelation* 75.

²⁸Lee, "Revelation" 4:517.

²⁹Mounce, *Revelation* 89.

³⁰Beckwith, *Apocalypse* 450.

³¹G. V. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, HNTC (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966) 32.

³²David F. Aune, "The Form and Function of the Proclamations to the Seven Churches," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 82 (1963) 207–22.

judgment.³³ One possible way of averting the difficulty is to view this as only to remove the lampstand—i.e., the church and its testimony—and the return of Christ *per se*. Yet to ignore the consequences of Christ's advent for individual people, as this explanation does, is impossible in light of His coming.

Christ's coming is unconditional in 2:25 and 3:11, so it must be the special grammatical feature of 2:5 makes it possible to interpret the construction the same in this case. Matthew 18:21b illustrates the construction of 2:5 which accords with a Semitic model.³⁴ The literal rendering is, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me and will I forgive him?" The sense of the verse is "How often, *when my brother sins against me*, will I forgive him?" Another illustration of parataxis with subordination is Luke 14:5b, whose literal rendering is, "A son or ox of which of you will fall into a pit, and will he not immediately snatch him up on the day of the Sabbath?" Rendered in a smoother English this becomes, "Which of you having a son or an ox, *when he falls into a pit* will he not immediately snatch him up on the day of the Sabbath?" John 7:34a provides another example: the literal "Seek Me and you will not find Me" means "If you *seek Me*, you will not find Me." Again in John 10:12b, the literal is, "He who is a wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees," but the meaning is, "*When the wolf comes*, he leaves the sheep and flees." This type of construction is well established in the NT.

Applying the same principle in Rev 2:5b yields the following: "But if you do not, I will come and remove your lampstand from its place unless you repent," but the sense is, "If you do not, *when I come*, I will remove your lampstand, if you shall not have repented before that coming[, which then happens]." ³⁵ This rendering does justice to the book's acknowledged emphasis on the imminence of Christ's return without conditioning it on the nonrepentance of the Ephesian church. The threat to this congregation lay in the possibility that the judgment might come while they were alive and catch them in a state of nonrepentance which they needed to comply immediately.

What is the threatened removal of the lampstand? Is it a special judgment in destroying the whole city and closing its harbor, as eventually happened to Ephesus?³⁶ This identification is problematic because the threat was to the church within the city and not to the whole city.

Another possibility is that the threat was the removal of the church's testimony, the symbolic meaning of a lampstand. A church can remain in existence if its testimony disappears.³⁷ Without its first love, a church is without a test-

³³E.g., Caird, *Revelation* 32.

³⁴Nigel Turner, *Syntax*, vol. 3 of *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963) 342.

³⁵Sweet, *Revelation* 82; Beckwith, *Apocalypse* 450.

³⁶Cf. Smith, *Revelation* 64; Walvoord, *Revelation* 57-58.

Pergamene church. Application of the explanation offered above in conjunction with the Ephesian message yields the following sense here: "Repent or else otherwise [i.e., if you shall not have repented beforehand], *when I come to you* I will make war against them with sword of My mouth."

The thrust of *tachy* must be that of imminence, not swiftness. The notion makes little sense in conjunction with victory in battle, which is the terminology in 2:16. Swiftness of action is meaningful only in connection with a series of events. Christ's victory at His second advent to earth will be a prolonged war.

The objects of the threatened judgment must include the whole church because the call to repentance addresses them. The *soi* (*soi*, "to you") early in the verse is singular, referring to the messenger from Pergamum. Since the messenger is representative of the church corporately, the whole church is culpable because of its tolerance of the Nicolaitan doctrine.⁴² The Balaamites and the Nicolaitans are guilty because of wrong doctrine, but the rest of the church because of its inaction in dealing with the promoters of that doctrine.

Sardis (3:3)

In 3:3, Christ admonishes the church at Sardis, "Remember that you have received and heard, and keep [strengthening what remains], and if therefore you do not watch, I will come as a thief, and you will in no way know what hour I will come upon you." Two "therefores" ($o \text{ eq } \backslash O(=,y)n$, *oun*) in the verse invert into two parts, the first half being a gracious call to solve the problem of stagnancy and the second a threat predicated on an assumption that the church will not accept the remedy.

The remedy consisted of a motivation kindled by focusing on their heritage from the past, earnest attention to strengthening their leftover virtues, repentance over and turning away from their spiritual lethargy. In some respects their plight resembled that of the church at Ephesus (cf. 2:5). They needed to return to their former outlook and achievements and do an immediate about-face to return to that condition.

Their probable failure to do so, however, would bring on the loss of the prospects of Christ's return. Their refusal to "watch" or "wake up"⁴³ from spiritual sleep of death (cf. 3:2) exposed them to the possible surprise coming of the Lord during their lifetime. Their present evil state was so hopeless that they held little anticipation that they would turn back.⁴⁴

In this instance the verb speaking of Christ's coming is $eq \backslash O(\sim, e)x \text{ eq } \backslash O(\sim, o)$, "I will come), the same verb and spelling as the word

⁴²Beckwith, *Apocalypse* 460.

⁴³Robertson correctly calls *grhgorhshw* (*gregoreshs*, "you wake up") an ingressive verb (*Pictures* 6:314).

2:25 for His coming, though the sentence structure requires understanding indicative here as compared with an aorist subjunctive there. Interpretations of the nature of this coming align with the two ways comings have identified the coming to judge the Ephesian church. Those who do not acknowledge that coming as a thief usually applies to Christ's second advent. This group sees here a partial and special advent for judgment of a single church. In support of this approach, Beasley-Murray cites Rev 3:20 as another example of parousia language refers to the present experience of Christians.⁴⁷ The passage above, however, has clarified why 3:20 speaks primarily of the second advent of present Christian experience.

A further weakness in taking 3:3 to be a special coming is the lack of particular consequences if this were Christ's coming to a single church. The two possible references to special comings—2:5, 16ADVANCE \R 2.15—result in results of removal of a lampstand and warfare with the sword of Christ. The speaker gives no such eventuality here, however.

The implied effect is punishment for disloyalty at the second advent. A major factor that supports a second way to understand the coming in 3:3. Apparently the major sin at Sardis was inattention to the Lord's return.⁴⁸ The simile of a thief finds exclusive use elsewhere in the NT in reference to Christ's second advent (cf. Matt 24:43; Luke 12:39; 1 Thess 5:2; 2 Pet 3:10; Rev 16:15).⁴⁹ Four writers use the figure this way: Matthew, Luke, Paul, and Peter. The third way of understanding 3:3 is closest to Paul's instruction to Thessalonica when he predicts the coming of the day of the Lord as a thief upon those unprepared for His coming.⁵⁰ The call for repentance in Revelation 2–3 arises from the prospect of an imminent "Coming-as-a-thief" terminology was the language of Jesus Himself in instructing the twelve to watch for His return.⁵² John shared the prevailing belief of the church that Christ would return imminently.⁵³ The Sardians in particular were to heed the possible negative outcome of that return by reversing their posture.

⁴⁵The spelling of the future active indicative, first person singular, is the same as the subjunctive, first person singular, for this verb.

⁴⁶E.g., Alford, *Greek Testament* 4:581; Lee, "Revelation" 4:537; Beasley-Murray, *Revelation* 97.

⁴⁷Beasley-Murray, *Revelation* 97.

⁴⁸Trench, *Seven Churches* 170-71; Charles, *Revelation* 1:81; Robert Govett, *The Apocalypse by Scripture* (London: Charles J. Thynne, 1920) 67.

⁴⁹Beckwith, *Apocalypse* 474; Robertson, *Word Pictures* 6:314.

⁵⁰Bullinger, *Apocalypse* 192-94.

⁵¹Behm, "πῶς, πῶς, etc.," in *TDNT* 4:1004.

⁵²Charles, *Revelation* 1:79.

Regarding this threat as they do others (2:5, 16, 22), some object to the eschatological coming of Christ because Christ conditions the coming on nonrepentance in one city.⁵⁴ The objection is formidable, but not insurmountable. Following the pattern of the two earlier threats to Ephesus and Pergamum, the sense of 3:3b is, "If you do not wake up, *when I shall come as a thief*, you will not know in what way I will come to you." The timing is not dependent on the city's response.

The timing of Christ's return depends solely on the Father's decree (Acts 1:7). But from man's perspective, the NT anticipates the alignment of prerequisites for that return to occur. One is the national repentance of Israel (3:19-21). That repentance and Christ's return to earth will follow shortly after the meeting of another condition, the completion of the body of Christ (Rom 13:11). The third human factor determinative of the second advent's timing relates to the remaining segment of humanity, the Gentiles (cf. 1 Cor 10:32). The degeneration of the Gentile world will reach a point that God can no longer tolerate, as on the days of Noah (Gen 6:3, 5-7). One measure of Gentile degeneration is the worsening moral condition of the professing Christian church as it absorbs the influence of its surrounding culture. Sleeping Sardian churches and churches that reflect the developing moral failure of their home city and the world as a whole are indifferent to God will eventually reach a point that Christ will bring judgment, a judgment that will have the unrepentant at Sardis as its object.

The Lord reinforces His lesson on unexpectedness in the last words of the letter: "you will in no way know what hour I will come upon you." No one can know the time of His return, so it will catch everyone by surprise. The citizens of Sardis, whose topological situation presumably rendered the city impregnable to surprise attacks realized well what it meant to fall victim to a surprise attack. Two centuries in the city's history opponents had captured the city while inhabitants were caught in dependence on their supposed invincibility. By their spiritual lethargy, the "Christians" had made Christ their enemy and were now in danger of becoming a victim to His surprise coming. John uses the same figure of a thief in Revelation 16:15 to reiterate a truth he had heard Christ teach at least twice many years before (Matthew 24:42-43; Luke 12:39). This time, however, its application was to a people who had ignored His earlier lessons on watchfulness.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE 'COMINGS' FOR THE TIME OF THE RAPTURE

An investigation of the 'comings' of Christ in Revelation 2-3 has led me to conclude that there are two types of them, one a coming for deliverance and the other a coming for judgment. The common feature of the two is that both 'comings' are unpredictable. They could occur at any moment to implement the anticipated results for the designated objects.

⁵⁴E.g., Caird, *Revelation* 49; George E. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 57; Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John* TNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 100.

The only way that both `comings' can be imminent is for them simultaneously. If either one preceded the other, the second would be impending because occurrence of the other would have to come first, full forewarning of the second. The necessity of such a precursor would render the latter `coming' from the category of imminency.

If the coming of Christ to impose the punishments of Daniel's week⁵⁵ on the disloyal were to precede His coming to deliver the faithful, it would not have characterized His coming for deliverance as being "soon." A predicted event had to happen before that deliverance, so it would not be impending.

Conversely, if the coming of Christ to provide deliverance were to precede His coming to impose punishments, He could not have described His chastise as being "soon." In this case, His retributive coming would not be imminent, but He says it is impending at least three times in these seven verses.

That means that Christ allowed for no time between His coming to deliver the church away from the world and the beginning of Daniel's seventieth week. To postulate a period between the rapture of the church and the beginning of the seventieth week during which ten nations must unite,⁵⁶ during which will occur the regathering of Israel, the emergence of a great world ruler, rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem, and a covenant of peace with Israel,⁵⁷ or during which some other event must happen, runs counter to the joint imminence of these two future happenings. Exegetical conclusions must override whatever theological necessities might demand. Examinations of passages relevant to the `comings' of Christ in Revelation 2–3 have dictated that the two come simultaneously.

Ryrie's opinion is that the Scriptures are noncommittal regarding the timing of whether or not there is a time gap between the rapture and the seventieth week.

Though I believe that the Rapture precedes the beginning of the Tribulation, actually nothing is said in the Scriptures as to whether or not some

⁵⁵For an analysis to demonstrate that the plagues of Revelation 4 ff. are events of the seventieth week, see John A. McLean, "The Seventieth Week of Daniel 9:27 as a Literary Unit: Understanding the Structure of the Apocalypse of John" (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1990).

⁵⁶Cf. John F. Walvoord, *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1989), 487, where Walvoord writes, "The ten-nation kingdom must be formed in the final days before the Second Coming." The diagram of the day of the Lord on 485 clarifies what he intends by this statement: the day of the Lord begins simultaneously with the rapture, followed by an undefined period after the rapture and before Daniel's seventieth week during which the ten-nation kingdom will occur. See also his statement, "The time period [i.e., the day of the Lord] begins at the rapture, but major events do not come immediately. However, if time progressed very far, there will be unmistakable signs that they are in the DOL" (ibid., 490).

⁵⁷Cf. Renald E. Showers, *Maranatha, Our Lord Come!* (Bellmawr, N. J.: The Friends of the Cross, 1961), 61. Showers, unlike Walvoord (see n. 55), sees the day of the Lord and the seventieth week beginning simultaneously (ibid., 63), but has the rapture occurring at an earlier time before the day of the Lord.

how much time) may elapse between the Rapture and the beginning of the Tribulation.⁵⁸

Exegetical results of this study indicate otherwise, however. For both the Rapture and judgement to be imminent, the rapture of the church must be simultaneous with the beginning of Daniel's seventieth week.⁵⁹

⁵⁸Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1986) 465. In essence Grant agrees with Ryrie on this issue: "There may be an interval of time, however small, between the Rapture and the signing of the seven-year treaty with Israel. Whether this interval occurs in days, months or years, it must be short because God will not leave the earth without a witness of His truth" (*Apocalypse, the Coming Judgment of the Nations* [Toronto: Frontier Research, 1992] 10).

⁵⁹Jeffrey L. Townsend concurs in his comments on Rev 3:10: "Both the coming of the Lord [in the Rapture] and the coming of the Lord are imminent. . . . There will be preservation of the church in the imminent hour of testing for the Philadelphian church when the Lord comes" ("The Revelation 3:10" *When the Trumpet Sounds*, eds. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy [Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1998] 10).

INDIRECT REFERENCES TO CHRIST'S 'COMINGS'

Consideration of indirect references to Christ's return in the seven will throw further light on the timing of the 'comings.' The three references to Christ's coming are, in the order of discussion, 3:10, 2:22, and

The Hour of Trial, 3:10

Pretribulationists have often cited Revelation 3:10 as one of the evidences for Christ's coming to remove the church before Daniel's week, and rightly so: "because you have kept the word of My endurance, I also keep you from the hour of trial that is about to come upon the whole earth, to try those who dwell upon the earth."

Yet the verse does not explicitly speak of the rapture so much as the church's preservation at a location away from the scene of earthly trial during that period.⁶⁰ Though it contains no explicit reference to the removal from the earth, the inevitable conclusion is that the only way all of the body of Christ, of which the Philadelphian church is representative, receive that protection from the scene of plagues detailed later in Revelation is to experience that deliverance prior to the beginning of those plagues.

The passage *does* refer to a coming of Christ in an indirect way, His coming to inflict wrath on a rebellious world. The Lord tells of "the hour of trial that is about to come upon the whole inhabited earth, to try those who dwell upon the earth." Christ's word in Rev 16:15 to *all* the churches—not just the church—is that His coming is a coming in judgment: "Behold I come as a thief. Blessed is the one who watches and keeps his garments, that he not walk in shame, and they see his shame." This "beatitude" carries overtones of His warning to Sardis and Laodicea (3:3, 18) in that failure to watch and keep one's garments result in unparalleled misery and utter hopelessness for those who find themselves objects of the seven last plagues. If the coming of Christ is a coming of temporal wrath as the previous discussion has outlined, the coming of "the hour of trial" is identical with the judgmental coming of Christ.

Common agreement identifies "the hour of trial" with the period of the trumpets, and bowls delineated in Revelation 4:1–22:5. This is not merely the time of troubling the community at Philadelphia. It will encompass "the hour of trial upon the whole inhabited earth" (τὸ ὄραμα τῆς ἡμέρας τῆς πειρασμοῦ ἐπὶ τὴν ὅλην τὴν γῆν, τὸ ὄραμα τῆς ἡμέρας τῆς πειρασμοῦ ἐπὶ τὴν ὅλην τὴν γῆν) and will have as its objects "those who dwell upon the earth," an expression that throughout Revelation refers to earth's rebellion against God.⁶¹ Moffatt calls the period the "broken days" of eschatological schemes was to herald the Messiah's return.⁶² It is a time

⁶⁰Thomas, 1—7283-88.

⁶¹Hort, *Apocalypse* 35; Ladd, *Revelation* 62; Johnson, "Revelation" 12:454. Cf. Rev 6:1 [twice]; 13:8, 12, 14 [twice]; 17:2, 8.

in the world before the coming of Christ, a period variously known as the Lord, the tribulation, or the great tribulation, in part (cf. Dan 12:1; Mark 13:14; 2 Thess 2:1-12; Rev 7:14; 14:7). The divine purpose behind this period is to test the wicked, either to lead them to repentance or to punish them for failing to repent.⁶³

The deliverance promised to the Philadelphian church pertained not only to their immediate Jewish persecutors, but also to the heathen world in general. This period of tribulation will immediately precede the coming of the Lord to judge the world (cf. Matt 24:29-30). Since the generation of Christians to whom Jesus addressed these words has now passed from the earthly scene, Philadelphia represent not only the other six churches of Asia but also the body of Christians worldwide throughout the present age.⁶⁴

The important time factor in Rev 3:10, *together with the hour* (*together with the hour*, "which is about to") fixes the timing of this hour's arrival. It was an hour getting closer every moment, one that could begin at any moment.⁶⁵ This relates closely to the words of Rev 1:1, *the things which must happen soon* (*the things which must happen soon*, "things that must happen soon") in 2:16, *the hour is near* (*the hour is near*, "I will come soon") in 2:16. Christ's coming to impose trials on a rebellious world is impending just as His coming to accomplish deliverance for the faithful.

The context of Rev 3:10 is further verification of the imminent nature of these two happenings. His immediately ensuing word to this church, *the hour is near*—"will come soon"—is implicit evidence that His coming to deliver will coincide with His coming to judge.

Great Tribulation, 2:22

A second indirect reference to Christ's coming appears in 2:22: *I will cast her into a bed, and those who commit adultery with her will also be cast into a bed with her, and they will be killed.* The leading offense in this tribulation, if they do not repent of her works." The leading offense in this context is Jezebel who "teaches and deceives My slaves to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed to idols" (2:20) and who has refused her divinely given opportunity to repent (2:21).

Christ predicts that He will cast her into a bed because of her unrepentance. Though suggested meanings of the bed have varied from a sickbed to physical death, the higher probability is that it is figurative language for the period of eschatological tribulation described after chapter 4 of the book. Similar anticipations extended to the churches at Ephesus (2:5) and Philadelphia (2:16) provide some of the rationale for this understanding as does a late

⁶³Alford, *Greek Testament* 4:586; Beckwith, *Apocalypse* 483; Johnson, "Revelation" 12:45.

⁶⁴Smith, *Revelation* 88.

⁶⁵Swato, *Apocalypse* 55; Walter Scott, *Exposition of the Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Swato, ed.,

this same church about the Lord's eschatological coming to deliver them (2:25). The strongest support for referring the bed to eschatological trials is Christ's return to earth comes in its paralleling with *ul eq \O(@,i)cin meg* (*thlipsin megal eq \O(~,e)n*, "great tribulation") in 2:22, an expression referring to eschatological trials in 7:14.

"Great tribulation" is the promised destiny of Jezebel's followers; it is probable that her fate will be the same. "Tribulation" (*ul eq \O(3,i)ciw*, sometimes a general word for a severe judgment of suffering,⁶⁶ but in these considerations make probable its reference to eschatological tribulation), the adjective "great" suggests a reference to the tribulation of the last days.⁶⁷ The use of the same expression in 7:14 to refer to the period immediately preceding the second advent is further indication of this meaning.⁶⁸ Jesus' use of this phraseology in Matt 24:21 to depict that future period provides further support for believing this to designate part of "the hour of trial" spoken of in the Philadelphia message. After all, the encouragement to the faithful in 2:25 comes in the context of contemplating Christ's imminent coming for deliverance; why should the threat to the unfaithful draw upon His related coming to judge the world in view of the detailed description of this period in the main body of the Apocalypse (Rev 4:1–22:5), it is sound to conclude that the threat to unrepentant followers (and Jezebel) was that of having to experience the horrors of the eschatological great tribulation.

So in a slightly different manner, motivation stemming from an imminent danger to the unfaithful in Thyatira accompanies the incentive of an imminent deliverance for the faithful, just as is in the message to Philadelphia. The same combination appear in the message to Laodicea?

Regurgitation, 3:16

To the Laodicean church, Christ communicates in part as follows: "because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I am about to spew you out of My mouth" (3:16). The metaphor of lukewarmness derives from the water supply to this city. Unlike neighboring Hierapolis which had hot, spring water used for medicinal purposes, and neighboring Colosse which had cool, refreshing, taste water, Laodicea had tepid water that was sickening to drink on a hot or a cold day.⁶⁹ This figure expresses the revulsion of Christ over the church's spiritual state.

The church people were not just spiritually immature or com

⁶⁶Beckwith, *Apocalypse* 467; Moffatt, "Revelation" 5:361.

⁶⁷Sweet, *Revelation* 95.

⁶⁸Smith, *Revelation* 77. The absence of the articles here and their presence in 7:14 is explained on the basis of 2:22 being the first mention of the period in the book (Robertson, *Word Pictures*).

⁶⁹William B. Nowell, *The Book of Revelation* (Chicago: Moody, 1935) 76.

Neither was their problem just that of having some interest in the thing, but falling short of the true testimony of Christ.⁷¹ Their plight was full. Lukewarm describes those who have professed Christ hypocritically and whose actions betray that their hearts are not in what they pretend to be.⁷² The description of them in 3:15-16 markedly resembles His denunciation of the religious authorities of His day for their hypocrisy (e.g., Matt 23:13-36). A Christian who cannot see his need for repentance is a hopeless case.⁷³ The adjectives describing this church in 3:17 make clear that, as a general rule, the church had no relationship with Christ as Savior.⁷⁴ Though a few among them may have been genuine in their faith, the influence of the few in the church was insignificant. That resembles the situation in Sardis.

Christ's reaction toward the sad condition corresponds to their spiritual condition. "Spew you out of My mouth" is a most contemptuous expression, one that Christ uses nowhere else.⁷⁵ "Thus" which begins v. 16, shows the correspondence between the church's condition and the drastic response that conforms to those against churches with similar problems (Rev 22; 3:3): "I am about to [m eq \O(3,e)]lv, *mell eq \O(~,o)*] spew you out of My mouth." As in 3:10, the verb m eq \O(3,e)]lv (*mell eq \O(~,o)*, "I am about to") indicates the wrath that is about to come on this church. The spewing out is not an individual and special judgment to come on this church alone. It is a warning of the eschatological wrath on all the churches and the rest of the world with them. This by design should have awakened recipients to the impending danger and the corresponding promise of deliverance from the same peril provided come to the church in Philadelphia (3:10).⁷⁸

In light of this understanding of 3:16, one looks for an encouraging message to the faithful in Laodicea, such as the messages to Philadelphia and Thyatira are illustrated. This comes in 3:20 where Christ promises the richness of eschatological fellowship at the marriage supper of the Lamb to the one who responds to the knock. The existence of a faithful remnant in Laodicea is not as explicit

Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation* (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1943) 154.

⁷¹Contra Trench, *Seven Churches*, 260; William Kelly, *The Revelation* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1904) 83.

⁷²Barnes, *Revelation* 1570; Walvoord, *Revelation* 92.

⁷³Moffatt, "Revelation" 5:371.

⁷⁴Johnson, "Revelation" 12:458.

⁷⁵Swete, *Apocalypse* 60; Kelly, *Revelation* 84; Smith, *Revelation* 122.

⁷⁶Charles, *Revelation* 1:96.

⁷⁷Trench, *Seven Churches* 263; Beckwith, *Apocalypse* 490; Lenski, *Revelation* 151.

other two messages, but the assumption of positive respondents to the in 3:20 strongly implies this.

Overviews of 3:10, 2:22, and 3:16, therefore, provide confirmat dual imminence of the coming day of the Lord's wrath with the comi deliverance for His church.

OTHER NT INDICATIONS OF DUAL IMMINECE

A brief survey of a few other NT indications of this dual im instructive. That combination begins as early as the teachings of the I during Passion Week. On Tuesday of that week in A.D. 30, His Olivet warned about the miseries to come upon Israel during her seventieth compared the coming of the period to the surprise arrival of a thief in (Matt 24:43). On Thursday of the same week in His Upper Room disc encouraged His own by predicting His return to take them to the Fath (John 14:2-3). The immediate context, verb tense, and verbal idea of *erxomai* (*erchomai*, "I will come") convey the notion of imminence in the latt am on My way and may arrive at any moment."

Seventeen or eighteen years later, James wrote about the dual im his epistle. In addressing the abusers of the poor, he noted "the miserie coming upon you" (5:1). Already on their way, they could arrive at because the rich were already in "the last days" (5:3) when God would wrongs they have inflicted. Immediately after his words to the rich (5:1 turns to offer incentives for the faithful to exhibit longsuffering (5:7-1 incentives lay in the nearness of the Lord's coming (5:8) and in His prese the door, ready to enter and rectify past injustices (5:9).

About four years later, Paul wrote his two epistles to the Thessa the first of which he outlined the sequence of Christ's imminent comi dead in Christ and then for the living in Christ (4:13-18). This meant com saints. In conjunction with this coming, he told of the surprise arrival of the Lord in terms of an unexpected visit by a thief in the night (5:2). The initiate the wrathful phase of that day (cf. 5:9) at the same moment He t in Christ to heaven. This will mean sudden destruction for those outside

A few months later, Paul wrote to the same church and in one bre of the translation of the churchADVANCE \R 2.15—"our gathering t Him" in 2:1—and in the next breath, of how the church would have reco day of the Lord if it had already arrivedADVANCE \R 2.15—through th of "the apostasy" and the revelation of "the man of lawlessness" in 2 person or persons had misled them into thinking that the day of the L have already begun without the translation of the church simultaneously. He wrote to correct this error and to assure them happenings will occur together.

After another sixteen or seventeen years, Peter wrote his second the area that is now north-central Asia Minor. He reported the skepticis who were unconvinced that the Lord would return (3:3-4). Am

hasten the coming of "the day of God" and the arrival of the new heaven and earth in which dwells righteousness (3:12-13). The arrival of that day has grievous implications for those who miss their opportunity to repent, because "the day of the Lord will come as a thief," ultimately bringing destruction of the elements and the disappearance of the earth and its works. Peter anticipated final results in the prolonged day of the Lord, both for the righteous and for the unrighteous. It is the beginning of that day that is followed by developing conditions within the day leading to conditions of an eternal state. Herein lies the motivation for the mockers to repent and to persevere.

The above brief sampling of NT teaching regarding the imminence of the wrathful seventieth week of Daniel 9 and the translation of the body to heaven parallels the same double imminence that is so conspicuous in Revelation 2-3 in A.D. 95. The Apocalypse climaxes this line of teaching that persisted throughout the period from Christ's personal ministry to the close of the NT canon.

A VINDICATION OF PRETRIBULATIONALISM

If two happenings are imminent, the only possible conclusion must be that they will be concurrent. Earlier discussion of the six direct references to the coming in the seven messages to the churches of Asia has shown both the return for the faithful and the beginning of Daniel's seventieth week to be imminent. That characteristic has received confirmation through a comparison of three indirect references to His coming in Revelation 2-3. The teaching of Christ in the gospels and several other NT portions have added their voice to the dual imminency of the two events. The return and the week's beginning therefore occur at the same time.

Several times I have had a responsibility to plan programs for the churches, societies and conferences. I designated a time and place for each speaker and everyone had to be ready and appear at the time I designated for him. I never had, in a moment of derangement, decided to tell no one in advance that it was his part, but instructed all to be prepared to speak when called upon. No one would know who was going to fulfill his role when. That would be poor planning on my part, but until I called for the first paper, every participant would be on his toes because his paper would be potentially imminent, i.e., due to be delivered at any moment. If a person knows his assignment would not come till the first day, he would not have to be ready the first day because he has an excuse to prepare. As planner, I would be aware of this difference in stages of readiness and would not expect everyone be ready the first day. But if I kept every speaker in the dark about when to speak, I would be the only one for whom each part would be imminent, since I would know the sequence in advance.

In a manner of speaking, God is a program planner. In planning a program, He has chosen not to disclose times for future events. He has chosen, however, that some events will occur before others. For example, the

Christ will precede the battle of Armageddon, or the seventieth week will precede the millennial kingdom. Yet He has indicated no sequential events, the rapture of the church and the beginning of Daniel's seventieth week. He has given His word that the two are imminent, that both may come at any moment.

Unlike human planners who cannot schedule simultaneous parts of the same program unless they are in separate rooms, God has indicated that His prophecy remains to be fulfilled before either of these events. If it were the case that one of the two preceded the other, God has not been forthright with His questions His ethics to suggest that one of the two is not imminent if, in fact, the other is the case. Would He misinform readers of Scripture by asking them to believe in two happenings that could occur at any moment, when actually one of them would precede the other? Of course not! God cannot lie (Tit 1:2).

The Bible presents no sequential arrangement of these two events relative to other future happenings. It prophesies nothing that must occur before the other two, including nothing to indicate that one of the two must occur before the other. They are both next items on God's prophetic calendar. This can be fulfilled if the two occur at the same time. Were either to come before the other, the biblical account would have been misleading in that the second would not have been imminent until the first occurred.

God, the master planner, is the only one for whom the two events are imminent because He knows precisely when they will happen. With His omniscient knowledge, He has instructed us to expect them both at any moment. He would not mislead people into expecting both to be imminent if one of them would not be.

The 'comings' of Christ in Revelation 2–3 necessitate that both the rapture and the beginning of Daniel's seventieth week be imminent and occur simultaneously. Exegetical analyses of the nine references to these events require contemporaneousness. That is why I differ with those who say that the proof for the pretribulational rapture does not exist. Clear exegetical evidence of the imminence of two future happenings requires a pretribulational rapture. If the events will come at once, one of which is the translation of the church, the only way this can happen is for the church to enter the Father's house not before, but after, but at the moment the hour of trial begins.

Dual imminency of Daniel's seventieth week and the church's deliverance from the wrath of that week is not the only exegetical proof of the pretribulational rapture of the church, but it deserves its place alongside other evidence of its prominence in Revelation 2–3.

THE MILLENNIAL POSITION OF SPURGEON

Dennis M. Swanson
Seminary Librarian

The notoriety of Charles Haddon Spurgeon has caused many since his time to claim him as a supporter of their individual views regarding the millennium. Spurgeon and his contemporaries were familiar with the four current millennial views—amillennialism, postmillennialism, historic premillennialism, and dispensational premillennialism—though the earlier nomenclature may have differed. Spurgeon did not preach or write extensively on prophetic themes, but in his sermons and writings he did say enough to produce a clear picture of his position. Despite claims to the contrary, his position was most closely identifiable with that of historic premillennialism in teaching the church would experience the tribulation, the millennial kingdom would be the culmination of God's program for the church, a thousand years would separate the resurrection of the just from that of the unjust, and the Jews in the kingdom would be part of the one people of God with the church.

* * * * *

In the last hundred years eschatology has probably been the subject of more writings than any other aspect of systematic theology. Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-92) did not specialize in eschatology, but supporters of almost every eschatological position have appealed to him as an authority to support their views.

Given Spurgeon's notoriety, the volume of his writings, and his theological acumen, those appeals are not surprising. A sampling of conclusions will illustrate this point. Lewis A. Drummond states, "Spurgeon confessed to be a pre-millennialist."¹ Peter Masters, current

¹Lewis A. Drummond, *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1993) 650.

pastor of Spurgeon's church, The Metropolitan Tabernacle in London, stated, "Spurgeon . . . would have stood much closer to amillennialism than to either of the other scenarios recognized today"² Erroll Hulse firmly declared Spurgeon to be postmillennial.³

Spurgeon could not have held all these positions. However, in which, if any, did he fit? The issue is an important one, as Spurgeon continues to be one of the most popular Christian authors in print, even a century after his death. Men of different positions seek to marshal support for their prophetic interpretations by appealing to Spurgeon.

This article will probe Spurgeon's view on the millennium by a careful examination of his writings in the light of his own times. Hopefully, it will help the uninformed understand Spurgeon and his millennial view more clearly and diminish the misinterpretation of his works and misuse of his stature in regard to eschatology.

MILLENNIALISM IN VICTORIAN ENGLAND

²Peter Masters, "Spurgeon's Eschatology," *The Sword and Trowel* (December 1989):39.

³Erroll Hulse, *The Restoration of Israel* (London: Henry E. Walter Ltd., 1968) 154. Some in the "Theonomist" movement (which holds postmillennialism as a cornerstone of its system) in their writings have implied that Spurgeon was postmillennial. See Gary DeMar and Peter Leithart, *The Reduction of Christianity* (Tyler, Texas: Dominion, 1988) 41.

An understanding of millennial definitions of Spurgeon's time is vital to understanding his view on the subject. Twentieth-century definitions are important, but how his contemporaries understood terms is essential. Furthermore, any view of the millennium depends on one's interpretation of Revelation 20:1-6. The following discussion will limit itself to the various millennial positions as they relate to Spurgeon's views.⁴

Introduction to the Millennial Understandings

Historically, examinations of Revelation 20 have resulted in four millennial views, designated by the prefixes "a-," "post-," "pre-," and "historic pre-." These refer to not only the timing of Christ's return to commence His millennial reign, but perhaps more important, the essential nature of that kingdom.

Briefly, the following are common understandings of the four millennial positions:

- (1) The amillennial position believes there will be no physical kingdom on earth. "Amillennialists believe that the kingdom of God is now present in the world as the victorious Christ rules his church through the Word and Spirit. They feel that the future, glorious, and perfect kingdom refers to the new earth and life in heaven."⁵
- (2) The postmillennial position teaches that there will be an extended period of peace, prosperity, and a godly world brought about by "Christian preaching and teaching."⁶ This millennium will see the nearly universal rule of the church and Christian principles in force in the world and will finally culminate with the return of Christ, and the translation into the eternal state.

The premillennial position divides into two distinct camps:

⁴For a detailed survey of interpretational options for Rev. 20:1-10, see Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1995) 403 ff.

⁵Robert G. Clouse, "Views of the Millennium," *Dictionary of Evangelical Theology*, Walter Elwell, ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984) 714-18.

⁶Ibid., 715.

- (3) The historic or covenantal premillennial view advocates a thousand-year kingdom on earth in which Christ will personally reign, having returned to the earth to establish his rule "suddenly through supernatural methods rather than gradually over a long period of time."⁷ In this approach the kingdom is essentially the culmination of the church age.
- (4) The dispensational premillennialist approach is similar, but the essential nature of the kingdom is quite different. For the dispensationalist, the thousand-year kingdom is the culmination and final fulfillment of God's promises to Israel, not the culmination of the church age. The kingdom over which Christ personally rules is the Davidic Kingdom of Israel's Messiah.

Millennial Approaches in Spurgeon's Day: An Overview

Christendom in Victorian England undoubtedly embraced all four millennial positions. In 1878 Nathaniel West, presenting a chronicle of the history of premillennialism, identified three strains of millennial thought:

Thus does pre-millennialism become a protest against the doctrine of unbroken evolution of the Kingdom of God to absolute perfection on earth, apart from the miraculous intervention of Christ [i.e., postmillennialism]. And equally is it a protest against that vapid idealism which violates the perfect kingdom into a spiritual abstraction, apart from the regensis of the earth [i.e. amillennialism]. It asserts that the literal is always the last and highest fulfillment of prophecy.⁸

In addition, John Whitcomb points out,

⁷Ibid.

⁸Nathaniel West, "History of the Pre-Millennial Doctrine," in *Premillennial Essays of the Prophetic Conference held in the Church of the Holy Trinity*, Nathaniel West, ed. (reprint of Fleming H. Revell 1879 ed., Minneapolis: Bryant Baptist, 1981) 315. This conference convened in the United States, but one presenter (Dr. W. P. Mackay) and several other participants were from England. Spurgeon was most probably aware of the positions and perhaps the conference.

Even in Spurgeon's day . . . Henry Alford (1810-71), the dean of Canterbury, in his monumental four-volume edition of the Greek New Testament, insisted that the thousand-year reign of Christ following His second coming as described in Revelation 20 be understood literally.⁹

What could be identified as amillennialism represented the official positions the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England, although there was latitude within Anglicanism for a wide spectrum on eschatological views. Outside of the established church the influential non-conformist theologian Philip Doddridge (1702-51), "rejected the very notion of a millennium."¹⁰ The Congregational theologian, Josiah Conder wrote in 1838 that any view of a literal millennial kingdom was "aberrational."¹¹

In England "the postmillennial theory was evidently widespread."¹² William Carey and Thomas Chalmers helped spread this view. Postmillennialism was the dominant view in America from the Puritan era to the early 1900's, and was also well-established in England. A seminal work delineating postmillennialism was David Brown's *Christ's Second Coming: Will it be Premillennial?* (1846), a work that became the classic presentation of postmillennial eschatology in England. The volume remains a standard reference piece to this day.

Dispensationalism, still being formulated in Spurgeon's time, predated Spurgeon's ministry by a few decades. John Nelson Darby and the "Brethren" were very influential and began spreading their system by the late 1830's. Bebbington states,

Although never the unanimous view among Brethren, dispensationalism spread beyond their ranks and gradually became the most popular

⁹John C. Whitcomb, "C. H. Spurgeon, Biblical Inerrancy, and Premillennialism," *Grace Theological Journal* 7/2 (Fall 1986):233.

¹⁰David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730's to the 1980's* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989) 62.

¹¹Josiah Conder, *An Analytical and Comparative View of All Religions* (London: SPCK, 1838) 584-92.

¹²Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* 62.

version of futurism. In the nineteenth century it remained a *minority version among premillennialists*, but this intense form of apocalyptic expectation was to achieve much greater salience in the twentieth.¹³

Bebbington goes on to state that the 1830's and 1840's saw the emergence of two schools of thought in premillennialism, the "historicist" and the "futurist."¹⁴ The "historicist" most closely identified with the historic/covenantal premillennial position and the "futurist" with the dispensational premillennialist.¹⁵ Since the dispensational view was a "minority version among premillennialists," the historicist view was the dominant premillennial option in the nineteenth century.

Spurgeon was familiar with various millennial opinions. In his *Commenting and Commentaries*, he identified interpretations of the Book of Revelation and their main proponents. He divided them into four groups: (1) preterist, (2) continuists, (3) simple futurists, and (4) extreme futurists.¹⁶

This clear discussion by Spurgeon, combined with his own admission that he was well-read in the prophetic literature of the day,¹⁷ shows his capability of interacting with the spectrum of millennial thought.

Spurgeon's Statements on Eschatology

Spurgeon's preaching did not often focus on eschatology. He paid little attention to the idea of using prophecy as an evangelistic tool. His statement, "A prophetic preacher enlarged so much on 'the little horn' of Daniel, that one Sabbath morning he had but seven

¹³Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* 86 [emphasis added].

¹⁴Ibid., 85.

¹⁵Ibid., 85-86.

¹⁶Charles H. Spurgeon, *Commenting and Commentaries* (reprint of 1876 Passmore and Alabaster ed., Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1969) 198.

¹⁷G. Holden Pike, *The Life and Work of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (reprint of 1894 Cassell & Company ed., Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1991) 4:133.

hearers remaining,"¹⁸ shows he saw no value in extended preaching on prophetic themes. He taught that one's chief concern in preaching should not be prophetic speculations, but the gospel message and practical godliness:

Salvation is a theme for which I would fain enlist every holy tongue. I am greedy after witnesses for the glorious gospel of the blessed God. O that Christ crucified were the universal burden of men of God. Your guess at the number of the beast, your Napoleonic speculations, your conjectures concerning a personal Antichrist—forgive me, I count them but mere bones for dogs.¹⁹

Nonetheless, Spurgeon could claim with the Apostle Paul that he "did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God" (Acts 20:27). His own testimony on this matter is sufficient:

You will bear me witness, my friends, that it is exceedingly seldom I ever intrude into the mysteries of the future with regard either to the second advent, the millennial reign, or the first and second resurrection. As often as we come about it in our expositions, we do not turn aside from the point, but if guilty at all on this point, it is rather in being too silent than saying too much.²⁰

It is clear that even if Spurgeon's statement on matters of "the second advent, the millennial reign, or the first and second resurrection" were infrequent, they were not imprecise. Spurgeon understood all the features of eschatology presented in Scripture, although he did not devote much time to their chronological arrangement. On September 18, 1876, he presented to the Metropolitan Tabernacle congregation this overview of eschatological events:

It is also certain that the Jews, as a people, will yet own Jesus of

¹⁸Charles H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 4 vols. in 1 (reprint of 1881 1st series ed. of Passmore & Alabaster, Pasadena, Texas: Pilgrim, 1990) 1:100.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 1:83.

²⁰Spurgeon, "The First Resurrection," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* 7:345.

Nazareth, the Son of David, as their King, and that they will return to their own land. . . . It is certain also that our Lord Jesus Christ will come again to this earth, and that he will reign amongst his ancients gloriously, and that there will be a thousand years of joy and peace such as were never known on this earth before. It is also certain that there will be a great and general judgment, when all nations shall be gathered before the Son of man sitting upon the throne of his glory; and his final award concerning those upon his left hand will be. . . . How all these great events are to be chronologically arranged, I cannot tell.²¹

The tendency of Spurgeon to reject tightly knit chronological sequences remained with him his entire life. Drummond points out that Spurgeon "refused to spend an inordinate amount of time discussing, for example, the relationship of the rapture to the tribulation period, or like points of eschatological nuance."²² Eschatology was secondary with him, a valuable endeavor, but one that he felt should never "overlay the commonplaces of practical godliness,"²³ or come before "first you see to it that your children are brought to the saviour's feet."²⁴

Spurgeon's Sermons

The primary outlet for Spurgeon's theology was, of course, his preaching. His preaching style was normally a topical or textual approach, yet he still worked diligently at exegesis. One visitor to his study remarked, "I was at first surprised to find Mr. Spurgeon consulting both the Hebrew and Greek texts. . . . His exegesis was seldom wrong. He spared no pains to be sure of the exact meaning of his text."²⁵

²¹Spurgeon, "The Harvest and the Vintage," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* 50:553-54.

²²Drummond, *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers* 650.

²³Spurgeon, "The Ascension and Second Advent Practically Considered," in *Spurgeon's Expository Encyclopedia* 4:442.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Spurgeon, *Autobiography* (Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1976) 2:346.

The second coming of Christ. The feature that Spurgeon identified as a foundational eschatological issue was "The Second Advent of Christ." That Spurgeon believed in the personal and literal return of Christ to the earth is an indisputable fact. He looked forward to this great event with anticipation and announced it to his congregation with regularity:

We know that Christ was really, personally, and physically here on earth. But it is not quite so clear to some persons that he is to come, really, personally, and literally the second time. . . . Now, we believe that the Christ who shall sit on the throne of his father David, and whose feet shall stand upon Mount Olivet, is as much a personal Christ as the Christ who came to Bethlehem and wept in the manger.²⁶

Certainly there can be no doubt about Spurgeon's belief in the literal and physical return of Christ. However, what were his views on the millennial reign?

The millennial reign of Christ. On the theme of millennial reign of Christ, Spurgeon was far from silent. Though he did not give a great deal of attention to it, when he did, his view was consistent. In 1865 he stated,

Some think that this descent of the Lord will be post-millennial—that is, after the thousand years of his reign. I cannot think so. I conceive that the advent will be pre-millennial; that he will come first; and *then will come the millennium as the result of his personal reign upon earth.*²⁷

This comment not only clarifies Spurgeon's position on the subject, but also shows his familiarity with other millennial positions and their key

²⁶Spurgeon, "The Two Advents of Christ," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* 8:39. For other sermons with a similar theme, see "Things to Come," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* 15:329; "To-Morrow," in *The New Park Street Pulpit* 2:237; and "The Ascension and The Second Advent Practically Considered," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* 31:23.

²⁷Spurgeon, "Justification and Glory," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* 11:249 [emphasis added].

features. In another sermon he made the following oft-quoted remark regarding the millennial reign:

We are looking for the blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ. "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" is the desire of every instructed saint. I shall not go into any details about when he will come: I will not espouse the cause of the pre-millennial or the post-millennial advent; it will suffice me just now to observe that the Redeemer's coming is the desire of the entire church.²⁸

Iain Murray cites Spurgeon's disclaimer of not espousing the cause of two different millennial positions as an example of Spurgeon admitting "a fundamental uncertainty in his mind."²⁹ However, it seems better to understand that Spurgeon was simply declining to elaborate on millennial views in this particular sermon.

Also, he did not think the millennium on earth was to be identified with the eternal existence in heaven. He clearly made a distinction between the two. Beginning a sermon on the text, "Throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it" (Rev 22:3), he stated, "We shall take these words as referring to heaven. Certainly it is most true of the celestial city, *as well as of the millennial city*, that the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it."³⁰ Regarding the nature and location of the millennial reign he said,

There is, moreover, to be a reign of Christ. I cannot read the Scriptures without perceiving that there is to be a millennial reign, as I believe, upon the earth, and that there shall be new heavens and new earth wherein dwell righteousness.³¹

Discussing the relation of the timing of the return of Christ to

²⁸Spurgeon, "The Double Come," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* 27:390-91.

²⁹Iain H. Murray, *The Puritan Hope: Revival and the Interpretation of Prophecy* (Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1971) 263.

³⁰Spurgeon, "The Throne of God and of the Lamb," in *Spurgeon's Expository Encyclopedia* 8:409 [emphasis added].

³¹Spurgeon, "For Ever with the Lord," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* 23:522.

the millennium and the necessity of its commencing that millennium, he rejected a postmillennial position:

Paul does not paint the future with rose-colour: he is no smooth-tongued prophet of a golden age, into which this dull earth may be imagined to be glowing. There are sanguine brethren who are looking forward to everything growing better and better and better, until, at the last this present age ripens into a millennium. They will not be able to sustain their hopes, for Scripture gives them no solid basis to rest upon. We who believe that there will be no millennial reign without the King, and who expect no rule of righteousness except from the appearing of the righteous Lord, are nearer the mark. Apart from the second Advent of our Lord, the world is more likely to sink into pandemonium than to rise into a millennium. A divine interposition seems to me the hope set before us in Scripture, and, indeed, to be the only hope adequate to the situation. We look to the darkening down of things; the state of mankind, however improved politically, may yet grow worse and worse spiritually.³²

He rejected any notion, however well-intended, that apart from the personal intervention of Christ a millennium would be possible. He called preachers who held to a postmillennial system those who "do not understand the prophecies"³³ and asserted that "the great hope of the future is the coming of the Son of man."³⁴

Thus it is clear that Spurgeon believed in an earthly millennium founded on and preceded by the Second Advent of Christ.

The resurrection of the dead. A third area of Spurgeon's eschatological interest lay in the resurrections of the just and the wicked. Throughout his ministry he taught separate resurrections of the just and unjust. The discussion above has cited his distinction between

³²Spurgeon, "The Form of Godliness without the Power," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* 35:301.

³³Spurgeon, "Jesus Only: A Communion Meditation," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* 45:374.

³⁴Ibid.

"the first and second resurrection."³⁵ That he believed in a literal and physical resurrection is undeniable:

Yet this Paul believed, and this he preached—that there would be a resurrection of the dead, both the just and the unjust, not that the just and the unjust would merely live as to their souls, but that their bodies should be restored from the grave, and that a resurrection, as well as an immortality, should be the entail of every man of woman born, whatever his character might be.³⁶

In the same sermon Spurgeon declared the resurrections would be distinct, separated by a period of time: "Notice that this reaping comes first, and I think it comes first in order of time. If I read the Scriptures aright, there are to be two resurrections, and the first will be the resurrection of the righteous."³⁷

Interestingly and in keeping with his avoidance of prophetic preaching, he only preached two sermons in his entire ministry with a primary text in Revelation 20, admittedly the key passage on the millennium. He preached on Revelation 20:4-6, 12 (skipping over verses one might have wished him to comment upon) in an 1861 sermon and Revelation 20:11 in 1866. He also never preached from any portion of Daniel 12 and the interpretation of the first two verses. Despite this, he firmly declared his belief that the thousand-year millennial reign would separate the two resurrections. In 1861 he told his congregation this:

I think that the Word of God teaches, and teaches indisputably, that the saints shall rise first. And be the interval of time whatever it may, whether the thousand years are literal years, or a very long period of time, I am not now about to determine; I have nothing to do except with the fact that there are two resurrections, a resurrection of the just, and afterwards of the unjust,—a time when the saints of God shall rise, and

³⁵Spurgeon, "The First Resurrection" 7:345.

³⁶Spurgeon, "Resurrection for the Just and the Unjust," *Spurgeon's Expository Encyclopedia* 13:241.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 13:358; cf. also, "Things to Come," *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* 15:329.

after time when the wicked shall rise to the resurrection of damnation.³⁸

In the same sermon he expressed his belief that both resurrections are literal and physical. He attacked the position of the famous American Presbyterian, Albert Barnes (1798-1870), an amillennialist,³⁹ who rejected the literal resurrection spoken of in Revelation 20:4-6, 12. He charged Barnes with holding a position that spiritualized the resurrection. In concluding his argument against Barnes, he said,

Now I appeal to you, would you, in reading that passage, think this to be the meaning? Would any man believe that to be its meaning, if he had not some thesis to defend? The fact is, we sometimes read Scripture, thinking of what it ought to say, rather than what it does say. . . . It is—we have no doubt whatever—a literal resurrection of the saints of God, and not of principles nor of doctrines.⁴⁰

Spurgeon's comments on the two resurrections, separated by the millennium, are not as Murray concludes, "far from common in his sermons,"⁴¹ but a normal and consistently expounded theme, when the text suggested that topic:

Now we believe and hold that Christ shall come a second time suddenly, to raise his saints at the first resurrection; this shall be the commencement of the grand judgment, and they shall reign with him afterwards. *The rest of the dead live not till the thousand years are finished.* Then they shall rise from their tombs and they shall receive the deeds which they have done in the body.⁴²

³⁸Spurgeon, "The First Resurrection" 7:346. The statement about "not now about to determine" seems to be idiomatic of Spurgeon to refer to his unwillingness to expound on a "bunny-trail" in the context of his sermon.

³⁹James E. Rosscup, *Commentaries for Biblical Expositors* (Sun Valley, Calif.: Grace Book Shack, 1993) 22.

⁴⁰Spurgeon, "The First Resurrection" 7:346.

⁴¹Murray, *The Puritan Hope* 259.

⁴²Spurgeon, "The Two Advents of Christ" 8:39 [emphasis added].

Spurgeon's view on the future of Israel as a people and as a nation deserves attention. At a special meeting at The Metropolitan Tabernacle on June 16, 1864, Spurgeon preached on "The Restoration and Conversion of the Jews," on behalf of the British Society for the Propagation of the Gospel amongst the Jews. In this sermon he laid out several important statements about the future of the Jewish people. First of all, he believed that the Jews would physically and literally return to inhabit and have political control over their ancient land. He explained,

There will be a native government again; there will again be the form of a body politic; a state shall be incorporated, and a king shall reign. Israel has now become alienated from her own land. . . . If there be anything clear and plain, the literal sense and meaning of this passage [Ezekiel 37:1-10]—a meaning not to be spirited or spiritualized away—must be evident that both the two and the ten tribes of Israel are to be restored to their own land, and that a king is to rule over them.⁴³

He also believed that the conversion of the Jews would come through Christian preaching by means of the church and other societies and mission agencies that God would raise up for that task.⁴⁴

Spurgeon's Commentaries and Other Works

In the course of his long preaching and literary career, Spurgeon wrote only two works that were, strictly speaking, commentaries. The primary one was his monumental work on the Psalms, *The Treasury of David*. Spurgeon spent nearly fifteen years completing the seven volumes which he and his closest associates considered his *magnum opus*.⁴⁵ It was his only thoroughly expository

⁴³Spurgeon, "The Restoration and Conversion of the Jews," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* 10:426.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 430-36.

⁴⁵Charles H. Spurgeon, *C. H. Spurgeon's Autobiography: Compiled from His Diary, Letters and Records by His Wife and Private Secretary* (reprint of 1897 Passmore and Alabaster ed., Pasadena, Texas: Pilgrim, 1992) 3:305.

work and has remained in print without interruption since his death.

In the *Treasury*, as in most of Spurgeon's works, he sees references to Israel in the Psalms as being the church. He does touch on eschatology several times within this work. One is his comment on Psalm 14:7 where he wrote, "The coming of Messiah was the desire of the godly in all ages. . . . His glorious advent will restore his ancient people from literal captivity, and his spiritual seed from spiritual sorrow."⁴⁶

Commenting on Psalm 2:5-6 Spurgeon wrote, "His unsuffering kingdom yet shall come when he shall take unto himself his great power, and reign from *the river unto the ends of the earth*."⁴⁷ Commenting on Psalm 45:16 his words were, "The whole earth shall yet be subdued for Christ, and honoured are they, who shall, through grace, have a share in the conquest—these shall reign with Christ at His Coming."⁴⁸ He comments decisively on the nature of Jesus' millennial reign in Psalm 72:8:

Wide spread shall be the rule of Messiah; only Land's End shall end his territory: to the Ultima Thule shall his scepter be extended. From Pacific to Atlantic, and from Atlantic to Pacific, he shall be. . . . In this Psalm, at least, we see a personal monarch, and he is the central figure, the focus of all glory; not his servant, but himself do we see possessing the dominion and dispensing the government.⁴⁹

Spurgeon sees specifically a personal reign of Christ over nations on earth. Commenting further on this Psalm, he discussed the political nature of Christ's reign on earth. He believed that nations would exist in the millennium with their own kings and leaders, but that all would be subject to Christ and His government in Jerusalem. He also saw Christ's personal reign as a certain, but future event: "But since we see

⁴⁶Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: An Expository and Devotional Commentary on the Psalms*, 7 vols. (reprint of 1870-1884 Passmore and Alabaster ed., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977) 1:183.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 1:13 [emphasis added].

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 2:359.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 3:319.

Jesus crowned with glory and honour in heaven, we are altogether without doubt as to his universal monarchy on earth."⁵⁰

In *The Treasury of David* as is in his sermons, Spurgeon is clear and concise in his statements regarding the millennium. Those statements were perhaps not as frequent as in some other commentators, but they are thoroughly consistent with his sermons and other writings.

Spurgeon's only other commentary was also his final book, *Matthew: The Gospel of the Kingdom*, completed only days before his death. Spurgeon himself completed only the first draft and the notations. His wife Susannah put it into its final form. He commented as follows on Matthew 24: "Our Lord appears to have purposely mingled the prophecies concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and his own second coming."⁵¹ Spurgeon understood most of the prophecies to refer to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. In Matthew 24:15-21 he called the abomination of desolation "the Roman ensigns with their idolatrous emblems."⁵²

Spurgeon saw none of the prophecies of Matthew as direct predictions of the period just before Christ's return, but saw in the destruction of Jerusalem a time typical of that period.

Another relevant work by Spurgeon was his *Commenting and Commentaries*, produced as the fourth in the series of *Lectures to My Students*. His comments were brief and often "tongue in cheek," but do reveal some features of his prophetic views. Regarding a certain R. Amner's commentary on Daniel, Spurgeon said it was built "on the absurd hypothesis that the prophecies were all fulfilled before the death of Antiochus Epiphanes."⁵³ About I. R. Park's work on Zechariah, he wrote, "This author explains the prophecy spiritually and asserts that 'the spiritual is the most literal interpretation.' We

⁵⁰Ibid., 3:320.

⁵¹Charles H. Spurgeon, *Matthew: The Gospel of the Kingdom* (reprint of 1893 Passmore and Alabaster ed., Pasadena, Texas: Pilgrim, 1974) 217.

⁵²Ibid., 215.

⁵³Spurgeon, *Lectures (Commenting and Commentaries)* 4:126.

more than doubt it."⁵⁴ In discussing commentaries on Revelation, he calls the premillennial work of E. B. Elliott's *Horae Apocalypticae* "the standard work on the subject."⁵⁵

During his lifetime Spurgeon amassed one of the largest and finest biblical and theological libraries of his day. He had read at least major parts of all of the volumes, had both the contents and locations of the books in his collection memorized! His vast resources and his almost insatiable reading habits enabled him to expose himself to the various interpretations of prophecy and the Book of Revelation in general and Revelation 20 and the millennium in particular. He kept up-to-date on current theological trends and new interpretations and was able to interact with them. In fact it was his theological acumen and "watchman on the wall" mentality that enabled him to foresee the theological decline that would lead to the "Downgrade Controversy," the event which led to the formulation of his famous "Statement of Faith."

Spurgeon's Statement of Faith

At the height of the Down-Grade Controversy⁵⁶ Spurgeon and several others created and signed a statement of faith to state the doctrines that distinguished them from those in the Baptist Union who were on the "down grade." In 1891 *The Sword and Trowel* published the statement, nearly half of which dealt with the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures. It closed with the final point: "Our hope is

⁵⁴Ibid., 4:139.

⁵⁵Ibid., 4:199. Elliott followed a continuous-historical interpretation of Revelation and was premillennial.

⁵⁶In brief, this was the controversy that led Spurgeon to resign from the Baptist Union. For further information on the controversy see Bob Ross, *The Down-Grade Controversy: Collected Materials which Reveal the Viewpoint of the late Charles H. Spurgeon* (Pasadena, Texas: Pilgrim Publishing, n.d.); Iain Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon* (Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1966); John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ashamed of the Gospel, When the Church Becomes like the World* (Waco, Texas: Word, 1993) 197-225; particularly J. C. Carlile, *C. H. Spurgeon: An Interpretative Biography* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1933).

the Personal Pre-Millennial Return of the Lord Jesus in Glory."⁵⁷

In discussing this Confession and its signatories, C. W. H. Griffiths maintained, "It is clearly to the point to ask what these men understood by pre-millennial."⁵⁸ He presented clear information that the signatories of this document were "powerful contenders for what we would understand as pre-millennialism."⁵⁹

Peter Masters dismissed the importance of the "Manifesto," as it was called, contending that their definition of "premillennialism was considerably broader than it is today."⁶⁰ However, as Erickson points out, the confusion of millennial positions was not between the amillennial and premillennial views, but rather over the fact that "amillennialism has often been difficult to distinguish from postmillennialism."⁶¹ This statement of faith is among the strongest sources for identifying Spurgeon as a premillennialist, with even Iain Murray citing it as substantial proof.⁶²

SPURGEON AND MILLENNIAL OPTIONS

With Spurgeon's material as proof of his premillennialism, it remains to examine the arguments of those who have identified his position otherwise or define what type of premillennialism he held.

Spurgeon and Amillennialism

Amillennialism rejects any earthly and physical "millennium,"

⁵⁷"Mr. Spurgeon's Confession of Faith," in *The Sword and Trowel* 26 (August 1891):446-48.

⁵⁸C. W. H. Griffiths, "Spurgeon's Eschatology," in *Watching and Waiting* 23/15 (July-September 1990):227.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Masters, "Spurgeon's Eschatology" 28.

⁶¹Millard J. Erickson, *Contemporary Options in Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977) 74.

⁶²Murray, *Puritan Hope* 257.

instead believing that the "kingdom" is both present in the "dynamic reign of God in human history through Jesus Christ,"⁶³ and future in the "new heaven and new earth."⁶⁴

Perhaps the most significant and well-documented evaluation of Spurgeon's eschatology that attempts to place him in the amillennial camp has come from Peter Masters. In a 1991 article in *Sword and Trowel*, he presents a brief critique of Iain Murray's appendix in *The Puritan Hope*, entitled "C. H. Spurgeon's Views on Prophecy." He also briefly notes Tom Carter's work, *Spurgeon at His Best*.⁶⁵ Masters' basic complaint about both works is their lack of thoroughness: "The problem with Mr. Murray's assessment is that it is based on too few of Spurgeon's eschatological statements."⁶⁶ He objects to Carter's calling Spurgeon a post-tribulation premillennialist "on the basis of three short passages."⁶⁷

After criticizing the brevity of the two, Masters lays out in chronological fashion quotations from Spurgeon's sermons ranging over his entire ministry. He quotes nearly thirty sources and concludes that Spurgeon "would have stood much closer to amillennialism."⁶⁸

Several facets of Masters' work deserve comment. First, he never defines the millennial views, he simply caricatures them and often misrepresents them. In one instance, he makes a point about the millennial reign and contrasts it to a dispensational view, saying,

According to Spurgeon, as the saints took up their everlasting abode on the glorified earth with their savior, the millennial reign would begin.

⁶³Anthony A. Hoekema, "Amillennialism," in *The Meaning of the Millennium*, Robert G. Clouse, ed. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1977) 178.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Masters does not refer to Carter or the book by name in his article, but the work he refers to is unmistakable.

⁶⁶Masters, "Spurgeon's Eschatology" 28.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Ibid., 39.

This, however, would not be a millennium like that *expected by dispensationalists*. *Spurgeon's millennium would not be interrupted by any resurgence of evil.*⁶⁹

However, dispensationalists are not the only ones that foresee a rebellion at the end of the millennium (Rev 20:7-9); historic premillennialists do too, and even postmillenarian Charles Hodge taught a rebellion at the end of the thousand years to be quelled by the personal return of Christ!⁷⁰

Perhaps the most serious deficiency of Masters' work is the occasional removal from Spurgeon's quotations of phrases and sentences without any notation. Ellipses are acceptable in long quotations when they do not alter the author's intended meaning, but his omissions do alter the meaning.

Upon close examination of several of the quotations, there "appears to have been a deliberate suppression of Mr. Spurgeon's view."⁷¹ Masters wrote, "Spurgeon's millennium, was, in effect simply the *opening phase* of the eternal hereafter,"⁷² that there would not be any resurgence of evil, and, "No unregenerate person could possibly exist there."⁷³ However, in quoting Spurgeon's sermon, he omits a key phrase:

The people of Israel are to be converted to God, and . . . their conversion is to be permanent. . . . This thing shall be, and . . . both in the spiritual and in the temporal throne, the King Messiah shall sit, and reign among his people gloriously.⁷⁴

The phrase excised in the second ellipsis is "so that whatever nations

⁶⁹Ibid. [emphasis added]

⁷⁰Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (reprint of 1871 Charles Scribner and Sons ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949) 3:812.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Masters's, "Spurgeon's Eschatology" 29 [emphasis original].

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Masters, "Spurgeon's Eschatology" 30.

may apostatize and turn from the Lord in these days, the nation of Israel never can."⁷⁵ This phrase indicates that Spurgeon did entertain the possibility, if not the likelihood, of some type of apostasy or falling away among the nations during the reign of Christ on earth. An apostasy of the nations would be impossible if Spurgeon's millennium was the eternal state.

A more overt example is Masters' careless quotation of Spurgeon came in another 1864 sermon:

They shall not say to one another, Know the Lord: for all shall know Him, from the least to the greatest.

The whole earth will be a temple, every day will be a Sabbath, the avocation of all men will be priestly, they shall be a nation of priests—distinctly so, and they shall day without night serve God in His temple.⁷⁶

Here no indication of editing appears. Masters simply moves from one paragraph to the next. He begins the sermon excerpt with a statement that Spurgeon believed, "There would be no Jewish worship, nor Christian ministers, and all shall know the Lord."⁷⁷ However, the removed sentence refutes Masters' assertion. Spurgeon expresses the possibility of Jewish rituals in the millennial kingdom: "There may even be in that period certain solemn assemblies and Sabbath days, but they will not be of the same kind as we now have."⁷⁸

Masters deserves criticism for both his technique and his analysis of Spurgeon's writings. He damages the credibility of his thesis and casts great doubt on the validity of his conclusions by carelessly handling the written evidence. Griffiths has written,

It appears that Dr. Masters has been over zealous in his attempt to identify the character of Mr. Spurgeon's millennium with that of the a-millennialists and that this has led to manipulation of quotations to his

⁷⁵Spurgeon, "The Restoration and Conversion of the Jews" 10:430.

⁷⁶Masters, "Spurgeon's Eschatology" 30.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Spurgeon, "The Lamb, The Light," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* 10:439.

own end.⁷⁹

In a point by point comparison, Spurgeon's teachings simply do not match typical amillennial teaching. First, he claims to be premillennial. Though the term "amillennial" may not have existed in Spurgeon's day, he nonetheless understood the concept and the teaching which would eventually become amillennialism. The position was well-known and well-established in his day. His idea of two resurrections separated by a millennial age is totally incompatible with amillennial eschatology. Hoekema clarifies this as he comments, "Amillennialists reject the common premillennial teaching that the resurrection of believers and that of unbelievers will be separated by a thousand years."⁸⁰

Spurgeon's belief that Israel would be re-gathered and have a "native government again; there will again be the form of a body politic; a state shall be incorporated, and a king shall reign,"⁸¹ is foreign to amillennial eschatology. His belief that Christians are to "expect a reigning Christ on earth,"⁸² is the opposite of amillennialists who see Christ's reign as spiritual and/or heavenly. In fact, Spurgeon warned that the earthly reign of Christ is "put so literally that we dare not spiritualize it."⁸³ No amillennialist would agree with his statement, "I conceive that the advent will be pre-millennial; that he will come first; and then will come the millennium as the result of his personal reign upon the earth."⁸⁴

The only conclusion can be that he was not amillennial in his eschatology.

⁷⁹Griffiths, "Spurgeon's Eschatology" 230.

⁸⁰Hoekema, "Amillennialism" 182.

⁸¹Spurgeon, "The Conversion and Restoration of the Jews" 10:426

⁸²Spurgeon, "Things to Come" 15:329.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Spurgeon, "Justification and Glory" 11:249.

Spurgeon and Postmillennialism

It has been almost the "default" belief among Christians that Spurgeon was postmillennial in his eschatology because of his close association with English and American Puritan writers whom he respected so deeply. However, as already shown, he clearly defined and categorically rejected the postmillennial system: "Some think that this descent of the Lord will be post-millennial—that is, after the thousand years of his reign. I cannot think so. I conceive that the advent will be pre-millennial. . . ." ⁸⁵

Spurgeon clearly identified and summarily rejected the main tenets of postmillennialism. Yet Iain Murray attempted to cast Spurgeon as a postmillennialist. He wrote, "There was a fundamental uncertainty in his mind [regarding eschatology],"⁸⁶ maintaining the thesis that though Spurgeon made many statements affirming a premillennial position, he also made statements contradictory to a premillennial position. Murray admitted that he had "no ready solution to the apparently contradictory features in Spurgeon's thought on prophecy."⁸⁷ However, after rejecting G. Holden Pike's theory that Spurgeon shifted his millennial beliefs after "he had received a few scars in the conflict,"⁸⁸ Murray presented three general explanations for Spurgeon's "contradictory features."

First, he postulated that in the initial phase of Spurgeon's London ministry (1855-65) when there were "conversions in large numbers, particularly after what may have been called the national spiritual awakening in Ulster in 1859,"⁸⁹ he was more "inclined to emphasize and preach the traditional Puritan hope [i.e., postmillennialism] which he had imbibed during his upbringing and youth."⁹⁰ Second, he noted that Spurgeon "had a profound distrust of

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Murray, *The Puritan Hope* 263.

⁸⁷Ibid., 260.

⁸⁸Pike, *Spurgeon* 5:96.

⁸⁹Murray, *The Puritan Hope* 260.

⁹⁰Ibid.

many pre-millennial dealers in prophecy."⁹¹ These he identified mainly with certain members of the Plymouth Brethren movement who were always "trumpeting and vialing."⁹² Third, Murray interpreted some statements as indicating he "was deliberately open in acknowledging the limitations of his understanding."⁹³ Murray's evaluation of Spurgeon's prophetic views is not adequate on several fronts.

Regarding his first and third points, Spurgeon's sermons show that he consistently rejected postmillennialism over his entire ministry, not simply during the time of the Down-Grade battle. "Jesus Only" was preached at New Park Street in 1857.⁹⁴ Perhaps Spurgeon's clearest statement, where he both identifies and rejects postmillennialism categorically, occurs in his sermon "Justification and Glory," preached in 1865.⁹⁵ The other sermon cited which rejects the postmillennial approach came in 1889, "The Form of Godliness without the Power."⁹⁶ To discern a "fundamental uncertainty" in Spurgeon's thinking on this does injustice to the facts. It appears that "unable to claim him as a postmillennialist, he [Murray] was unwilling to concede him to be a pre-millennialist."⁹⁷

⁹¹Ibid., 261.

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* 45:373 ff.

⁹⁵Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* 11:241 ff.

⁹⁶Ibid., 35:301 ff.

⁹⁷Griffiths, "Spurgeon's Eschatology" 226.

Spurgeon and Dispensational Premillennialism

On several occasions in the *Sword and Trowel* Spurgeon spoke against some of the practices of the Brethren, especially Darby, viewed sometimes as the developer of dispensational premillennialism. However, Spurgeon's main argument against the Brethren was their ecclesiology and soteriology, some features of their eschatology being only secondary issues.

Spurgeon's displeasure with "dispensationalism" was the teaching that separated the church and Israel into separate people's in God's program. In 1867 he wrote a long article outlining his objections to the theology of the Brethren.⁹⁸ In that article he questioned dispensational teaching: "Has it not been reserved to the Christian dispensation to furnish the privileged company which, in their unity, is called 'the Church,' 'the Bride of Jesus,' 'the Lamb's wife?'"⁹⁹ He objected to the idea that the believing Jews living prior to the first advent were not part of the church. In the entire article Spurgeon advocated "the one people of God," the continuity between the OT and NT saints. The following reflects his objection to this emphasis of dispensational teaching:

Difference of dispensation does not involve a difference of covenant; and it is according to the covenant of grace that all spiritual blessings are bestowed. So far as dispensations reach they indicate degrees of knowledge, degrees of privilege, and variety in the ordinances of worship. The unity of the faith is not affected by these, as we are taught in the eleventh chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews. The faithful of every age concur in looking for that one city, and that city is identically the same with the New Jerusalem described in the Apocalypse as "a

⁹⁸Spurgeon was not against all Brethren. The Plymouth Brethren split between John Nelson Darby and B. W. Newton, Darby and his followers being called the "Exclusive Brethren" and Newton's group the "Open Brethren" or "Bethesda Group." Spurgeon's differences with the "Exclusive" branch were larger, but he maintained warm relations with many in the "Open" school, including B. W. Newton and George Mueller. Even among the "Exclusive" group he respected the commentaries William Kelly and C. H. Macintosh, though he usually differed with their conclusions.

⁹⁹Spurgeon, "There be some that Trouble You," in *The Sword and Trowel* 3 (March 1867) 120.

bride adorned for her husband."¹⁰⁰

He clarifies this point: "Surely, beloved brethren, you ought not to stumble at the anachronism of comprising Abraham, David, and others, in the fellowship of the Church!"¹⁰¹ In this entire article, Spurgeon says nothing about eschatological interpretations of the Brethren, referring only to the violence done to the covenant by dispensationalism.

Ryrie specifies, "The essence of dispensationalism, then, is the distinction of Israel and the Church."¹⁰² Spurgeon rejected any notion that separated the people of God. In a clear reference to the teaching of dispensationalists, he explained,

We have even heard it asserted that those who lived before the coming of Christ do not belong to the church of God! . . . These who saw Christ's day before it came, had a great difference as to what they knew, and perhaps in the same measure a difference as to what they enjoyed while on earth meditating upon Christ; but they were all washed in the same blood, all redeemed with the same ransom price, and made members of the same body. Israel in the covenant of grace is not natural Israel, but all believers in all ages.¹⁰³

Without question, he saw the church and Israel united "spiritually." Also, his *Treasury of David* viewed the church as the recipient of the kingdom promises of God. His commentary on Matthew, though not stating so specifically, strongly implied that the church would experience the future tribulation, being preserved and protected by the power of God.

Spurgeon's views on eschatology were not consistent with a dispensational understanding of premillennialism.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹⁰¹Ibid., 121.

¹⁰²Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody, 1965) 47.

¹⁰³Charles H. Spurgeon, "Jesus Christ Immutable," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* 15:8.

Spurgeon and Historic Premillennialism

Key features of historic premillennialism are twofold: (1) the kingdom will be the culmination of the church age and (2) the "rapture" will follow the tribulation, with the church going through the tribulation under the protection of God.

Spurgeon fits most consistently into the "historic or covenantal premillennial" system. The reasons for this conclusion are the following:

First, Spurgeon believed that the church would go through the totality of the tribulation, but be protected.

The burning earth shall be the torch to light up the wedding procession; the quivering of the heavens shall be, as it were, but as a dancing of the feet of angels in those glorious festivities, and the booming and crashing of the elements shall, somehow, only help to swell the outburst of praise unto God the just and terrible, who is to our exceeding joy.¹⁰⁴

Tom Carter concluded that he "believed that the church would pass through the tribulation before the second coming, this would make him a premillennial post-tribulationist."¹⁰⁵ Spurgeon believed the second advent would precede the millennial kingdom: "I conceive that the advent will be pre-millennial; that he will come first; and then will come the millennium as the result of his personal reign upon earth."¹⁰⁶

Second, Spurgeon felt that the millennial kingdom was the culmination of God's program for the church: "The vehemence of your desire for the destruction of evil and the setting up of the kingdom of Christ will drive you to that grand hope of the church, and make you cry out for its fulfillment."¹⁰⁷

Third, Spurgeon believed that there would be two separate

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 42:607.

¹⁰⁵Tom Carter, *Spurgeon at His Best* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988) 183-84.

¹⁰⁶Spurgeon, "Justification and Glory" 11:249.

¹⁰⁷Spurgeon, "The Double Come" 27:292.

resurrections, one of the just and one of the unjust, separated by the millennium:

If I read the Scriptures aright, there are to be two resurrections, and the first will be the resurrection of the righteous; for it is written, `But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished.'¹⁰⁸

Fourth, Spurgeon taught that though the Jews would return to their land and Messiah would reign over them, they would come to faith in Christ just as the church and would be part of the church:

These who saw Christ's day before it came, had a great difference as to what they knew, and perhaps in the same measure a difference as to what they enjoyed while on earth meditating upon Christ; but they were all washed in the same blood, all redeemed with the same ransom price, and made members of the same body. Israel in the covenant of grace is not natural Israel, but all believers in all ages.¹⁰⁹

CONCLUSION

Spurgeon was most certainly premillennial, but not dispensational. Currently this has been a disputed issue, but during his lifetime his position was well known and attested to. As Drummond points out, "Nineteenth Century premillennialists loved to get Spurgeon in their camp. In 1888 The Episcopal Recorder stated that, `C. H. Spurgeon [is a] . . . pronounced premillennialist.'"¹¹⁰ In prophetic conferences of the 19th century, S. H. Kellog identified Spurgeon as premillennial.¹¹¹ George Marsden called the religious

¹⁰⁸Spurgeon, "Resurrection of the Just and the Unjust" 13:241.

¹⁰⁹Charles H. Spurgeon, "Jesus Christ Immutable," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* 15:8.

¹¹⁰Drummond, *Spurgeon* 650.

¹¹¹S. H. Kellog, "Christ's Coming: Will It Be Premillennial," in *Premillennial Essays of the Prophetic Conference Held in the Church of the Holy Trinity, New York City*, Nathaniel West, ed. (reprint of Fleming H. Revell 1879 ed., Minneapolis: Bryant Baptist, 1981) 74.

periodical *The Christian Herald and Signs of the Times* "a premillennial organ, featuring such contributors as A. J. Gordon, A. T. Pierson, Samuel Kellog and England's Charles Spurgeon."¹¹²

All the evidence demonstrates that Charles Haddon Spurgeon most certainly held to a premillennial eschatology. Furthermore, his millennial views coincided most closely with the "historic" or "covenantal" view of premillennialism, a position he held firmly throughout his entire ministry. The understanding of the premillennial return of Christ was of such great import to Spurgeon and his ministry that he stressed,

Brethren, no truth ought to be more frequently proclaimed, next to the first coming of the Lord, than his second coming; and you cannot thoroughly set forth all of the ends and bearings of the first advent if you forget the second. At the Lord's Supper, there is no discerning the Lord's body unless you discern his first coming; but there is no drinking into his cup to its fulness, unless you hear him say, "Until I Come." You must look forward, as well as backward. So it must be with all our ministries; they must look to him on the cross and on the throne. We must vividly realize that he, who has once come, is coming yet again, or else our testimony will be marred, and one-sided. We shall make lame work of preaching and teaching if we leave out either advent.¹¹³

¹¹² George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and the American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University, 1980) 84.

¹¹³Spurgeon, "He Cometh With Clouds," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* 33:592-93.

**THE DISPENSATIONAL VIEW
OF THE DAVIDIC KINGDOM:
A RESPONSE TO
PROGRESSIVE DISPENSATIONALISM**

Stephen J. Nichols¹

Progressive dispensationalism has departed from one of the historical distinctives of normative dispensationalism, that of the offer, rejection, postponement, and exclusively future fulfillment of the Davidic kingdom. It has also failed to include a related distinctive, the church's separateness from the Davidic kingdom. Dispensationalists from the successive periods of history have repeatedly emphasized these distinctives, an emphasis that nondispensational critics have also noted. Progressive dispensationalism, on the other hand, has not advocated these distinctives, raising the question of whether that movement deserves the label "dispensational" or whether it belongs more in the category of nondispensational historical premillennialism.

* * * * *

"This book," writes Craig Blaising, "explains a significant change presently taking place in dispensational interpretations of Scripture. This change affects the way dispensationalists understand key biblical themes such as the kingdom of God, the church in God's redemptive program, the interrelationship of the biblical covenants, the historical and prophetic fulfillment of those covenants, and the role

¹Stephen J. Nichols has an MAR (Theology) from Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, and is currently in the PhD program at that institution. He is an adjunct faculty member at Lancaster Bible College and Philadelphia College of Bible.

of Christ in that fulfillment."² These key biblical themes encompass perhaps the whole of both biblical and systematic theology, implying the extent of proposed changes by Progressive Dispensationalism (hereafter PD) as represented by Craig Blaising and his colleague Darrell Bock. It would be a formidable task to undertake an examination of each of these themes, so this essay will compare the traditional dispensational understanding of the Davidic kingdom with how PD understands it.

²Craig Blaising and Darrell Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton, Ill.: BridgePoint, Victor, 1993) 9.

According to Blaising, ". . . Dispensationalism has not been a static tradition," but has undergone change and modification, especially its view of the kingdom.³ He uses this thesis of earlier change to legitimize current proposals of change by the progressives (i.e., progressive dispensationalists) within the dispensational tradition.⁴ This concept forms the substance of the first chapter, "The Extent and Varieties of Dispensationalism," which gives significant attention to kingdom views⁵ and to the difference between classic and revised dispensationalism. The chapter notes differences among revised dispensationalists in two areas: the kingdom-of-God and kingdom-of-Heaven distinction, and the relationship of the church in its present form to the kingdom.⁶ The focus placed on these two issues, however, obscures a defining distinction of the dispensational view of the kingdom that persists throughout the history of dispensational tradition, but is absent among the progressives. This distinction is the view of the offer, rejection, postponement, and exclusively future fulfillment of the Messianic, Davidic kingdom, and

³Ibid. 21. In earlier works he argued for four such stages: (1) Niagara Premillennialism (1875 - 1909); (2) Scofieldism (1909 - 1963); (3) Essentialist (1965 - 1986); (4) Progressive (1986 -) (*Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, Craig Blaising and Darrell Bock, eds. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992] 13-34). A more recent work has revised these labels: (1) Classical (1800's - 1950's); (2) Revised (1950's - 1986); (3) Progressive (1986 -). For a full discussion of these stages and the nomenclature, see Craig Blaising and Darrell Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* 21-23, 304-5 n. 8).

⁴This is a similar apologetic to that found in earlier works. See the two-part article by C. Blaising, "Doctrinal Development in Orthodoxy" and "Development of Dispensationalism by Contemporary Dispensationalists," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145 (1988):133-40 (esp. 135), 254-80. Though this paper will focus solely on the issue of the Davidic Kingdom, a similar case can be made in the area of hermeneutics. The progressives argue for far more discontinuity within the tradition than the data allows. See Thomas D. Ice, "Dispensational Hermeneutics," *Issues In Dispensationalism*, Wesley Willis and John Master, eds. (Chicago: Moody, 1994) 29-49; and Robert L. Thomas, "A Critique of Progressive Dispensational Hermeneutics," *When the Trumpet Sounds*, Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy, eds. (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House, 1995) 413-25.

⁵Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* 9-56.

⁶Ibid., 30-31, 39-46.

the view that the church in its present form is unrelated to and distinct from the Davidic kingdom.

This essay argues that the rejection, postponement, and entirely future fulfillment of the Davidic kingdom is and has been a consistently held view within "normative" dispensationalism.⁷ It further argues that this position serves as a distinguishing feature of dispensationalism, differentiating it from non-dispensational theology. The progressives reject this position and consequently at least blur the distinction between dispensational and non-dispensational views.⁸ The first section of this essay will examine the rejected/postponed Davidic kingdom view throughout the history of dispensationalism, beginning with the work of John Nelson Darby. This section will also examine how non-dispensationalists note this concept within dispensationalism. The second section will assess the current landscape, giving attention to the rejected/postponed Davidic kingdom view in PD. Next will follow a look at the ramifications of the current discussion for normative dispensationalism. However, in order to interact with the claims of Blasing concerning whether the dispensational tradition of the kingdom has changed, a discussion of the meanings of "development" and "change" is in order.

Kingdom Distinctions in Normative Dispensationalism

Charles C. Ryrie has argued for the need to distinguish between the concepts of *development* and *change*, and this is especially true in terms of examining the history of doctrines and doctrinal systems. He sums up his discussion by noting, " (1) development and change are not synonymous but have different meanings; and (2) in order to decide whether something is developing or changing one must

⁷The term "normative" follows Larry Crutchfield, *The Origins of Dispensationalism: The Darby Factor* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1992) 23-42. It includes the entire dispensational tradition (classic and revised), excluding the progressives.

⁸Cf. "The essence of dispensationalism, then, is the distinction between Israel and the Church," Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody, 1965) 47; cf. idem, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody, 1995) 41.

consider what the essentials of the matter are."⁹ The issue of the kingdom serves as a fitting example. Admittedly, a difference exists in views of the substantive distinction between the phrases kingdom of God and kingdom of heaven within the dispensational tradition.¹⁰

Clarence Mason in his helpful words on this issue poses the question: "The kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God: distinct or equated?"¹¹ He reflects his respect for both C. I. Scofield and L. S. Chafer, prefacing his critique of their view that the phrases themselves represent a substantive distinction.¹² He then writes, "However, . . . I came to the conclusion that this distinction . . . is not a valid distinction," and he proceeds to argue that the terms are used synonymously in Daniel and the Gospels.¹³ However, in regard to root distinctions between the phrases and the concepts underlying them, Mason adds, "It seems to me that the simpler and better solution is to recognize that the terms are synonymous and that the variation is due to context, not the variant word."¹⁴ He then proposes the "Multiple uses of the idea (or word 'kingdom') in the Bible."¹⁵ Ryrie concurs in reasoning that Scripture speaks of various concepts of the

⁹Charles C. Ryrie, "Update On Dispensationalism," in *Issues In Dispensationalism* 16; cf. idem, *Dispensationalism* 161-81.

¹⁰For the teaching of the distinction by earlier dispensationalists, see J. N. Darby, *Collected Writings* (Sunbury, Pa.: Believers Bookshelf, reprint, 1971) 25:47; C. I. Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible* (Oxford: University Press, 1917) note on Matt 6:33; L. S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Seminary Press, 1948) 7:223-25.

¹¹Clarence Mason, *Prophetic Problems with Alternate Solutions* (Chicago: Moody, 1973) 101.

¹²Mason acknowledges his early dependence on the *Scofield Reference Bible*. He also served on the revision committee for the *New Scofield Reference Bible*, (1967). He further points out how he was a member of the first class at Dallas Theological Seminary (then named the Evangelical Theological College), sitting under the teaching of Chafer (*ibid.*, 102).

¹³*Ibid.*, 102-3, 103-7.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 105.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 107.

kingdom and that the concepts are distinguishable in the answers to three questions: "Who is the ruler? Who are the ruled? When and where is the kingdom?"¹⁶ Under this rubric, he distills four concepts: (1) the universal kingdom; (2) the Davidic/Messianic kingdom; (3) the mystery form of the kingdom; and (4) the spiritual kingdom.¹⁷ The contributions of Mason and Ryrie (as well as those of others) have answered the critics and advanced the view while still retaining its essence.¹⁸

The point is that though a difference exists between earlier and later dispensationalists, this difference is a refinement or development, not a change. The latter view retains the essence of the earlier one (i.e., that of distinctions in the concept of the kingdom). In contrast to this essence, however, is Blaising's view of the kingdom of God:

The theme of the kingdom of God is much more unified and much more central to progressive dispensationalism than it is to revised dispensationalism. Instead of dividing up the different features of redemption into self-contained 'kingdoms' progressive dispensationalists see one promised eschatological kingdom which has both spiritual and political dimensions.¹⁹

This focus on the unity of the kingdom as opposed to distinct concepts of the kingdom is more than development; it is a change which affects the essence of dispensationalism.

Blaising also points out differing views of the church's relationship to the kingdom among revised dispensationalists. He surveys the work of A. McClain, C. Ryrie, J. Walvoord, and J. D. Pentecost, noting that, "The main point of this survey is to demonstrate

¹⁶Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1986) 397; cf. also idem, *Dispensationalism Today* 169-76; idem, *Dispensationalism* 154-57, for a discussion on the kingdom of God and kingdom of heaven distinctions.

¹⁷Ibid., 397-99.

¹⁸ See Mason, *Prophetic Problems*, 101, where he interacts with G. Ladd's critique in *Crucial Questions Concerning the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952).

¹⁹Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 54 (cf. chart, 55).

that there is no *one* revised dispensational view of the kingdom."²⁰ However, in noting the differences, he fails to acknowledge that each of the authors sees this present dispensation as different from the Davidic kingdom. This omission obscures the agreement within normative dispensationalism in speaking of *one* view of the Davidic kingdom, a subject to which the present discussion now turns.

The Davidic Kingdom View of Normative Dispensationalism

Discussion of the Davidic kingdom within normative dispensationalism appropriately begins with John Darby (1800-1882) and continues with Scofield, Chafer, Ryrie, Walvoord, McClain, and Pentecost, as well as less widely known and read dispensationalists. In addition, the analysis will include the perspective of non-dispensationalists (beginning with O. T. Allis and continuing with more current works) concerning the dispensational view of the Davidic kingdom.

In an essay entitled, "The Church—What Is It?," Darby pointed out, "It is of great importance to distinguish between the kingdom and the church."²¹ He added, "In fact, it appears to me a confusion of the Jewish and Gentile dispensations—the hinge upon which the subject [prophecy] and the understanding of scripture turns."²² A crucial aspect of this distinction for Darby was the rejection of Christ as the Anointed, the son of David, King of Israel.²³ Commenting on Luke 3, he wrote, "In fact we know John was beheaded, and the Lord was crucified, and the kingdom presented in Him, and by Him, was rejected by Israel. By-and-by it will be set up visibly and in power. Meanwhile the church is set up, because the kingdom is not set up in this manifested way."²⁴ Regarding Acts 2:30-36, a passage important

²⁰Ibid., 39; cf. 39-46 for a survey and charts of the views.

²¹Darby, "The Church—What Is It?," *Collected Writings* 12:372.

²²Darby, *Collected Writings* 2:18.

²³See *ibid.*, 5:387-88.

²⁴Ibid., 25:47. Darby refers often to the theme of the rejection of the King and consequent postponement of the kingdom (11:126, 144; 30:94-95; 5:387-89).

to the progressives, he wrote, "In this, again, there is not one word about Christ's being made King," and added, "The question of the kingdom . . . was left in total abeyance."²⁵

Though Darby may not have explicitly stated elements of the offer, rejection, postponement, and future fulfillment of the Davidic kingdom and its distinction from the church, they were all present in his writings. William Kelly, the editor of Darby's writings, remarked that Darby was like a miner who "left it to others to melt the ore, and circulate the coin."²⁶ Scofield and Chafer developed Darby's teachings in a systematic way.²⁷

In a book of sermons, Scofield wrote about God's purpose in this age and contrasted the church as a mystery with the "kingdom to be set up by the Messiah, David's great Son." He added,

In the fullness of time John the Baptist, and then Christ came preaching 'the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' 'But His own received Him not.' Israel would not have her King 'meek and lowly' (Zech. ix: 9 ; Matt. xxi: 1-5), and so, when His rejection by the bulk of the nation became manifest, the kingdom was postponed, and Christ announced the mystery, the Church.²⁸

He repeated and expanded this idea throughout the *Scofield Reference Bible*.²⁹ Blaising argued that the original edition, 1909, and the 1917

²⁵Ibid., 2:76.

²⁶William Kelly, *John Nelson Darby, As I knew Him* (reprint, Belfast, Northern Ireland: Words of Truth, 1986) 11.

²⁷Larry Crutchfield offers a thorough examination of the relationship of Darby and Scofield in *Origins of Dispensationalism: The Darby Factor* (esp. 211-12). Though he allows part of Scofield's dispensational scheme differs from Darby's in regard to the period prior to Noah, in terms of the present issue they agreed.

²⁸C. I. Scofield, *Addresses on Prophecy* (Greenville, S. C.: The Gospel Hour Inc., n.d.) 17.

²⁹The impact of the Scofield Bible is readily acknowledged by many. Writing as an historian and sociologist, Paul Boyer notes, "For more than eighty years The Scofield Reference Bible has been a major conduit for disseminating premillennial dispensationalism throughout the world" (*When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief*

edition serve as a reference point for classic dispensationalism, but the revision in 1967 (from which he derives the nomenclature "revised dispensationalism") offers "views much more compatible to writers of this second period [revised stage]."³⁰ However, though revisions of minor points occurred, the major structures and many of the key texts, especially texts of interest to this present discussion, remain intact.³¹ The extensive note on Acts 1:11, which is the same in the original and revised editions, serves as an example of the many that substantiate this point. Here Scofield wrote of the two advents, "In due time the Messiah born of a virgin according to Isaiah's prophecy (7:14), appeared among men and began His ministry by announcing the predicted kingdom as `near' (Mt 4:17, *note* 9). The rejection of King and kingdom followed."³² In the same note he added that the NT teaching of the return of Christ has the following relation to Israel: "The return of the Lord to the earth is to accomplish the yet unfulfilled prophecies of Israel's national regathering, conversion, and establishment in peace and power under the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam. 7:16, *note*; cp. Acts 15:14-17 with Zech. 14:1-9)."

Chafer picked up these same emphases:

Every Old Testament prophecy of the kingdom anticipates His kingly office: (a) Christ will yet sit on the Davidic throne as David's heir (2 Sam. 7:16; Ps. 89:20-37; Isa. 11:1-16; Jer. 33:19-21). (b) He came as a King (Luke 1:32-33). (c) He was rejected as a King (Mark 15:12-13; Luke 19:14; cf. Gen. 37:8; Ex. 2:14). (d) When He

in Modern American Culture [Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, Harvard University Press, 1992] 98).

³⁰Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* 22.

³¹One such revision concerns the infamous note on John 1:17; see the discussion in Fred H. Klooster, "The Biblical Method of Salvation: A Case for Continuity," *Continuity and Discontinuity*, John Feinberg, ed. (Westchester, Ill: Crossway Books, 1988) 133. In addition, the editors have softened the language relating to the kingdom of heaven and kingdom of God distinction (cf. note on Matt. 3:2). However, the notes on key texts concerning the kingdom, the church, and eschatology remain substantially intact (cf. various notes on Matt. 13, Acts 1, and throughout Revelation).

³²Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible*, note on Acts 1:11.

comes again it is as King (Rev. 19:16; cf. Luke 1:32-33).³³

He further emphasized the literal and earthly fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant:

The Covenant is of an earthly throne related to a people whose expectation is earthly. There is no evidence that David foresaw an earthly throne merging into a spiritual reign; yet David was given a perfect understanding concerning the divine purpose which the covenant designated. Nor is this kingdom and throne established in heaven. It is established on earth when the Son of David returns to the earth (Matt. 25:31, 32. Cf. 19:28; Acts 15:16; Luke 1:31-33; Matt. 2:2).³⁴

In addition, Chafer dealt at length with the themes of the offer, rejection and postponement of the kingdom and discussed the church and its relation to the kingdom: "The new purpose of God in this age is seen to be the out-calling of a heavenly people. They form a part of the kingdom in its present mystery form (Mt. xiii.); but are in no way related to the Messianic earthly kingdom of Israel. . . ."³⁵

The agreement of Chafer and Scofield with Darby is clear. Blaising acknowledged agreement between Chafer and Scofield: "Chafer's view of the kingdom was essentially the same as Scofield's."³⁶ The view of the kingdom was shared by many of their lesser known contemporaries as well.³⁷

Dispensationalists of the last half of the twentieth century show

³³Chafer, *Systematic Theology* 7:223.

³⁴L. S. Chafer, "Dispensationalism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 93 (October-December 1936):435.

³⁵L. S. Chafer, *The Kingdom in History and Prophecy* (Philadelphia: Sunday School Times, 1919) 71.

³⁶Craig Blaising, "Lewis Sperry Chafer," *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, Walter Elwell, ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993) 91.

³⁷The works of W. Pettingill, J. M. Gray, W. E. Blackstone, J. H. Brookes, A. C. Gaebelein, D. G. Barnhouse, and H. A. Ironside contain similar views.

continuity with the earlier dispensationalists in their view of the rejection, postponement, and future fulfillment of the Davidic covenant. Charles Feinberg affirmed the normative dispensational view in his classic work, *Millennialism: The Two Major Views*,³⁸ particularly in the chapter "The Kingdom Offered, Rejected, and Postponed." He argued for the church as something different from the kingdom in the chapter, "The Church Age and the Church." He returned to Israel and argued for a fulfillment of the Davidic kingdom in the chapter on "The Millennium."³⁹ In another work, he offered the following: "Again the Spirit of God alerts all with emphasis on the Davidic covenant. He came to His land, His throne, and His kingdom (John 1:11),"⁴⁰ and "He offered Himself as King (Mt. 21:1-5) and was rejected in His kingly offer (Jn. 18:37; 19:14-15)."⁴¹ He then spoke of the postponement of the kingdom:

Moreover, other Scriptures confirm the validity of the postponement of the kingdom. . . . To the Hebrews who were expecting a king on David's throne, yet had rejected Him in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the sacred writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, emphasized the session of Christ at God's right hand (1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:20). With every mention the writer points out Christ as seated elsewhere than on His earthly Davidic throne.⁴²

As mentioned above, Blasing deals at length with the kingdom theology of McClain, Ryrie, Walvoord, and Pentecost with the purpose of highlighting their differences. However, the four have striking

³⁸Charles L. Feinberg, *Millennialism: The Two Major Views*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1980). The first edition of this work entitled *Premillennialism or Amillennialism?* appeared in 1936, so the work spans two alleged stages of dispensationalism.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 129-43, 149-57, 181-87.

⁴⁰Charles Feinberg, "The Eternal Kingship of Christ," *Jesus The King Is Coming*, Charles Feinberg, ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1975) 186.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 187.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 188.

similarities in their views on the Davidic kingdom as evidenced in the following selections.

McClain introduced the term "interregnum" when he discussed the result of Christ's rejection as the Messianic King:

And the Chief purpose of the new phase of teaching will be to prepare the disciples for His rejection and also for the interregnum which will intervene between His death and His return from heaven in glory to establish the Kingdom on earth in accordance with Old Testament prophecy.⁴³

He also spoke of future fulfillment of the kingdom: "Christ also reassures the disciples that His impending death will not mean any abandonment of the Kingdom; and indicates explicitly that its establishment will be connected with a second coming of the King."⁴⁴

Ryrie offers an explicit and lucid summary of his view of the Davidic kingdom:

Because the King was rejected, the Messianic, Davidic kingdom was (from a human viewpoint) postponed. Though He never ceases to be King and, of course, is King today as always, Christ is never designated as King of the church. . . . Though Christ is a King today, He does not rule as King. This awaits His second coming. Then the Davidic kingdom will be realized (Matt. 25:31; Rev. 19:15; 20).⁴⁵

Ryrie also speaks of the church's relationship to the Davidic/Messianic kingdom: "The church is not a part of this kingdom at all."⁴⁶ He

⁴³Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Winona Lake, Ind.: BMH Books, 1974) 321.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 334. See also 309-20 for an extensive discussion on the rejection of the kingdom and 170-205 for a discussion of the coming and establishment of the kingdom.

⁴⁵Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1986) 259.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 398-99.

argues for a legitimate offer of the Davidic kingdom and the need for its future fulfillment based on the distinction of the church from Israel and a consistently literal interpretation of Old Testament promises.⁴⁷ After discussing the millennium, he sums up the dispensational perspective by noting, "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, earthly, and spiritual kingdom in the future millennium."⁴⁸

John Walvoord notes in reference to the Davidic kingdom,

It is also clear that Christ is not reigning on earth in any literal sense. Jerusalem is not His capital nor are the people of Israel responsive to His rule at the present time. To attempt to find fulfillment in the present age requires radical spiritualization and denial of the plain, factual statements related to the kingdom.⁴⁹

His numerous articles in *Bibliotheca Sacra* as well as a recent work, *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook*, express the same understanding. In the latter he notes, "It is also abundantly clear that the church does not fulfill the promises of the kingdom on earth as given to Israel," adding that God will "resume His plan and purpose to fulfill the kingdom promise to Israel in connection with the second coming of Christ."⁵⁰

J. Dwight Pentecost discusses the eschatological implications of the Davidic covenant: "David's son, the Lord Jesus Christ must return to the earth, bodily and literally, in order to reign over David's

⁴⁷Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* 161-76; idem, *Dispensationalism* 145-60.

⁴⁸Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* 176; idem, *Dispensationalism* 158.

⁴⁹John F. Walvoord, *Major Bible Prophecies* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991) 108; cf. also idem, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Findlay, Ohio: Dunham, 1959) 202-7; idem, *Israel in Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962.) 80-100, esp. 96-97.

⁵⁰John F. Walvoord, *Prophecy Knowledge Handbook* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1990) 438-39. See also appendices A and B concerning the fulfillment of prophecies of the Old and New Testaments, esp. 2 Sam. 7:16 and the prophecy of David's house, kingdom, and throne to be fulfilled in the millennium (658), as well as Luke 1:32-33 and the prophecy of Christ's sitting on the Davidic throne reigning over Israel to be fulfilled in the millennium (716).

covenanted kingdom. The allegation that Christ is seated on the father's throne reigning over a spiritual kingdom, the church, simply does not fulfill the promises of the covenant."⁵¹ In a more recent work, he also speaks of the offer, rejection, and postponement of the kingdom:

In His covenant with David (2 Sam. 7:16), God promised that a descendant of David would sit on David's throne and rule over his house. This covenanted program was offered to Israel, but was rejected by the nation. Because the covenants are eternal, unconditional, and therefore irrevocable, the Davidic kingdom program would not be canceled. It could, however, be postponed.⁵²

He adds, "Christ's central teaching was that the Davidic kingdom would be postponed until a future time."⁵³ He also discusses the church, and though he refers to it as a "new form of the kingdom," he explicitly holds to the withdrawal and postponement of the Davidic kingdom.⁵⁴

After referring to the views of Walvoord, Ryrie, and Pentecost, Blaising claims, "In response to the criticisms of George Ladd, they dropped the kingdom distinctions of Scofield, modified his essential structure in different ways and introduced their own terminology. As a result, there is no revised dispensational kingdom theology but competing interpretations which have had various levels of influence."⁵⁵ He ignores, however, the agreement among them concerning the postponement of the Davidic kingdom, as documented above, and obscures their agreement with each other and with their predecessors.

⁵¹J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things To Come* (Findlay, Ohio: Dunham, 1958) 114.

⁵²J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1990) 233.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 234.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 234-35.

⁵⁵Craig Blaising, "Contemporary Dispensationalism," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 36 (Spring 1994):9.

Other normative dispensationalists have also argued for a similar understanding of the Davidic kingdom.⁵⁶ Very recently, Cleon Rogers has reached the following conclusion concerning the Davidic covenant:

Both He [Christ] and His forerunner, John the Baptist, proclaimed the Davidic kingdom promised in the Old Testament, but this message was rejected. So the Messiah presented a 'new' form of God's rule on the earth, the church. . . . The rejection of Israel is not permanent, for the kingdom will be restored when the Son of David returns to set up the kingdom of David. Meanwhile He occupies the place of privilege and prominence, the 'right hand of the Father,' where He rules as Head of the church and intercedes as High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek. His followers are called on to be His faithful witnesses in all the world as they await His return, when He will defeat all enemies, assume His place on the Davidic throne, and set up the Davidic kingdom.⁵⁷

To underline further the pervasiveness of the teaching of the rejection and postponement of the Davidic kingdom within the dispensational tradition, notice the attention given to the teaching by its critics. In 1945, O. T. Allis wrote the following about the "postponement theory":

If it be admitted that a visible earthly kingdom was promised to the Jews and announced as 'at hand' by John and by Jesus, some

⁵⁶For example, see Renald Showers, *There Really Is a Difference: A Comparison of Covenant and Dispensational Theology* (Bellmawr, N. J.: Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 1990) esp. 97, 181-82; Herman Hoyt, *The End Times* (Chicago: Moody, 1969) 167, 192.

⁵⁷Cleon Rogers, "The Davidic Covenant in Acts-Revelation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151 (January-March 1994):84. See also "The Davidic Covenant in the Gospels," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150 (October-December 1993):458-78. Also consider the following recent work by Stanley D. Toussaint, "The Contingency of the Coming of the Kingdom," *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands*, Charles Dyer and Roy Zuck, eds. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994) 222-37.

explanation must be found of the fact that such a kingdom was not set up. . . . The explanation which is given by Dispensationalists is covered by the two words 'rejection' and 'postponement.' The kingdom was *rejected* by the Jews and *postponed* by God; and in its place the church was introduced.⁵⁸

He added,

It is the claim of all dispensationalists that the kingdom offered the Jews by John and by Jesus was an earthly kingdom similar to that of David, the son of Jesse; and since such a kingdom was not set up at the time of the earthly ministry of Jesus, they insist that it was rejected by the Jews and has been postponed to a time still future.⁵⁹

After discussing the new form of premillennialism, i.e. dispensationalism, L. Berkhof described it thus:

But when the Messiah came and offered to establish the Kingdom, the Jews failed to show the requisite repentance. The result was that the King did not establish the Kingdom, but withdrew from Israel and went into a far country, postponing the establishment of the Kingdom until His return. Before He left the earth, however, He founded the church, which has nothing in common with the Kingdom, and of which the prophets never spoke.⁶⁰

He discussed eschatology as he wrote of events following the rapture and tribulation: "The millennial kingdom will now be established, a real visible, terrestrial, and material kingdom of the Jews, the restoration of the theocratic kingdom, including the re-establishment

⁵⁸O. T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1945) 77.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 70.

⁶⁰L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953) 710.

of the Davidic kingship."⁶¹

The historic premillennialist G. Ladd wrote the following concerning dispensationalism: "This system sees no present relationship between the church and the Kingdom. . . . Dispensationalists believe that the Davidic eschatological Kingdom is yet to be established with the return of Christ."⁶² Clarence Bass, a former dispensationalist, viewed the postponed kingdom as a "definite feature of dispensationalism which distinguishes it from the historic faith."⁶³ He offered the following assessment of the view:

The postponed-kingdom idea grows out of the basic concept of what the kingdom was to be, and what it shall yet be. This is held to be a literal restoration of the national kingdom, and since no such covenanted kingdom with the Davidic throne has appeared, it must have been postponed. The kingdom and the church can in no way be paralleled in the plan of God.⁶⁴

Anthony Hoekema also acknowledged the rejection/postponement of the kingdom as a main aspect of dispensationalism as reflected in the *New Scofield Bible*:

When Christ was on earth He offered the kingdom of heaven to the Jews of His day. This kingdom was to be an earthly rule over Israel in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. . . . The Jews at that time, however, rejected the kingdom. The final establishment of this kingdom, therefore, was now postponed until the time of the millennium.⁶⁵

He also characterized the postponed view as one of eight major points

⁶¹Ibid., 711.

⁶²G. Ladd, "The Kingdom of God and the Church," *Foundations* 4 (1961):166.

⁶³Clarence Bass, *Backgrounds to Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977) 32.

⁶⁴Ibid., 32.

⁶⁵Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 189.

of dispensationalism.⁶⁶ O. Palmer Robertson also makes an extended comparison between dispensational and covenantal views of the Davidic kingdom. He acknowledges and critiques the dispensational notions of the rejection, postponement, and future fulfillment in the millennium of the Davidic kingdom.⁶⁷ After arguing for the current session of Christ as the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant, he observes,

The dispensationalist must be commended for his desire to hold strongly to the full veracity of Scripture in its promises. But the denial of any connection between the 'throne of David' and Christ's current enthronement at God's right hand must be taken as an effort to limit the magnificent realities of the new covenant by the shadowy forms of the old.⁶⁸

In a more current work, Stanley Grenz not only interacts with the normative dispensational view of the Davidic kingdom, but also with that of the progressives. He offers the following perspective on classical dispensationalism's (which for him refers to dispensationalism prior to the progressives) understanding of the Israel and church distinction:

The Israel phase, which began with Abraham, was suspended when the Jews rejected Jesus as their Messiah. Consequently, the church phase, which is a parenthesis in God's Israel program, was inaugurated at Pentecost. The advent of the church, however, did not spell the end of God's program for Israel. God neither abrogated the divine promise to His Old Testament people nor enmeshed them into the church.⁶⁹

⁶⁶Ibid., 212-14.

⁶⁷O. Palmer Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, N. J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980) 218-27.

⁶⁸Ibid., 252.

⁶⁹Stanley Grenz, *The Millennial Maze* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1992) 97. See also 103-4.

Throughout the history of dispensationalism its adherents and critics alike have acknowledged *one* normative dispensational view of the Davidic kingdom, a view that entails the offer, rejection, postponement, and future fulfillment of the Davidic kingdom as well as a separation of the church in its present form from this kingdom. Also, the emphasis given this view by its adherents and critics demonstrates the crucial role this particular element plays in the overall structure of dispensational theology. With the history of the tradition in mind, it is appropriate next to look to the current landscape of the work of PD.

The Davidic Kingdom View in Progressive Dispensationalism

Discussions of the offer, rejection, and postponement of the Davidic kingdom are absent in the work of the progressives. Bock argues that Luke-Acts teaches that Christ has already inaugurated His reign of Christ as Davidic king, that His present position of "*being seated on David's throne is linked to being seated at God's right hand,*" and that a future consummative stage of the kingdom rule will follow.⁷⁰ He reaches these conclusions by approaching the text through an already-not yet framework.⁷¹ He exhibits this method in the following:

Peter establishes the Davidic connection by linking Psalm 110 to Psalm 132 and thus to 2 Samuel 7. . . . Both of these Old Testament texts [Ps. 110, 16] from the Psalter are seen beyond any doubt as presently fulfilled in the Resurrection, with Psalm 110 fulfilled at least in terms of inauguration. Peter goes on to declare that this Lord (Jesus) sits by God's side until all enemies are a footstool for

⁷⁰Darrell Bock, "The Reign of the Lord Christ," *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, eds. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 37-67, 49.

⁷¹See Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 97-98, for Bock's endorsement and explanation of his understanding of an already-not yet hermeneutic.

the Lord's feet, something that is yet to be realized. So inauguration is present but consummation is not.⁷²

In an earlier critique I argued that Bock's understanding of these concepts and the related passages follows the work of Ladd. Consequently, a better view of PD takes it as a departure from normative dispensationalism rather than a further development or refinement.⁷³ Here, the purpose will not be to show PD's similarity to non-dispensationalists such as Ladd, but to underline its dissimilarity to normative dispensationalism.⁷⁴

Bock summarizes his essay on the reign of Christ:

⁷²Ibid., 51.

⁷³Stephen J. Nichols, "Already Ladd-Not Yet Dispensationalism: D. Bock and Progressive Dispensationalism" (unpublished paper, Eastern regional meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Philadelphia, Pa., April 2, 1993). See also V. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1994). In this second edition, Poythress has a postscript devoted mainly to the progressives. He observes, "However, their position is inherently unstable. I do not think that they will find it possible in the long run to create a safe haven theologically between classic dispensationalism and covenant premillennialism. The forces that their own observations have set in motion will most likely lead to covenantal premillennialism after the pattern of George E. Ladd" (137). Consider also the comment by Walter Elwell ("Dispensationalism of the Third Kind," *Christianity Today* [September 12, 1994]:18): "The newer dispensationalism looks so much like nondispensationalist premillennialism that one struggles to see any real difference."

⁷⁴Bock has since argued that critics of his position have missed the crucial difference between his already-not yet construct and that of Ladd ("Current Messianic Activity and OT Davidic Promise: Dispensationalism, Hermeneutics and NT Fulfillment," *Trinity Journal* 15 [Spring 1994]:69-70.). The area of difference lies in the view of Israel in the future stage of fulfillment. I acknowledged this point in my review of *Progressive Dispensationalism* (*Trinity Journal* 15 [Fall 1994]:253-55), i.e., the progressive dispensational concept of the millennium is far more "Israelitish" than that of Ladd. However, the point still stands, that as far as the current, initial stage of fulfillment is concerned, Bock is following Ladd. He admits, "Nevertheless, it is true that this complementary approach of reading Scripture means that this view of the kingdom in the present era looks very much like Ladd's" ("Current Messianic Activity," 70).

In the gospel of Luke, it is clear that with Jesus' presence, and especially his Resurrection-Ascension, comes the beginning of Jesus' kingdom rule. . . . Thus the new community, the church, is the showcase of God's present reign through Messiah Jesus, who inaugurates the fulfillment of God's promises.⁷⁵

Blaising offers a similar understanding in his discussion of "The Church as Present Revelation of the Kingdom."⁷⁶ Throughout his lengthy treatment of the presence and coming of the eschatological kingdom in the person and teaching of Jesus, he has no mention of the kingdom's rejection and postponement.⁷⁷ Regarding Jesus, he writes, "Repeatedly, He is portrayed as enthroned at the right hand of God in fulfillment of promises that belong to God's covenant with David. His enthronement and present authority is *messianic*."⁷⁸ He also states, "*All of the language describing the church in the New Testament is either directly drawn from or is compatible with the genres of covenant promise and the Messianic kingdom.*"⁷⁹

Blaising also discusses "some typical objections raised against the theory of Jesus' present Davidic position and activity."⁸⁰ He lists the following objections:

Objection 1. *The throne Jesus received at His ascension was not the throne promised to David. . . .*

Objection 2. *Jesus' present activity is best understood as divine sovereignty, not Davidic kingship. . . .*

Objection 3. *To speak of the present fulfillment of Davidic promises by Christ in heaven is a spiritual interpretation of earthly, political*

⁷⁵Bock, "The Reign of the Lord Christ" 65.

⁷⁶Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* 257-62.

⁷⁷Cf. *ibid.*, 232-57.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 257.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 260 [emphasis original].

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 182.

*promises.*⁸¹

He then seeks to refute these objections. A review of the normative-dispensational Davidic-kingdom view as discussed above will demonstrate how that view reflects these objections and further demonstrates the departure of the progressives from normative dispensationalism.

Robert Saucy also fails to endorse traditional dispensational concepts in his discussion of the Davidic covenant.⁸² In this vein, Saucy writes,

Traditional dispensationalists have understood this [Jesus as seated at the `right hand of God'] as teaching the present session of Christ in heaven before His return to fulfill the Davidic messianic kingdom promise of a literal reign on earth. They are careful to distinguish between the Davidic throne and the position that Christ presently occupies in heaven at the right hand of God (Ac 2:30).⁸³

He offers his understanding of Christ's exaltation to the right hand: "The meaning of the right hand of God in Psalm 110:1 and Acts 2:33 is, therefore, the position of messianic authority. It is the throne of David."⁸⁴ However, though arguing that Christ is on the Davidic throne, Saucy does not argue for the active reign of Christ at present. He notes that the allusion to Psalm 110 in Revelation 3:21 "affirms the present exaltation of Jesus, but not a present function of ruling."⁸⁵ Saucy's view as represented here differs significantly from that of Blaising and Bock, but is still a departure from normative dispensationalism, as he observes,

⁸¹Ibid., 182-87 [emphasis original].

⁸²Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993) 59-80.

⁸³Ibid., 69-70.

⁸⁴Ibid., 72.

⁸⁵Ibid., 73.

This interpretation of the exaltation of Jesus to the right hand of God in fulfillment of the Davidic messianic promise therefore allows for the inaugural fulfillment of those promises in distinction from the total postponement of the Davidic promise in traditional dispensationalism.⁸⁶

While the progressive dispensationalists are careful to express their commitment to a future for ethnic Israel and a future, literal fulfillment of Israel's covenant promise, these views concerning the inaugural fulfillment of Old Testament promise, especially that of the Davidic covenant, and the redefining of the present form of the church mark an aberration from normative dispensationalism.⁸⁷ The consistently held offer, rejection, postponement, and fully future fulfillment of the Davidic kingdom is absent from their teaching. Also absent is the view that the church is distinct from that kingdom. Ryrie offers the following summary of the progressive dispensational teaching on the Davidic covenant, underlining its departure from normative dispensationalism:

Until now the Davidic covenant was understood by dispensationalists as related only to Israel, with its ultimate fulfillment in the reign of Christ on David's throne in the Millennium. Progressive dispensationalism, however, teaches that the Lord Jesus is now reigning as David's king in heaven at the right hand of the Father in an 'already' fulfillment aspect of the Davidic kingdom and that He will also reign on earth in the Millennium in the 'not yet' aspect. They also assert that at Christ's ascension He was inaugurated as Davidic king, that the right hand

⁸⁶Ibid., 76. It is also interesting to point out the synopsis of the book on its back cover: "Dr. Saucy departs from classic dispensationalism, however, in showing that (1) the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy begins in the present church age, and (2) the church is not a parenthesis in God's program but represents a continuity with the Old Testament messianic program."

⁸⁷For the progressive dispensational perspective on future fulfillment, see R. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* 297-323; Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* 262-77.

of the Father is the throne of David in heaven, and that the present church age is indistinct from the kingdom.⁸⁸

Ramifications for the Dispensational View of the Davidic Kingdom

Progressive dispensationalists' view of the Davidic kingdom has brought to the forefront some crucial aspects of dispensational theology. Four areas in particular suggest future directions in evaluating PD and offering critiques of normative dispensationalism.⁸⁹

1. Hermeneutics.

A crucial aspect, though not the focus of this paper, is that of hermeneutics. On the one hand, progressives have offered helpful comments about the limitations of the hermeneutical designations "literal" "normal." Bock's expansion to a "historical-grammatical-literary-theological" method is more complex and, consequently, is more capable of handling the complexities faced in interpretation.⁹⁰ On the other hand, nothing inherent in such an approach demands the employment of an already-not yet framework.⁹¹ Further, this fuller method does not mutually exclude a 'literal' interpretation. Those issues are beyond the scope of this essay. However, their mention

⁸⁸Ryrie, "Update on Dispensationalism" 21.

⁸⁹I am not suggesting that these issues are in any way breaking new ground for dispensationalism. However, these issues and the related texts are increasingly being understood in new ways in light of the paradigm shifts occurring among progressive dispensationalists. My point is that these issues and interpretations of the text need rethinking and developing in light of the current questions being raised.

⁹⁰Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* 76-105, esp. 76-77.

⁹¹*Ibid.*, 96-100. Here Bock offers this method as a way of relating texts, arguing that the already-not yet tensions are evident through the Bible and serve to link "the plan of God into a unified whole" (97). However, this approach may be operating on the assumption that because *x* is similar to or like *y*, then *y* has become *x*, or at least incorporates *x* into its meaning, but actually *y* is simply similar to *x*, yet still different. The point is that even with the use of a more complex hermeneutic, theological assumptions still lie behind the application of the already-not yet framework to OT promises.

here points out a need to explore hermeneutical features in more detail.

2. The Rejected/Postponed Davidic-Kingdom View.

Ultimately, a commitment to being consistent with Scripture and not tradition is the issue in the ongoing development of theology. In this regard, the need is for a solid exegetical defense of the rejected/postponed view. A current deserving work along these lines is that of Cleon Rogers mentioned above. This type of work is necessary as the progressives have demonstrated that dispensationalists can no longer simply assume the rejected/postponed paradigm. Perhaps a fruitful study would be to examine the language of fulfillment in Luke-Acts as Luke progresses from the birth narratives through the life of Christ and on to Peter's sermons. Here a study of the contrast/comparison of the introductory formulas, the content of the quotations, and the context of the passages employing the quotations looks most promising.

3. The Present Form of the Church.

Another area brought to the surface through the work of the progressives is the differences of opinion about the relationship of the church to the overarching concept of the universal kingdom or sovereign rule of God. Progressives and non-dispensationalists alike are making much of these differences and perhaps inconsistencies on behalf of dispensationalists. A need exists for a thorough and clear expression of the church's role as distinct from: (1) the Davidic kingdom at present (What are the implications of viewing the church as a mystery form of the kingdom? Cf. Matthew 13 parables.); (2) the Davidic kingdom during the millennium (Is ruling with Christ participation in the Davidic kingdom? Cf. Rev 3:21); and (3) the universal kingdom of God. Some texts relevant to this discussion deserve significant treatment (such as Eph 1:19-23; 1 Pet 3:22; passages in Acts and Hebrews used by the progressives.)

4. The Consistent Distinction Between Israel and the Church.

The rejection of the normative dispensational view of the Davidic kingdom by the progressives is crucial because it impinges on the dispensational distinctive of a separation of Israel from the church.

Ryrie comments on this point:

This understanding of the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies quite naturally leads to a third feature—the clear distinction between Israel and the Church which is a vital part of dispensationalism. All other views bring the Church into Israel's fulfilled prophecies except dispensationalism. The amillenarian says that the Church completely fulfills Israel's prophecies, being the true, spiritual Israel. The covenant premillenarian sees the Church as fulfilling in some senses Israel's prophecies because both are the people of God while at the same time preserving the millennial age as a period of fulfillment too. The understanding of the how and when of the fulfillment of Israel's prophecies is in direct proportion to one's clarity of distinction between Israel and the Church.⁹²

The similarities of the progressives to covenant premillenarians are both obvious and telling and demonstrate the need for a *consistent* distinction between the peoples of God.

Conclusion

From the perspective of dispensational tradition, the current landscape of progressive dispensationalists appears to be a different terrain. The view of the offer, rejection, postponement, and fully future fulfillment of the Davidic kingdom and the corollary view of the church as something different and distinct is and has been the consistent view of normative dispensationalism. By viewing the present form of the church as an inaugural stage of the Davidic kingdom with Christ seated on the Davidic throne in heaven, the progressive dispensational position has distanced itself from this distinguishing feature of dispensationalism. *The* distinguishing feature of dispensationalism, i.e., the consistent distinction between Israel and the church, is all but absent. Consequently, the legitimacy of calling PD part of the dispensational tradition is questionable.

⁹²Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* 159.

THE INDISPENSABLENESS OF SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY TO THE PREACHER¹

Benjamin B. Warfield

A growing misconception in training preachers has been the idea that appearance is a substitute for substance, that methodology is more important than content. On the contrary, the preacher's main responsibility to his listeners is to present the truth as expounded in Systematic Theology. To do this, he must himself have a firm grasp on Christian doctrine. This is not to say his preaching must manifest a chilly intellectualism, but that his knowledge of doctrine must combine with a warmly evangelistic spirit. The universally acknowledged principle that what a person believes will determine how he behaves underscores the importance of preaching correct doctrine. Whether he admits it or not, every preacher communicates a set of beliefs, so it is urgent that he know correct Systematic Theology. Theology is the best cultivation of the devotional life of both the preacher and his hearers.

* * * * *

Professor Flint, of Edinburgh, in closing his opening lecture to his class a few years ago, took occasion to warn his students of what he spoke of as an imminent danger. This was a growing tendency to "deem it of prime importance that they should enter upon their ministry accomplished preachers, and of only secondary importance that they should be scholars, thinkers, theologians." "It is not so," he is reported as saying, "that great or even good preachers are formed. They form themselves before they form their style of preaching. Substance with them precedes appearance, instead of appearance

¹From the *Homiletic Review* (February 1897):99-105, as reported in *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield—II*, John E. Meeter, ed. (Nutley, N. J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973) 280-88.

being a substitute for substance. They learn to know truth before they think of presenting it. . . . They acquire a solid basis for the manifestation of their love of souls through a loving, comprehensive, absorbing study of the truth which saves souls."² In these winged words is outlined the case for the indispensableness of Systematic Theology for the preacher. It is summed up in the propositions that it is through the truth that souls are saved, that it is accordingly the prime business of the preacher to present this truth to men, and that it is consequently his fundamental duty to become himself possessed of this truth, that he may present it to men and so save their souls. It would not be easy to overstate, of course, the importance to a preacher of those gifts and graces which qualify him to present this truth to men in a winning way—of all, in a word, that goest to make him an "accomplished preacher." But it is obviously even more important to him that he should have a clear apprehension and firm grasp of that truth which he is to commend to men by means of these gifts and graces. For this clear apprehension and firm grasp of the truth its systematic study would seem certainly to be indispensable. And Systematic Theology is nothing other than the saving truth of God presented in systematic form.

The necessity of systematic study of any body of truth which we need really to master will scarcely be doubted. Nor will it be doubted that he who would indoctrinate men with a given body of truth must needs begin by acquiring a mastery of it himself. What has been made matter of controversy is whether Christian truth does lie so at the basis of the Christian hope and the Christian life that it is the prime duty of the preacher to possess himself of it and to teach it. It has been argued that the business of the preacher is to make Christians, not theologians; and that for this he needs not a thorough systematic knowledge of the whole circle of what is called Christian doctrine, but chiefly a firm faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and a warm love toward him as Lord. His function is a practical, not a theoretical one; and it matters little how ignorant he may be or may leave his hearers, so only he communicates to them the faith and love that burn in his own heart. Not learning but fervor is what is required; nay, too

²As reported in *The Scotsman* for Nov. 13, 1888.

much learning is (so it is often said) distinctly unfavorable to his best efficiency. Engagement of the mind with the subtleties of theological construction excludes that absorption in heart-devotion and in the practical work of the ministry, which on its two sides forms the glory of the minister's inner life and the crown of his outer activity. Give us not scholars, it is said, but plain practical men in our pulpits—men whose simple hearts are on fire with love to Christ and whose whole energy is exhausted in the rescue of souls.

Surely, if the antithesis were as is here implied, no voice would be raised in opposition to these demands. If we are to choose between a chilly intellectualistic and a warmly evangelistic ministry, give us the latter by all means. A comparatively ignorant ministry burning with zeal for souls is infinitely to be preferred to a ministry entirely absorbed in a purely intellectual interest in the relations of truths which are permitted to exercise no influence on their own lives and which quicken in them no fervor of missionary love. But the matter cannot be settled by fixing the eye on this extreme only. What should we do with a ministry which was absolutely and blankly ignorant of the whole compass of Christian truth? Obviously it would not be a Christian ministry at all. Let it be admitted, then, that it is possible for men to become so occupied with the purely intellectual aspects of Christian truth as to be entirely unfitted for the prosecution of the Christian ministry. It must be equally allowed that they must have a sound knowledge of Christian truth in order to be qualified to undertake the functions of the Christian ministry at all. The possibility of the abuse of Systematic Theology has no tendency to arraign its usefulness or even its indispensableness to the preacher. A high capacity and love for mathematics may live in a sadly unpractical brain, and, for aught I know, the world may be full of pure mathematicians who are absolutely useless to it; but it does not follow that the practical worker in applied mathematics can get on just as well without any mathematics at all. In like manner, though there may be such a thing as a barren knowledge of even such vital truth as the Christian verities, there is not and cannot be such a thing as a fruitful Christian ministry without a sound and living knowledge of these verities. And it is very much to be deprecated that men should sometimes permit themselves to be driven, through their keen sense of the valuelessness of an inoperative knowledge, to speak as if no

importance attached to that vitalizing knowledge of divine truth without which any true ministry is impossible. The warning given us by the lamented Aubrey Moore is sorely needed in our times. He says: "There are many earnest-minded Christians who are so morbidly afraid of a barren belief that they sometimes allow themselves to talk as if to hold fast to any form of sound words must be formalism; as if, in fact, the belief in a creed were rather dangerous than helpful. It is true, of course, as we all know well, that a right creed cannot save a man, and that when the bridegroom comes many may be found with lamps that have no oil; but surely if we discard our lamps, much of the precious oil we have may be lost."³

The fundamental principle on which the indispensableness to the preacher of a sound knowledge of Christian truth rests is not more surely rooted in a true psychology than it is illustrated by universal experience. That "conduct in the long run corresponds with belief," as Bishop Westcott puts it, "all experience goes to show." And certainly he is entitled to add that "this unquestionable principle carries with it momentous consequences." "Patient investigation," he continues, "will show that no doctrine can be without a bearing on action. . . . The influence of a dogma will be good or bad—that is an important criterion of dogma, with which we are not now concerned—but if the dogma be truly maintained, it will have a moral value of some kind. Every religion, and every sect of every religion, has its characteristic form of life; and if the peculiarities of these forms of life are smoothed away by time, it is only because the type of belief to which they correspond has ceased to retain its integrity and sharpness."⁴ It is therefore that Principal Wace rebukes the "tendency of some modern historians to undervalue the influence upon human nature of variations in religious and moral principles," as "strangely at variance with the evidence before them."⁵ "The history of the world," he adds, "would appear to be in great measure a history of the manner in which religious ideas, often of an apparently abstract and subtle character,

³*Some Aspects of Sin* 20.

⁴*The Gospel of Life* 48, 57.

⁵*The Foundations of Faith* 194-98.

can determine the future of whole races and of vast regions of the earth. . . . The facts of history thus afford conclusive evidence that the instinct of the Christian world, or rather the instinct of mankind, has not been mistaken in attributing extreme importance to those variations in faith, even on points apparently secondary, by which Christendom has been and is still so grievously divided." The whole case is most concisely put in a comprehensive passage in the *Systematic Theology* of the late Prof. John Miley:

A religious movement with power to lift up souls into a true spiritual life must have its inception and progress in a clear and earnest presentation of the vital doctrines of religion. The order of facts in every such movement in the history of Christianity has been, first, a reformation of doctrine, and then, through the truer doctrine, a higher and better moral and spiritual life. . . . Such has ever been and must forever be the chronological order of these facts, because it is the logical order. When souls move up from a sinful life or a dead formalism into a true spiritual life they must have the necessary reasons and motives for such action. . . . If we should be consecrated to God in a life of holy obedience and love, it must be for reasons of duty and motives of spiritual well-being which are complete only in the distinctive doctrines of Christianity. These doctrines are not mere intellectual principles or dry abstractions, but living truths which embody all the practical forces of Christianity. The spiritual life takes a higher form under evangelical Christianity than is possible under any other form, whether ritualistic or rationalistic, because therein the great doctrines of Christianity are apprehended in a living faith and act with their transcendent practical force upon all that enters into this life.⁶

If there be any validity at all in these remarks, the indispensableness of Systematic Theology to the preacher is obvious. For they make it clear not only that some knowledge of Christian truth is essential to him who essays to teach that truth, but that the type of life which is produced by his preaching, so far as his preaching is effective, will

⁶Vol. 1, 48-49; cf. also 40.

vary in direct relation to the apprehension he has of Christian truth and the type of proportion of truth he presents in his preaching. As Bishop Westcott puts it: "Error and imperfection in such a case must result in lives which are faulty and maimed where they might have been nobler and more complete"; and, on the other hand, "right doctrine is an inexhaustible spring of strength, if it be translated into deed."⁷ In directly the same line of remark that saint of God, Dr. Horatius Bonar, urges that: "All wrong thoughts of God, whether of Father, Son, or Spirit, must cast a shadow over the soul that entertains them. In some cases the shadow may not be so deep and cold as in others; but never can it be a trifle. And it is this that furnishes the proper answer to the flippant question so often asked: Does it really matter what a man believes? All defective views of God's character tell upon the life of the soul and the peace of the conscience. We must think right thoughts of God if we would worship him as he desires to be worshiped, if we would live the life he wishes us to live, and enjoy the peace which he has provided for us."⁸ And what is true of the doctrine of God is true of every other doctrine about his ways and works; as Dr. Westcott phrases it, "The same law which holds good of the effect of the ideas of God and of a future life and of the incarnation in their most general form, holds good also of the details of the view upon which they are realized."⁹

Accordingly Dr. Alexander Whyte testifies to the relation of right belief and all the highest devotion, in a striking passage which we cannot forbear quoting somewhat in full. He writes:

One of the acknowledged masters of the spiritual life warns us against "an untheological devotion." "True spirituality," he insists, "has always been orthodox." And the readers of the *Grammar of Assent* will remember with what masterly power and with what equal eloquence it is there set forth that the theology of the Creeds and Catechisms, when it is rightly understood and properly

⁷Westcott, *Gospel of Life* 58.

⁸*The Gospel of the Spirit's Love* 22.

⁹Westcott, *Gospel of Life* 55.

employed, appeals to the heart quite as much as to the head, to the imagination quite as much as to the understanding. And we cannot study Andrewes' book [his *Private Devotions*], his closet confession of faith especially, without discovering what a majesty, what a massiveness, what a depth, and what a strength, as well as what an evangelical fervor and heartsomeness, his theology has given to his devotional life. . . . In the *Grammar* its author says that for himself he has ever felt the Athanasian Creed to be the most devotional formulary to which Christianity has given birth. We certainly feel something not unlike that when Andrewes takes up the Apostles' Creed, or the Nicene Creed, or the Life of our Lord, or his Names, or his Titles, or his Offices. When Andrewes takes up any of these things into his intellect, imagination, and heart, he has already provided himself and his readers with another great prayer and another great psalm. So true is it that all true theology is directly and richly and evangelically devotional.¹⁰

Readers of Dr. Palmer's *Life of Thornwell* will recall a parallel testimony to what the reading of the Westminster Confession did for Thornwell's soul; and we can ourselves testify from experience to the power of the Westminster Confession to quicken religious emotion, and to form and guide a deeply devotional life. "So true is it," to repeat Dr. Whyte's words, that "all true theology is directly and richly and evangelically devotional."

It cannot be a matter of indifference, therefore, what doctrines we preach or whether we preach any doctrines at all. We cannot preach at all without preaching doctrine; and the type of religious life which grows up under our preaching will be determined by the nature of the doctrines which we preach. We deceive ourselves if we fancy that because we scout the doctrines of the creeds and assume an attitude of studied indifference to the chief tenets of Christianity we escape teaching a system of belief. Even the extremest doctrinal indifferentism, when it ascends the pulpit, becomes necessarily a scheme of faith. As a bright writer in *The Atlantic Monthly* puts it, men are always found believers in either the head or the tail of the coin. Even "Renan's followers have their pockets crammed with beliefs of

¹⁰*Lancelot Andrewes and His Private Devotions* 49-51.

their own, bawling to the public to try them; they trundle their push-carts down the boulevard, hawking new creeds: *Par ici, mes amis, par ici! Voici des croyance neuves, voici la Verite!*"¹¹ Beliefs old or beliefs new, we all have them; and when we take our place in the rostrum in their behalf we perforce become their teachers. There may be Christian truths of which we speak as if they were of infinitesimally little importance, because, as Aubrey Moore caustically puts it, "from first to last we know infinitesimally little about them";¹² but we need not fancy that we are teaching nothing in so speaking of them, or are failing to preach a dogmatic faith or by it to mold lives in essaying to occupy a position of indifference. To withhold these truths from our hearers is not merely a negative act, nor can their loss act merely negatively upon their spiritual development. A mutilated gospel produces mutilated lives, and mutilated lives are positive evils. Whatever the preacher may do, the hearers will not do without a system of belief; and in their attempt to frame one for the government of their lives out of the fragments of truth which such a preacher will grant to them, is it any wonder if they should go fatally astray? At the best, men will be "driven to a kind of empirical theologizing, attempting with necessarily imperfect knowledge to coordinate for themselves the truths of religion and those which follow as consequences from them";¹³ and so will build up an erroneous system of belief which will mar their lives. At the worst, they will be led to discard the neglected or discredited truths, and with them the whole system of Christianity—which they see, even though the preacher does not see, to be necessarily correlated with them; and so will lapse into unbelief. In either case, they may rightly lay their marred or ruined lives at the preacher's door. It is not given to one who stands in the pulpit to decide whether or not he shall teach, whether or not he shall communicate to others a system of belief which will form lives and determine destinies. It is in his power only to determine what he shall teach, what system of doctrine he shall press upon the acceptance

¹¹Henry T. Sedgwick, Jr., in *The Atlantic Monthly* (August 1896):188.

¹²Moore, *Some Aspects of Sin* 26.

¹³*Ibid.*, 25.

of men, by what body of tenets he will seek to mold their lives and to inform their devotions.

By as much, however, as the communication of a system of belief is the inevitable consequence of preaching, by so much is the careful formation of his system of belief the indispensable duty of the preacher. And this is but another way of saying that the systematic study of divine truth, or the study of Systematic Theology, is the most indispensable preparation for the pulpit. Only as the several truths to be presented are known in their relations can they be proclaimed in their right effects on the soul's life and growth. Systematic Theology is, in other words, the preacher's true text-book. Its study may be undertaken, no doubt, in a cold and unloving spirit, with the mind intent on merely scholastic or controversial ends. In that case it may be for the preacher an unfruitful occupation. But so undertaken it has also lost its true character. It exists not for these ends, but to "make wise unto salvation." And when undertaken as the means of acquiring a thorough and precise knowledge of those truths which are fitted to "make wise unto salvation," it will assuredly bear its fruit in the preacher's own heart in a fine skill in rightly dividing the word of truth, and in the lives of the hearers as a power within them working a right attitude before God and building them up into the fulness of the stature of symmetrical manhood in Christ.

HEB 13:20: COVENANT OF GRACE OR NEW COVENANT? AN EXEGETICAL NOTE

Richard L. Mayhue
Senior Vice President and Dean
Professor of Pastoral Ministries and Systematic Theology

The recently released *New Geneva Study Bible*, which champions the theological school of "covenantalism," proposes that "God . . . revealed His covenant of grace by promising a Savior (Gen. 3:15). . . . The covenant of Sinai . . . was a continuation of the covenant of grace (Ex. 3:15; Deut. 7:7, 8; 9:5, 6). . . . As Heb. 7-10 explains . . . God inaugurated a better version of His one eternal covenant with sinners (Heb. 13:20). . . ." ¹ But, does the phrase *διαθήκη αἰώνίου* (*diathekē aiōniou*, "eternal covenant") in Hebrews 13:20 actually refer to "one eternal covenant"? ²

¹"God's Covenant of Grace," *New Geneva Study Bible*, R.C. Sproul, ed (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995) 30. Interestingly, the explanatory note on Heb. 13:20 (1957) identifies the phrase as referring to the New Covenant, but says nothing about an eternal covenant of grace. For concise overviews of "covenantalism" as a distinct theological school, see Morton H. Smith, "The Church and Covenant Theology," *JETS* 21/1 (March 1978):47-65, and Mark Futato, "Covenant: Let The Reader Understand," *Coram Deo* 19/8 (August 1995):8-12. These articles delineate the thinking of covenantalists which leads them to see all of the covenants as though they were one.

²Among covenantalists there have generally been at least three views in regard to the supposed pre-creation covenant(s) of redemption/grace. First, O. Palmer Robertson (*Christ of the Covenants* [Phillipsburg, N. J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980] 54) argues that to embrace this concept as exegetically taught ". . . is to extend the bounds of scriptural evidence beyond propriety," as does Reformed Baptist John Zen in "Is There A `Covenant of Grace?'" *Baptist Reformation Review* 6:3 (Autumn 1977) 43-53. Second, John Dick (*Lectures on Theology* [Cincinnati: Applegate, 1856] 258) insists on one covenant in eternity past. Third, Robert C. Dabney (*Systematic Theology*, 2nd ed. [reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1985] 432-33), Charles Hodge

(*Systematic Theology* [reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975] 2:358-59), and Herman Witsius (*The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man* [reprint, Escondido, Calif.: The den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1990] 1:165) strongly distinguish between the covenant of redemption and the covenant of grace, albeit they supposedly existed initially as one pre-creation agreement between the Father and the Son. See John Murray, "Covenant Theology," in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* (Marshallton, Del.: The National Foundation for Christian Education, 1972) 3:204-15, for a brief history of these variations within "covenantalism." Interestingly, nowhere in his volume *The Covenant of Grace* (Phillipsburg, N. J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1953) does Murray mention the deduced or inferred covenant(s) of redemption/grace, most likely because his was a "biblico-theological study" which found no explicit biblical data—i.e., that derived inductively/exegetically—referring to the hypothetical covenants.

THE ISSUE

Reformed commentators of another era—e.g., Gouge³ (1587-1653), Henry⁴ (1662-1714), Owen⁵ (1616-1683), and Poole⁶ (1624-1679)—equated Hebrews 13:20 with the alleged "covenant of grace," as did theologian Dabny⁷ (1820-1898). In contrast, John Calvin (1509-1564) spoke of this text in conjunction with the New Covenant,⁸ although one might have guessed he would have linked this text to the covenant(s) of redemption/grace if pressed for a more thorough explanation.

More recent commentators uniformly relate Hebrews 13:20 to the New Covenant without mentioning the covenant of grace—e.g., Brown,⁹ Bruce,¹⁰ Cranfield,¹¹ Ellingsworth,¹² Hughes,¹³ Kistemaker,¹⁴

³William Gouge, *Commentary on Hebrews* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1980) 1116.

⁴Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary* (reprint, Marshallton, Del.: The National Foundation for Christian Education, n.d.) 3:1285.

⁵John Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews* (reprint, Marshallton, Del.: The Foundation for Christian Education, n.d.) 4:475-76.

⁶Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible* (reprint, McLean, Va.: MacDonal Publishing, n.d.) 3:878.

⁷Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 435.

⁸John Calvin, *Hebrews* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989) 412.

⁹John Brown, *Hebrews* (reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1976) 718-19.

¹⁰F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 411.

¹¹C. E. B. Cranfield, "Hebrews 13:20-21," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 20/3 (1967):437-41.

¹²Paul Ellingsworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, in *CGT* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 729-30.

¹³Philip E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 589-90.

Lane,¹⁵ Morris,¹⁶ Pink,¹⁷ and Westcott,¹⁸ but most likely with silent covenantal overtones. Non-covenantalists such as Kent¹⁹ and MacArthur²⁰ also relate Hebrews 13:20 to the New Covenant, but without assumptions in regard to any alleged covenant(s) of redemption/grace.

A fresh look at the phrase "eternal covenant" in Hebrews 13:20 is appropriate in view of the less-than-unanimous conclusions put forth by commentators and theologians of various theological persuasions. Are there "covenantal" overtones in the verse that find their roots in a pre-creation, eternity-past covenant of redemption which may or may not have a connection with a supposed subsidiary or subsequent covenant of grace? Or, does Hebrews 13:20 refer exclusively to the New Covenant, which is the dominant theme of Hebrews, with no reference to or assumptions concerning the presupposed foundational elements of covenant theology?

THE EXEGETICAL FACTS

At least six textual/contextual observations are germane in answering the question, "To what does 'the blood of the eternal covenant' in Hebrews 13:20 refer?"

¹⁴Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews in NTC* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984) 430-31.

¹⁵William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, in *WBC* (Dallas: Word, 1991) 47B:563.

¹⁶Leon Morris, "Hebrews," in *EBC*, Frank E. Gaebelin, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981) 12:155.

¹⁷A. W. Pink, *An Exposition of Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1954) 3:375.

¹⁸B. F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 448.

¹⁹Homer A. Kent, Jr., *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Winona Lake, Ind.: BMH, 1972) 293.

²⁰John MacArthur, *Hebrews* (Chicago: Moody, 1983) 389.

1. "Eternal" (*aiōnios*) in the NT does not necessarily mean "eternity past."²¹ Consider *eternal* life in John 3:15-16, 36, for example. Further, only five of the over seventy appearances of *aiōnios* in the NT clearly refer to "eternity past" (Rom 16:25-26; 2 Tim 1:9; Titus 1:2; Heb 9:14). Therefore, the initial assumption should be that *aiōnios* has the sense of (1) eternity future or (2) an indefinitely long period of time, unless obvious features of the context indicate otherwise. No such indications occur in Hebrews 13:20.²²

2. No explicit, uncontested exegetical evidence in either the Old or New Testaments refers to any covenant(s) made in eternity past.²³ Deduced or inferential evidence is not sufficient foundation for something as important as the supposed "covenant of redemption" or "covenant of grace." Rather direct, unquestioned declarations of Scripture should establish that foundation, the kind that establish explicitly revealed covenants—e.g., the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 17:7), the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 23:5), and the New Covenant (Jer 32:40). It is inconceivable for Hebrews 13:20 to be the first and only outright mention of a heretofore unrevealed covenant

²¹J. Guhrt, "αἰών," *NIDNTT* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975) 3:829.

²²Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 102. Louis Berkof, *Systematic Theology*, 278, admitted this openly when writing about the covenant of grace. "When we speak of it as an eternal covenant, we have reference to a future rather than to a past eternity, Gen. 17:19; II Sam. 23:5; Heb. 13:20. Past eternity can be ascribed to it only if we do not distinguish between it and the covenant of redemption." Many covenantalists connect the two covenants, thereby making a serious lexical error when they refer Hebrews 13:20 to eternity past.

²³Although proponents cite numerous biblical texts in support of the covenant(s) of redemption/grace, they all assume the fact of these covenants and the covenantal hypothesis of their origin. However, the unvarnished truth is that no clear and uncontested biblical texts mention a "covenant of redemption" or a "covenant of grace." Nor do any undisputed texts describe these covenants in a unified relationship to each other. Additionally, the biblical fact of God's predetermined plan of election to salvation in eternity past (Eph 1:4-5) does not need the theory of "covenantalism" to account for it.

made in eternity past or later.

3. In noticeable contrast to the absence of exegetical evidence for either a covenant of redemption or a covenant of grace, the OT clearly and specifically calls five different covenants "eternal" or "everlasting":

- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| A. Noahic Covenant - | Gen 9:16. |
| B. Abrahamic Covenant - | Gen 17:7, 13, 19; 1 Chr 16:15, 17; Pss. 105:8, 10; 111:5, 9; Isa 24:5. |
| C. Priestly Covenant - | Lev 24:8; Num 18:19. |
| D. Davidic Covenant - | 2 Sam 23:5; Ps 89:3-4, 28-29, 36. |
| E. New Covenant - | See biblical references in the next paragraph. |

Therefore, one of these five covenants is the most obvious candidate to be identified as the covenant mentioned in Hebrews 13:20.

4. Of the five covenants called eternal/everlasting in the OT, the New Covenant is mentioned in more separate texts than any of the other four.

- | | |
|--------------|---------------|
| A. Isa 55:3 | E. Jer 50:5 |
| B. Isa 59:21 | F. Ezek 16:60 |
| C. Isa 61:8 | G. Ezek 37:26 |
| D. Jer 32:40 | |

Therefore, the New Covenant should be the interpretative option-of-choice in Hebrews 13:20, especially if further evidence strengthens the likelihood of that probability.

5. The book of Hebrews explicitly mentions only two covenants—the Old Covenant (Heb 8:9) and the New Covenant (Heb 8:8). Of the two, the OT calls only the New Covenant eternal/everlasting.²⁴ Therefore, the covenantal context of

²⁴Kent, *Hebrews*, 293, notes, "It is eternal in the sense that it secures eternal life for its beneficiaries and will never be invalidated nor superseded."

Hebrews points to the New Covenant as the "eternal covenant" to which Hebrews 13:20 most likely refers.

6. Hebrews links "blood" and "covenant" closely on four occasions, one in the text under consideration. The first text refers to the Old Covenant (9:20), but the second and third refer to the New Covenant (10:29; 12:24). Therefore, as one encounters the phrase $\alpha\omicron\mu\alpha\tau\iota$ $\delta\iota\alpha\theta\eta\kappa\eta\varsigma$ $\alpha\iota\omega\nu\iota\omicron\upsilon$ (*haimati diathekes aioni-ou*, "blood of [the] eternal covenant") in 13:20, the New Covenant is the only contextual possibility.²⁵

A REASONABLE CONCLUSION

This note has considered the following six features of the phrase "blood of the eternal covenant" in Hebrews 13:20:

1. The predominant NT use of *aionios* to mean a period of indefinite length or "eternity future."
2. The total absence of any OT/NT explicit mention of a covenant(s) made in eternity past.
3. The specific identification of five OT covenants called "eternal/everlasting" that point ahead in time, not back.
4. The dominant frequency of the New Covenant among the five OT covenants cited above.
5. The appearance of only two covenants in Hebrews—the Old and the New, which provides the contextual limits of interpretive options.
6. The linking of "blood" with an "eternal covenant" in Hebrews,

²⁵This is also the conclusion of Johannes Behm, " $\delta\iota\alpha\theta\eta\mu\iota$, $\delta\iota\alpha\theta\eta\kappa\eta$," *TDNT* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 2:132, and J. Guhr, " $\delta\iota\alpha\theta\eta\kappa\eta$," *DNTT* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975) 1:371.

which leads decisively and exclusively to the New Covenant.

Therefore, the most textually/contextually consistent and natural understanding of the phrase "the blood of the eternal covenant" in Hebrews 13:20 points to "the blood of Jesus Christ shed as the New Testament propitiation which provides the future, permanent, and eternal expectation of personal redemption." This clear interpretation does not depend on any assumptions made or inferences drawn about a supposed covenant(s) of redemption/grace.

BOOK REVIEWS

James DeYoung and Sarah Hurty. *Beyond the Obvious. Discover the Deeper Meaning of Scripture*. Gresham, Ore.: Vision House, 1995. 422 pp. \$15.99 (cloth). Reviewed by James E. Rosscup, Professor of Bible Exposition.

This book challenges the traditional evangelical view that sees a single meaning in a Scripture text, the human author's intent. The writers seek to show more possibility in valid meaning by inquiring how Jesus and the NT writers use the OT. Though seeing basic help in the historical-grammatical method, the co-authors contend that the divine Author in later Scripture takes revelation *beyond* the original human author's intent into new details or even changes in meaning (34).

DeYoung is Professor of New Testament, Western Baptist Theological Seminary, Portland, Ore. Hurty is pursuing Ph.D. studies at the University of Sheffield, Sheffield, England.

The book aims to be clear even for readers not technically trained. It relegates some technical, in-depth comments to extensive end notes. Chapters 2-3 discuss historical and present efforts to find deeper meanings, 4-9 explain the writers' theory, and 10 deals with where the hermeneutical approach leads. Appendices A-F discuss related matters such as the kingdom theme held to be the central, unifying factor for all biblical interpretation. Chapter lengths are 12-20 pages for the most part (Chap. 7 on "Knowing God the Author" is 32).

The authors hold that the literal hermeneutic makes good sense and curbs interpreters from whatever may strike their fancy. The literal method does not go far enough to fit with the NT's use of the OT, in their opinion.

Chapter 1 offers examples of NT texts assuming more meaning than literal interpretation of the OT passages allow. In Ps 102:25-27 the psalmist speaks to Yahweh as creator, etc. But Heb 1:10-12 supplies new information that the God the psalmist addressed is Jesus, who

will endure for eternity. The writers see this as a case where the writer of Hebrews changes (34) the authorial intent of the psalmist. This reviewer wonders if a better word choice would not be "complements" rather than "changes". Naturally OT passages relating to the Lord, by progressive revelation, prepare for and are taken further later in the NT, which has the vantage point of seeing them in the fullest light. Also, one's full and final interpretation of Psalm 102 in historical-grammatical methodology would include sensitivity to factors in all of the Bible (a unity). The method interprets each cogent passage on its own, then as related to how it correlates with other passages, and sees each part of the entire picture in a composite. As on many NT relationships to the OT, direct prophecy and predictive typology, for example, the NT does not "change" meaning as to its essence, but it does "complement" it. It does show God's authoritative reflection on the meaning. Finally one basic essence or core meaning is there. The NT passage comports in unity with this in one broad arena of meaning, but does not introduce a meaning that is of an entirely different essence.

Examples in the present book do not appear to confound this. Galatians 4:24-31 has Paul giving allegorical meanings of Genesis, Mosaic legislation, Jerusalem, and the New Covenant. Old Testament passages do not state these connections (Hagar represents the Mosaic Covenant, Mount Sinai, etc.). Analyzing the OT passages, the interpreter can find that the principle prompting Abram's relationship with Hagar at first was one of trying to gain the promised son by a fleshly method and timing rather than by depending on God, His Spirit, His grace. The principle, evident in historical-grammatical study of the OT passages, is also operative for many who keep the law of Moses as a fleshly effort to please God. The principle is repeated by many in Jerusalem who followed fleshly impulses, not faith's response to grace in the freedom of the Spirit's power. A contrast, essentially, between acting by the Spirit and acting in the flesh as shown by historical-grammatical analysis has its true analogy in principles Paul sees in the Galatians. But, coming later in progressive revelation, Paul's insights apply the same basic principles, His remarks "change" nothing in the essential principle, but "complement" and rightly assess what he comments on. He shows relevantly that some act by the Spirit and some still by the flesh.

The present book is a product of diligent study and a sincere desire to interpret correctly. It places a healthy focus on needing the

Spirit in the entire process of interaction with Scripture, the relevancy of the kingdom theme as the unifying factor, and the importance of fresh stimulus from Scripture. All of these, really, are urgent factors for anyone using the grammatical-historical method.

A statement about Matt 11:11 seems to be a slip. The authors have Jesus saying that John the Baptist "is the greatest person (not just prophet) ever born (v. 11a)" (38). What Jesus actually stressed was John's equality with the greatest, not superiority over all. Among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John but, of course, some have been on that high level with him.

The authors say that exponents of the historical-grammatical view cannot "follow Jesus and His disciples" as to methodology, because Jesus and the apostles find meaning that those today do not have the authority to find (42). But those using the traditional methods do "follow" Jesus and the apostles in seeing what they teach as right, in affirming their use of the OT as valid, and in seeking to obey what they say. To represent them as following in theology and ethics but not in method does not put things in truest focus. These endorse whole-heartedly the method of Jesus, believing that He is the authority and His word is true and cogent. They seek to interpret as Jesus did, getting the one essential meaning and understanding that God in progressive revelation "complements" the truth by fuller NT insight. Like Jesus, they never alter the one core sense.

The authors of *Beyond the Obvious* acknowledge that interpreters should not add new truth—i.e., deeper meanings—to the NT (118), because the NT provides "the final, normative revelation" on the definitive interpretation of history and its end. It is surprising, then, to find the book elsewhere advocating that people today need to derive new meanings. The authors define new meaning in terms of light on who to marry, details of schooling, etc. But such areas are examples of God's guidance as a believer *applies* the *meaning* of God's truth that he has already grasped. These are not new meanings; they use the one meaning by applying it to particular cases in deciding a course of action. They are not *interpretations* of Scripture, but come after interpretation as *applications* of those interpretations. New applications of truth in devotional reading is not a deeper *meaning* in the technical sense of the word. It is simply a new way of applying the text's one meaning in a new way that a believer has not seen before. This is totally consistent with the historical-grammatical sense and is

not an interpretive method for seeing "beyond the obvious."

Certain statements of the book will perplex some. One is in creating the impression that in the historical-grammatical method users limit the Holy Spirit "to the end of the method, applying the truth . . ." (127). Some are guilty, but this is by no means a fair description of many who use the method. As long as this reviewer can remember in seminary studies and in teaching, an urgent focus was upon depending on the Spirit in *all* phases relating to Scripture and life. One of the earliest emphases ingrained was to ask God, even in interpreting, to open the eyes enabling a proper view of God's Word.

But many will not agree with the authors that the passages teach that believers throughout the church age can keep getting new, deeper meanings. For example, that John 16:13-14 involves new truth beyond that which God revealed through the then-living apostles is questionable interpretation. One wonders where 1 John 2:27 teaches a revealing of new truth different from what is already in the NT.

It raises problems when the authors pose a distinction between Revelation given by God in Scripture and revelation (small r) as new meaning believers discover today. Where is any clear-cut revelation today that one can confidently believe? Is it in essence what is already in Scripture, and not "revelation" per se? Is it consistent with Scripture and clearly from God? The book attempts to set forth how a reader can discover a deeper meaning by using the *kingdom* theme (121-22). This reviewer could not see how this method is superior to the historical-grammatical. The kingdom can be vital in historical-grammatical interpretation just as it can in the proposed new method.

The book has many concepts, some commendable, some questionable. This stimulating work's high motivation for interpretive fidelity is commendable. A more convincing case to defend the method can perhaps be forthcoming.

Walter A. Elwell, ed.. *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996). x + 933 pp. \$44.99 (cloth). Reviewed by Dennis M. Swanson, Seminary Librarian

The *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, the newest volume in the *Baker Reference Library* series, continues the high qualitative

standard that has characterized the previous works under the general editorship of Walter A. Elwell.

The volume attempts to make articles dealing with biblical theology accessible to those who may not have facility in the original languages. As noted in the introduction, all the contributors affirm "the full integrity and trustworthiness of the Scriptures," who "not only write with that understanding but live their lives according to it" (v).

Elwell has assembled nearly one thousand individual articles written by over one hundred evangelical scholars. The articles range in length from a few paragraphs to several pages. Most articles have brief, but satisfying, bibliographies. The *Dictionary* transliterates Greek and Hebrew words throughout for the sake of those not well-versed in those languages. It has an immense, eighty-page Scripture index, but it contains no listing of individual articles, which in this reviewer's opinion is a weakness. A helpful addition to the *Reference Library* series as a whole would be a separate volume providing a complete listing of all articles and a subject index.

Robert Yarborough contributes an excellent article on "Biblical Theology," providing a clear framework of what this discipline contributes to evangelical scholarship. Yarborough points out that the preliminary assumptions "without which valid observations about the meaning of the Bible's parts and whole are sure to elude the reader" (62). He lists those assumptions as (1) Inspiration; (2) Unity; (3) Reliability; (4) Christocentric.

Central to the theme of this work are the "Theology of . . ." entries for each of the sixty-six canonical books. Beyond these are several articles that merit special attention: Bruce N. Fisk's outstanding article on "Abortion"; Richard Averbeck's contribution in "Offerings and Sacrifices"; Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. on "Prophet, Prophetess and Prophecy"; and Gary T. Meadors on the "Unity and Diversity of Scripture."

Only a few items, such as Blomberg's advocacy of "power evangelism" in the article on "Miracles" (534) and a superficial treatment of eschatological themes, notable for the absence of an article on the millennium, can be cited as weaknesses.

Dr. Elwell's efforts with both the series and this new volume are both singular and significant and *The Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* should find a ready place at the right hand of pastors, teachers, and all students of the Scripture.

John M. Frame. *Apologetics to the Glory of God: An Introduction*. Phillipsburg, N. J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1994. xiii + 265 pp. \$14.99 (paper). Reviewed by Eddy D. Field III, Adjunct Professor of Biblical Education, Philadelphia College of Bible, and an alumnus of The Master's Seminary.

John Frame is Professor of Apologetics and Systematic Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Escondido, California. He designed this book as an introductory textbook in apologetics for college-level readers (xi). Though he thinks the apologetic of Cornelius Van Til is the best foundation, he departs from Van Til at some points (xi).

His three reasons for adding to the already crowded list of introductory apologetics books are (1) to translate Van Til's difficult writings into popular language, (2) to eliminate the weaknesses in Van Til's apologetic, and (3) to develop an apologetic based on Scripture (xii).

Frame's apologetic has a number of good points, many of which come in chapter 1. First, he is especially good on the issue of neutrality. He argues that Christ's authority is ultimate and is not legitimately subject to questioning. The unbeliever does not accept this authority because of the noetic effects of sin (7). In fact, the unbeliever already knows God but suppresses that knowledge (7-8). He concludes that neutrality for both believer and unbeliever, is epistemologically impossible and morally wrong (9). Second, Frame explains circular reasoning very well. He is correct that arguments about ultimate presuppositions, for believer and unbeliever, are necessarily circular. Otherwise, they would be inconsistent (10). Third, Frame understands that conversion of the unbeliever is possible in spite of the problems of non-neutrality and circularity. For one, the unbeliever knows God (Rom 1:21) and this affords common ground between believer and unbeliever (11). For another, the Holy Spirit may work in the heart of the unbeliever (11). Fourth, he writes that man has always needed a revelational epistemology, even before the Fall (22-23). Frame has other helpful contributions in the book, including his presuppositional reformulations of the classic theistic

arguments that makes them consistent with Scripture (chap. 4). He shows how evidence for the gospel makes sense from within the Christian worldview (chap. 5). He offers a sound response to the problem of evil, including a critique of Jay Adams' approach to the issue (chaps. 6, 7). He allows Adams to respond in Appendix B. He does an internal critique of unbelief (chap. 8). He gives a sample apologetic encounter (chap. 9). He argues throughout that "all intelligibility and meaning, indeed all predication, depend on God" (91). In Appendix A he includes an essay that critiques the "Ligonier" apologetic of R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley. He demonstrates that those scholars have fundamental flaws in their system and have attacked a straw man in their criticisms of Van Til.

A number of problems weaken this book, however, most of them relating to Frame's objections in chapter 3 to Van Til's transcendental method. It is impossible to answer all the objections here, but a reply to the main one is feasible. Frame thinks that the transcendental argument is not really distinct from the classic arguments and he uses the argument from causality as an example (76). This is not correct, though, because the cosmological argument takes causality as something intelligible in itself and attempts to trace the chain of events back to the first cause, which is called God. A transcendental argument, on the other hand, is neither deductive nor inductive. It takes any fact of experience and inquires into the preconditions of intelligibility for that fact. With respect to causality, the transcendental argument assumes causality and asks what must be true in order to make sense of causality. In other words, it asks what makes causality possible. Frame apparently thinks that because the classic arguments are attempts to prove something transcendent, these arguments are transcendental (71, 73, 76-77). This is not the case. Additional problems occur with Frame's definition of proof as that which ought to persuade (63, 73), which leads to his affirmation of the classic arguments because they tend to persuade (71-72) and his denial of the certainty of the transcendental argument (77-82). Also problematic is his "blockhouse" approach to defending the Christian worldview (72).

Frame has helped to make Van Til's apologetic understandable to the average person. However, his method is weak when it departs from Van Til's transcendental method. Overall, though, he has been quite faithful to Scripture in developing his apologetic. Except for a few problems in his method, Frame's *Apologetics to the Glory of God* is a

helpful introduction to Christian apologetics.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum. *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology*. rev. ed. Tustin, Calif.: Ariel Ministries, 1993. 1,052 pp. \$30.00 (cloth). Reviewed by William Varner, Professor of Bible, The Master's College.

The fruit of Fruchtenbaum's research for a doctoral dissertation at New York University, this massive work comes from a leader and one of the finest scholars in the Hebrew Christian/Messianic Jewish movement. At the forefront of this movement as it has sought for about two decades to define itself, Fruchtenbaum has contributed *Jesus Was a Jew* in 1974, *Hebrew Christianity: Its Theology, History, and Philosophy* in 1974, and a monograph devoted to eschatology, *The Footsteps of the Messiah* in 1982. He presently directs Ariel Ministries.

He "affectionately dedicated" *Israelology* to Charles C. Ryrie on whom he is somewhat dependent in his books, but that does not mean he always agrees with him and Dallas Seminary professors in their position on the role of Israel in the divine plan. In fact, their weakness in the matter of Israel's present role led to his producing this volume.

The author defines "Israelology" as "a subdivision of Systematic Theology incorporating all theological doctrines concerning the people of Israel" (2). "Israel is viewed theologically as referring to all descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, also known as the Jews" (2). Fruchtenbaum holds to this definition of Israel consistently throughout the Scriptures, a conviction that sets him apart from most theologians, even some of the premillennial persuasion. This single point is the "crux interpretum" on which his construction of an "Israelology" stands or falls. That is probably his greatest contribution to theology in this work.

In chapters 2-7, the author explains and critically evaluates the "Israelology" of three other theological systems: postmillennialism, amillennialism, and historic premillennialism, called "covenant premillennialism" in this work. His three-hundred page critical evaluation of the three sees a common flaw. They all have an inconsistent hermeneutic in understanding the meaning of "Israel." They differ from one another in the degree of inconsistency, but the

same basic flaw renders them all incapable of expressing a biblical "Israelology."

Dispensationalists already familiar with the flaw in these systems will profit most from chapters 8-10 where Fruchtenbaum has five hundred pages explaining and evaluating the traditional dispensational view of Israel's role, past, present, and future. He writes, "Dispensationalism has developed a well-thought out Israelology insofar as Israel Past and Israel Future is concerned—Chafer's statement on the Jews is a good example of this—but it has been weak in developing a comprehensive theology of Israel Present" (415). He critiques—sometimes favorably and sometimes not—the works of Chafer, Walvoord, Pentecost, and Ryrie of Dallas Seminary; McClain and Hoyt of Grace Seminary; and Feinberg of Talbot Seminary. He does not have an exclusively future fulfillment of the new covenant for Israel (634-36), an issue on which the listed dispensationalists disagree. Yet he rejects the ideas of progressive dispensationalism (e.g., Blaising, Bock, Saucy), because he does not agree with the progressives that Jesus currently occupies David's throne. A weakness of the book is its failure to address issues raised by the progressives, something the author could have included in his 1992 revision. This reviewer suspects that he would apply his criticisms of covenant premillennialism to progressive dispensationalism.

Chapter 10 has Fruchtenbaum's contribution to the discussion, "A Dispensational Israelology," which argues persuasively for including "Israelology" as a subdiscipline of systematic theology. The three-hundred page chapter deserves publication in a separate volume. He adds nothing new under Israel past and future, but develops original material regarding "Israel Present." He addresses with thoroughness and insight such issues as the Jewish believer's present relationship to the law of Moses (640-79), the identity of believing Jews in this age (Hebrew Christians or Messianic Jews, 745-62), and the present role of the State of Israel in God's plan (494-98). Further, he has an excellent summary of how Romans 9-11 handles these issues (720-44).

This reviewer can see room for some improvements in the volume. The author could have given some space to dispensational writers prior to Chafer who tried to interpret Israel's role in the divine plan. He never mentions the "Old Scofield" authors and their

theological colleagues, nor does he notice the writings of such Hebrew Christian giants as Adolph Saphir and David Baron or the great British authors Canon Lukyn-Williams and John Wilkinson. Wilkinson's work *Israel My Glory* was a very good attempt at constructing a "theology of Israel." Besides these, some current Messianic writers in Israel (e.g., Menachem Benhayim and David Stern) deserve at least some mention. Their failure to be labeled as "dispensationalists" does not mean they have nothing to contribute to the subject. Also missing are those affirming a "dual covenant view"—i.e., that the message of the gospel is not for Jewish people since they have their own covenant with God—even though they address directly the present salvific status of the Jewish people.

The volume has four excellent appendices (857-1012). In three of them Fruchtenbaum describes his interaction with two different perspectives regarding the degree Jewish believers should maintain their "Jewishness." He supports a middle position between the "Messianic synagogue" approach and the "local church" approach. Those interested in this, the current hottest topic in Hebrew Christianity, will find these pages very informative.

Undoubtedly, some will find various positions of the author a bit too novel. Readers of David Cooper's books, published between 1930 and 1950 by the Biblical Research Society, will recognize Cooper's influence on Fruchtenbaum in some of these interpretations. Nevertheless, those who neglect *Israelology's* contributions in these areas will incur intellectual risk. The book has much to inform evangelicals about in a greatly neglected field, the present role of a people who are the main characters in the Bible.

J. T. Greene. *The Role of the Messenger and the Message in the Ancient Near East*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989. 346 pp. \$68.95 (cloth).
Reviewed by David C. Deuel, Professor of Old Testament.

This work draws upon the author's 1980 Ph.D. dissertation at Boston University, "The Old Testament Prophet as Messenger in the Light of Ancient Near Eastern Messengers and Messages" (University Microfilms 8024188).

That the OT writers portray the prophets as messengers from

God to His people has long been recognized. The present volume proposes to draw on ancient Near Eastern documents for information about the messenger in order to investigate the character and behavior of OT prophets. In so doing, it follows a standard comparative methodology using the messengers of Israel's neighbors to illumine the role and character of biblical messengers.

The three main chapters are "the Messenger in the Ancient Near East," "The Message in the Ancient Near East," and "The Messenger and the Message in the Hebrew Scriptures." The purpose of the third chapter is "to ascertain whether the messengers of the Hebrew Scriptures truly share all of the characteristics of their overall ANE counterparts" (77).

Several weaknesses mar the volume. It is mistitled because less than 70 of its 300 pages treat the broader ancient Near Eastern matters of the messenger and message which the title promises. The title of the author's dissertation would have been more representative of the book's contents. The other two-thirds of the book address the comparison of the ancient Near Eastern messenger and message as they illumine the OT prophet and prophetic utterances.

In a comparative study, care in orchestrating the method is important. Messenger activity cannot be separated from either the processes of administrative correspondence or the royal postal system. In Greene's research, material used to compare with Scripture comes from a number of sites, but without in-depth analysis of any one site. This means that the data with which he compares Scripture is a composite sketch of the messenger and message rather than an internally coherent system. In support of his approach the author argues, "For nearly three thousand years, according to the literature studied herein, the understanding of what a messenger was and did as viewed by the inhabitants of the ANE was everywhere the same" (133). Textual evidence for the messenger does not support that assumption. The author has over-generalized a complex set of characteristics.

For example, at ancient Nuzi the messenger's character and role are basic. He carries out simple local deliveries of commodities and escorts people to court. Greene's caricature of the messenger is based not on the small-scale local messenger, but on the international diplomatic messengers of whom it was said, "Upon his shoulders is the word of the king." The latter messengers were often high officials

of an empire builder such as Hammurabi. The two roles differ significantly. The Nuzi local messenger comes from a brief period of time and one small site. Greene's data comes from all over the ancient Near East and dates from 3000 B.C. to 30 B.C. His overgeneralized assumption impairs his conclusions. The author may be correct in many of his observations, but he does not provide the reader with arguments rooted in clear systemic evidence of the sort needed.

A third concern is the price of the book (\$68.95). A similar study, much more carefully executed (and titled), is Samuel Meier's *The Messenger in the Ancient Semitic World*. The latter work sells for about \$14.00. A conspicuous absence of any allusion to Meier's book or 1986 Harvard dissertation is unfortunate.

These matters aside, the book stimulates creative thinking about who the prophets were in light of the language used to describe them. This interesting study exhibits much creative thought.

David Hagopian and Douglas Wilson. *Beyond Promises. A Biblical Challenge to Promise Keepers*. Moscow, Idaho: Canon, 1996. 268 pp. \$14.00 (paper). Reviewed by James E. Rosscup, Professor of Bible Exposition.

This book is very clear in most places, readable, well-researched, and creatively fascinating in its writing style. It compliments the Promise Keepers (PK) men's movement where it can, but pleads for corrections the authors feel are urgent.

Hagopian is a business litigator in the California office of an international law firm, and lives in Southern California. He has a B.A. in history from the University of California, Irvine, and a J.D. from the University of Southern California. Wilson earned an M. A. in philosophy at the University of Idaho, pastors Community Evangelical Fellowship, Moscow, Idaho, and has written two books on marriage and child-rearing—*Reforming Marriage* (Canon, 1995) and *Standing on the Promises* (Canon, forthcoming in 1996)—and a *Latin Grammar* (Canon) and other works.

The book appeals for corrections in the largest men's movement in the United States today with a brotherly Christian spirit that seeks not to score cheap points but rather to evaluate PK ideals by the

biblical "Bureau of Standards," God's Word. One quickly gains the impression that the movement has grown so rapidly that it has not with proper discernment assessed ideas being taught in its publications. Many PK speakers and writers promulgate opinions that are misleading and not reflective of what God's Word teaches. One big corrective would be to replace speakers and writers who spin questionable or non-Christian theories off their heads with those who have depth and fidelity to Scripture.

The writers commend PK aims to help men gain wholeness in a Christian sense and count for the right in every area of life. They also commend PK help in getting men converted to Christ, combating racism, and showing a proper biblical leadership in the home.

Yet most of the book defines areas of correction. The authors want to help, not just criticize. They call for a sounder biblical basis for PK ideas (23, 34). In a manner that attempts not to offend Christian brothers, the authors constructively suggest the following problems that need to be set right:

Too often the PK gospel is a brand of moralism, the authors reason. It slights God's grace gift and creates impressions that to be saved, men need to *do* something, i.e., "live to please Him" (38). Or to live the Christian life men need to commit to seven promises, leaving the impression that transforming power lies in making promises. The problem is that rules such as the ten commandments prove human inability to obey perfectly and should drive people to Christ, the only true promise keeper. God alone transforms; in conversion one begins and then he continues by the Spirit (Gal 3:1-3). Christ offers His perfection in man's place, as his righteousness, holiness, and redemption (1 Cor 1:30).

Another correction needed is in PK's concept of biblical masculinity. The authors fault PK use of Robert Hicks' *The Masculine Journey* and its *Study Guide* which stops at nothing (they say) to shock the conscience. It even promotes fetishism, and encourages men to share with each other intimate private sexual matters such as their first wedding night. It advocates celebrating the male phallus and having church elders *congratulate* young people who have sinned for being human, before moving on to confession and restoration (102). Hicks endorses the error that six Hebrew Old Testament words for man (Adam, etc.) teach six normative stages of development for men, seasons of life, and twists the idea of manhood in Scripture. Men are

to worship God as phallic kinds of guys, rather than the biblical emphasis of men and women worshiping God in spirit and truth (John 4:24).

The writers acknowledge that PK leaders have finally (after about two years) withdrawn use of Hicks' book, but observe they have not issued a public statement acknowledging the lack of discretion in using it as an official PK tool in earlier stages of the movement (105, 106).

Other problems exist in PK teaching, the writers say. One is in reconciling pop psychology to Christianity, as in pushing self-esteem (affirming one another) rather than recognizing human sinfulness and overcoming it through God's forgiveness and enablement. Christ died for those whose acts were as filthy rags, who were children of wrath, and dead in trespasses and sins. Only God is good. To exalt self-esteem as PK writers do is to reduce Christ's cross to a meaningless gesture by claiming man's basic goodness (82).

Signs of careful analysis mark this book, so sensitive PK attention and response could profit the movement and get it on sounder footing. Yet the book has some faults, not doctrinal ones, but in its failure to give explicit positive remedies after criticizing PK for giving the impression men are to accomplish good through their own promises and determination. What are the biblical commands believers *are* to heed—the many imperatives—and how do they correlate with depending on God's power to fulfill them? At the end of chapter 8, for example, where is any positive counsel on how to obey the Lord? Another weakness is the book's disjointedness in early chapters, bringing up criticisms briefly, then leaving them without a thorough discussion, and picking them up in later chapters that take up the PK's seven promises one by one.

Despite occasional lapses in clarity, the book is usually an incisive, articulate, good-spirited appeal for PK to deal with problems and become accurate and more effective. Otherwise the PK movement will, with whatever good it does, foster considerable error in the guise of biblical and Christian truth. Otherwise, it will be part of the problem, not a solution that men need to it.

House, 1995. 380 pp. \$19.99 (cloth). Reviewed by Trevor Craigen, Associate Professor of Theology.

How refreshing to read a book which unashamedly presents Israel as having a place in God's plan and purpose for the ages, doing so with a nice blend of examining Scripture and surveying history. Larsen has produced a work deluged with Scripture references and studded with facts, names, places, and dates. He laces his work with incredibly diverse bibliographic information, and spices it with comments well worth remembering from different authors, diplomats, and politicians. One cannot help but exclaim over and over again, "Good stuff!" In chapters dealing with history, a listing of one or more appropriate Scripture references opens each chapter and sub-section to keep readers from forgetting the Scriptural footing. An opening section entitled "The Scriptural Footings" (chaps. 1-3) and a closing section called "The Prophetic Future" (chaps. 13-18) bracket "The Historical Flow" (chaps. 4-7) and "The Sequential Facts" (chap. 8-12), reminding the reader that what has happened in history and is happening today is not without biblical warrant.

Undoubtedly his book resulted from much thinking and research for which, in his words, "a life-long interest in and love for the Jewish people" (11) were the motivation. A fascination with the course of Jewish history and with the explosive growth of the Jewish State in Israel brought forth what he calls "a modest contribution to the contemporary debate and discussion among evangelical Christians on many issues related to Israel and the Jews" (11). The work is far more than a modest contribution; it is rather a significantly important masterpiece that this reviewer hopes will become "must reading" for everyone in seminaries, colleges, and local churches. In the very least, pastors ought to read and assimilate and perhaps plan a series of studies or sermons on the hope of Israel, on the return of and ultimate restoration of Israel to her divinely granted land. Even a fast reading will fill the mind with so much information and in particular with so much Scripture that one could only conclude that leaving Israel out of the divine plan and replacing her with the church is wrong. To take it further and put it quite bluntly, to summarily dismiss a millennial kingdom is dreadfully shortsighted, prophetically abusive, and eisegetical.

The wealth of information, the pertinent comments, questions,

and evaluations on this subject of Israel and the church and on the abundant detail in God's revealed promises and prophecies may cause one to wonder whether amillennialism, postmillennialism, or any other system or worldview embracing "replacement/displacement theology" is guilty of leaning toward anti-Semitism. Advocates of such systems would, of course, vigorously deny that label, but reflecting upon Romans 11 (52) raises the question of whether they fall under God's charge of arrogance, conceit, and self-esteeming wisdom. Larsen reminds the reader that the future of Israel taught so clearly in Scripture forbids her being submerged into "an amorphous ideal people of God or the church" (200). He notes that divine prophecies cannot apply in spiritual fulfillment to the church. He pulls no punches when citing H. L. Ellison on Ezekiel 36–37: "Unless . . . [expositors] can give full weight both to the transformed land of Israel in Ezekiel 36 and to the national resurrection of Israel in chapter 37, . . . [they have] no right to banish the Israel of the Old Covenant from the picture in favor of the Church" (190). Well said!

How encouraging to be reminded of many different men of the past who accepted without apology and hesitation the clear promises of God about His people in the future. How enthralling to observe the providential bringing into existence of the State of Israel—the right men with the right attitudes stirred by the revelation of God in His Word were there at the right time both inside and outside of Palestine. How troubling to read of centuries-long, worldwide anti-Semitic hatred, and, yes, of Jewish brutality, disregard, and hatred for the Arab, and to realize that Arab and Jew face each other in an irrepressible conflict that perhaps will not resolve itself short of the Messiah bringing in His kingdom. Larsen's love for Israel is not blind to her faults. He neither condemns the Arab out of hand nor applauds Israel without criticism.

How saddening to ponder the incredible savagery and atrocity of the Holocaust, as well as the shameful treatment of budding Israel by the British army so soon after having fought to free them and many others from the Third Reich's willfully iniquitous and "Assyrian-like" pernicious domination.

How encouraging to be reminded that Bible students, both pre- and post-Reformation, held to a millennium. What a surprise to discover that before A.D. 1649 over eighty books on the subject of Christ's millennial reign were available in published form. What a

surprise to discover just who it was who acknowledged that Scripture clearly promised the return of Israel to the land of her fathers (e.g., Owen, Mather, Simeon, M'Cheyne, Bonar, Ryle, Spurgeon, and Girdlestone, to name a few). Historian Ernest Sandeen accused England of having been drunk with millennialism in the nineteenth century (129), a far cry from the church's teaching in modern England that no longer takes seriously God's written promises and prophecies. The author's evaluation of the negative impact of Augustine's "facile equation of the church and the kingdom" is quite correct. Augustine's teaching did much disservice to the proper, biblical understanding of the millennial reign of Christ for many, many years after his death and right up to modern amillennialism (116, 122-23).

How enlightening to read Larsen's concise but most informative survey of Islam and her resistance and opposition to Israel and of militant Islam's pathological hatred of the Jew (153-68). Without reference to what God said in Scripture, one cannot clearly understand the past history of the conflict, and without God's prophetic Word a person cannot accurately estimate the future history of Arab and Jew alike (see 164-68, "The Outcome for Islam").

How satisfying to benefit from a well-written quick summary (chaps. 13-17) of the church age, of end-time events and personages in the tribulation—including the rebuilding of the Temple—of the conversion of Israel, and of the coming of the kingdom.

How challenging to read the final chapter, "Our Faithful God and the Responsibility of the Church," where Larsen gives an invitation to justice, to hopefulness, to vigilance, to witness, and to readiness (325-36). The church should concern herself about justice for all. The church's preaching and teaching on premillennialism is a position that pulsates with hopefulness—the sovereign God will bring to fulfillment all His promises to Israel. The church must be vigilant and take a public stand against all forms of anti-Semitism, and should show concern about media inaccuracy in reporting from the Middle-East. The church must witness lovingly, graciously, and prayerfully to the Jew too. She should be ready always for her upward call, the rapture of the saints, especially in view of the "constellation of signs of the approaching end of the age, particularly in relation to Israel" (335).

Buy, read, think, and let the incongruity of affirming the inerrancy of God's special revelation while disclaiming a place for Israel challenge both mind and heart.

Wayne A. Mack and David Swavely. *Life in the Father's House: A Members Guide to the Local Church*. Phillipsburg, N. J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1996. 211 pp. \$9.99 (paper). Reviewed by Richard L. Mayhue, Senior Vice President and Dean.

This recent release by Dr. Wayne A. Mack, Professor of Biblical Counseling at The Master's College, and David Swavely, a 1996 graduate of The Master's Seminary, addresses the primacy of the local church. It deals with the kinds of issues and commitments that are essential for individual Christians to understand, grasp, and enact in their life.

The volume is thoroughly biblical and should be well received by pastors of every local church. Actually, every local church should use this volume in their new members' class and provide a free copy for every existing member. If Christians in every local church would embrace the principles extracted from Scripture and articulated in this volume, the church of Jesus Christ in the 21st century, should the Lord Jesus delay His coming, will be just as vibrant as the one we read of in the book of Acts.

Abraham Malherbe. *Ancient Epistolary Theorists*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988. 88 pp. \$18.95 (cloth). Reviewed by Dave Deuel, Associate Professor of Old Testament.

The Bible contains many letters. The OT records the activities of messengers as well as their messages. For example, in Ezra and Nehemiah the author either records or speaks of many letters between the provincial government and Palestine. The Bible describes prophets (Hag 1:12), priests (Mal 2:7), and even kings in the language of messengers and their missives.

In the NT the same applies. Almost all the NT books are letters sent throughout the ancient world to spread the news of God's grace. Even Acts and Revelation, which may not be letters, per se contain letters. It is also important that much of the language of the NT that

speaks of the spread of the gospel and the establishing of churches is in messenger language: "gospel" is the message of a herald-type messenger; "preach" is the action that the herald performs; "apostle" was one of the common words for a messenger who delivered mail and oral messages. God used the correspondence system of the day to communicate to His people in many ways.

With that background, a reader can appreciate the contribution of Malherbe's book. The author has collected ancient classical sources of information about ancient letters. Beyond the introduction which includes an interesting discussion of letter writing in schools, the author simply allows the sources to speak. In clear translation, the reader can hear the ancient writers express in their own words their perspectives on the nature and purposes of letters. Of particular interest are the definitions given to epistolary genre:

A letter is one half of a dialogue (Dem. 223) or a surrogate for an actual dialogue (Cic. *Ad Fam.* 12, 30, 1).

In it one speaks to an absent friend as though he were present (Cic. *Ad Fam.* 2, 4, 1; Sen. *Ep.* 75, 1; Ps. Lib. 2, 58; Jul. Vict.).

The letter is, in fact, speech in the written medium (Cic. *Ad Att.* 8, 14, 1; 9, 10, 1; 12, 53; Sen. *Ep.* 75, 1).

A letter reflects the personality of its writer (Cic. *Ad Fam.* 16, 16, 2; Sen. *Ep.* 40, 1; Dem. 227; Philostr.) (12).

Some ancient epistolary theorists viewed letters as organized into styles that served social functions and atmospheres. In the following list, some of the styles may have been employed by biblical writers:

(1) paraenetic, (2) blaming, (3) requesting, (4) commending, (5) ironic, (6) thankful, (7) friendly, (8) praying, (9) threatening, (10) denying, (11) commanding, (12) repenting, (13) reproaching, (14) sympathetic, (15) conciliatory, (16) congratulatory, (17) contemptuous, (18) counter-accusing, (19) replying, (20) provoking, (21) consoling, (22) insulting, (23) reporting, (24) angry, (25) diplomatic, (26) praising, (27) didactic, (28) reproving, (29)

maligning, (30) censorious, (31) inquiring, (32) encouraging, (33) consulting, (34) declaratory, (35) mocking, (36) submissive, (37) enigmatic, (38) suggestive, (39) grieving, (40) erotic, (41) mixed (67).

Though the potential for forcing correspondences of style on Scripture is ever-present, understanding how Ezra, the Apostle Paul, and others learned to compose letters as well as what were the expectations of their readers is helpful in understanding the letters and language of correspondence in Scripture.

The reviewer enthusiastically recommends this work to students of the Bible who would like to understand how the people who first received the Bible might have understood the documents and their messages.

George A. Mather and Larry A. Nichols. *Masonic Lodge*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995. 83 pp. \$5.99 (paper).
Reviewed by Eddy D. Field III, Adjunct Professor of Biblical Education, Philadelphia College of Bible, and an alumnus of The Master's Seminary.

This book is an entry in the new series, *Zondervan Guide to Cults and Religious Movements*, edited by Alan W. Gomes. Its format is unique: it is an outline designed to achieve concision. The outline has five points: (I) Introduction, including history and organization, (II) Theology, (III) Witnessing Tips, (IV) Selected Bibliography, and (V) Parallel Comparison Chart. This format is helpful as a quick reference guide, enabling the authors to include much helpful information in a few pages.

Part I is a very helpful introduction to Freemasonry, detailing its origin, structure, and related organizations. Also included in this section is a look at the important connection between Masonry and Mormonism, and an exploration of the response to Masonry by the Southern Baptist Convention.

In Part II, the authors argue that Masonry is a religion that is at odds with Christianity, and they compare the major Christian doctrines with what some Masonic scholars have written. Yet their

failure to refer to the "Masonic View" of certain doctrines flaws their methodology. For "Arguments used by Masons," they refer primarily to writings of non-authoritative Masonic scholars and not to the Masonic rituals and monitors themselves. A Mason may express disagreement with those scholars and cite other Masonic scholars with a different view. The authors also neglect the most difficult problem in discussions with Christian Masons: relativism in interpreting Masonic ritual. Also, in their discussion of various doctrines, the authors make a serious mistake in ignoring Masonry's teaching of salvation by works. They omit mention of salvific rituals such as the Lambskin Apron, the Common Gavel, and the Perfect Ashlars. This omission leaves the Christian virtually hamstrung in responding to a Mason about the heart of the gospel. Naturally, this weakness carries over to Part III, Witnessing Tips, and Part V, Comparison Chart.

Part IV, Bibliography, has a list of sources on Masonry, both sympathetic and critical, that will aid in research. It does not include a number of important works, though, including those by Jim Shaw, John Ankerberg and John Weldon, and John Robinson.

Masonic Lodge provides a useful, concise outline of the history and structure of Masonry. However, its methodology is unsound and it omits information crucial to understanding Masonry and to dealing with Masons.

Alister E. McGrath, ed. *The Christian Theology Reader*. Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1995. xxiv + 422 pp. \$29.95 (paper). Reviewed by Dennis M. Swanson, Seminary Librarian.

This work, designed as a companion volume to the author's *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Blackwell, 1994), provides supplementary readings for that work. McGrath has selected excerpts from the writings of theologians from the Ante-Nicene era to the modern day and used them to illuminate various aspects of the discussions in his *Theology*.

He has sought to "make available a series of 280 seminal texts of Christian theology, drawn from 161 different sources, arranged on a broadly thematic basis, to allow its users to engage directly with the intellectual richness of the Christian tradition" (xvii). The arrangement

of the work is clear, with the selections numerically coded (with full bibliographic information) to correspond to the various sections of the *Theology*. McGrath has included brief but helpful biographic entries for each author cited, as well as a glossary of terms and subject index.

Though designed to supplement the author's *Theology*, this work serves well as a stand-alone theological anthology. The strength of the selections lies in the Reformation and Pre-Reformation citations that particularly highlight some of the often neglected medieval. Unfortunately, readers are likely to be disappointed in the selections from the modern era, especially those from the last 150 years. The latter represent only scantily conservative theologians of this period, but give prominence to those of the liberal, neo-orthodox, and feminist branches of theology.

Those criticisms aside, this work accomplishes its purpose quite well and will be a valuable resource tool.

Kelly Monroe, ed. *Finding God at Harvard*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996. 368 pp. \$17.99 (cloth). Reviewed by James E. Rosscup, Professor of Bible Exposition.

The volume's ten chapters gather 42 testimonies of intellectuals who discovered truth when they found God. All are professors, staff members, alumni, or students of Harvard, America's first college. They tell how God is meaningful to them in life-shaping reality amid academia.

A group of Puritans founded Harvard and named it after John Harvard, a Puritan minister who left the school half his estate. Of the original nineteen guidelines adopted soon after the school began, one called every student to consider "the mayne end of his life and studyes to know God and Jesus Christ . . . and . . . lay Christ in the bottome, as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning." The early mottos were *Veritas* ("truth," 1643), *In Christi Gloriam* ("to the glory of Christ," 1650), and *Christo et Ecclesiae* ("for Christ and the church," 1692). In early years, whatever field a pupil studied, Harvard's guideline was, "Seeing the Lord giveth wisdom, every one shall seriously by prayer in secret seek wisdom of him."

Kelly Monroe is a chaplain to graduate students at Harvard.

She also advises senior independent studies in C. S. Lewis, media, and film. She says that a truer title for the book is *Found by God at Harvard*. The book is a response to Ari Goldman's conclusion in *The Search for God at Harvard*. Goldman dealt only with Harvard Divinity School and said he found *nobody* there to speak of the gospel or the person of Jesus Christ. The present book finds many in the larger university setting willing to speak up for Christ.

Some writers are well-known to many readers: Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Elizabeth Dole, Mother Teresa, Elton Trueblood, and Charles Malik. This reviewer was pleased to see a chapter by Jeffrey Barneson, a product of and missionary from his local church, Calvary Baptist, Whittier, Calif., who ministers at Harvard with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship.

The book shows that the truth claims of Jesus Christ are not peripheral but central to human experience (19). Contributors raise and explore questions on truth and meaning, such as why crime exists, how it is possible to possess virtue, why people become angry, how they can forgive, and where they find hope.

The chapter by psychiatrist Robert Coles could challenge some to trust in Christ. He illustrates trust in a six-year-old girl, placed in a New Orleans school by federal authorities and walking to and from the school daily, past whites who threatened her life. Ruby astounded Coles by her calm trust in Jesus and her prayers for those who wronged her.

Solzhenitsyn's chapter, "A World Split Apart," is part of a 1978 commencement address at Harvard arguing the impoverishment of humanistic ideas. He sees many in the Western world seeking values that give no peace and favors seeking spiritual values in a relationship to God. A fascinating account is that of a Jewish doctor, Boris Kornfield, in a prison treating Solzhenitsyn's cancer of the intestines in the 1950's. Kornfield witnessed faithfully to his patient during the operation. Solzhenitsyn, at intermittent times when conscious, saw his need of Christ and forgiveness.

Krister Sairsingh's chapter on the emptiness of Hinduism and the fullness he found in Christ is intriguing. Another Christian converted from Hinduism witnessed to him, he read the gospels, was drawn to Jesus Christ, and finally received Him and forgiveness that his belief in karma—i.e., every sin must be paid for in the next life—could not give. Sairsingh then led his mother, grandmother, brothers,

sisters, and a cousin to Jesus Christ.

Barneson's chapter recounts his bid to obey biblical appeals to care for the poor, forgotten, and strangers (Mic 6:8; Isaiah 58). He found a way to suffer the disgrace that Jesus bore (Heb 13:11-14) as he and his wife since 1984 have led graduate students in doing summer work in impoverished villages of Guatemala and Honduras.

One of the finest chapters, one by Elizabeth Dole, is forthright about the difference Christ makes in her life. Mrs. Dole uses the challenge of Esther's commitment for her people and the example of her grandmother who loved God's Word and sacrificed to help ministers and foreign missionaries. Near the end of her chapter, Mrs. Dole testifies of feeling "the power of Christ rest upon me, encourage me, replenish my energy, and deepen my faith—power from God, not from me" (243). She adds that a life of total commitment to Christ is "the only life worth living, the only life worthy of our Lord."

Mother Teresa, Albanian nun known for exemplary help to the poor and dying, has several good things to say. One is, "For God, it is not how much we give but how much love we put in the giving" (317). She also exhorts people to give a beautiful thing on their wedding day, "a virgin heart . . . body . . . soul" (315). She does not explain that cleanness is only by the pardoning power of Christ. And her response to visiting American professors' request to "tell us something that will help us to become holy" is a disappointment. Mother Teresa replied, "Smile at each other—because we have no time even to look at each other" (315). That response reflects tragic emptiness!

Amid many excellent emphases and illustrations in the book, careful readers will find other things that disturb them. An example is the word of Owen Gingerich, Professor of Astronomy and History at Harvard and a Mennonite church goer, who acknowledges a creator God but assumes an evolutionary chain of four billion years leading to man (272). Aware of the "mixed bag" nature of the book, readers will still find much that stimulates richly. It testifies to a growing number worshiping Christ at a school that has, since drifting from its early purposes, often found no place for Him. Stimulated far more often than disappointed, the reviewer found the book a catalyst to freshened commitment.

Iain H. Murray. *Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism: The Battle for Gospel Preaching*. Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1996. xv +164pp. \$9.85 (paper). Reviewed by Dennis M. Swanson, Seminary Librarian.

Studies and writings about the multi-faceted life of Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-92), seemingly have single-handedly been a fulfillment of Ecclesiastes 12:12. However, Iain Murray's latest addition to Spurgeon studies is neither "wearying to the body" nor superfluous in its content.

Murray, perhaps the pre-eminent Spurgeon scholar of the present, has provided a valuable work covering the first and perhaps the most forgotten of several controversies that arose during Spurgeon's ministry. Sensing that a "resurgence of Calvinistic belief has occurred across the world" (xiii), Murray has ably chronicled and evaluated the battle Spurgeon has with so-called Hyper-Calvinism. The reason for the study is "when evangelical Calvinism is again being recovered in many parts of the earth, the danger of Hyper-Calvinism is once more a possibility and the lessons to be drawn from this old controversy have again become relevant" (41).

Hyper-Calvinism was difficult to define in Spurgeon's day as it is today. He said, "I do not think I differ from any of my Hyper-Calvinistic brethren in what I do believe, but I differ from them in what they do not believe" (38). Murray himself comments "the danger with Hyper-Calvinism is not so much what it believes, but what that it does not believe enough" (xiv). Because of this situation, misunderstandings of the differences between Calvinism and Hyper-Calvinism are frequent. Murray thoroughly summarizes the Hyper-Calvinistic position:

For a preacher to convey to his hearers the impression that they are called to receive Christ, and to believe in him for salvation, is to deny, in the opinion of Hyper-Calvinists, the sovereignty of divine grace. It is to represent salvation as available to those whom God has excluded by the decree of election. Gospel preaching for Hyper-Calvinists means a declaration of the facts of the gospel but nothing should be said by way of encouraging individuals to believe that the promises of Christ are made to them particularly until there is evidence that the Spirit of God has begun a saving work in their hearts, convicting them and making them "sensible" of their need (69).

Murray recounts the early public controversy between Spurgeon and James Wells (1803-72) on this issue. As was normal for that era, the printed debate appeared in the magazine of Charles Waters Banks (1806-86), the *Earthen Vessel*. Murray appends Spurgeon's views on the necessity of clear gospel preaching, a "universal proclamation of good news" (75) and his "four-fold appeal to Scripture" (66-99). He describes the aftermath of the controversy and draws four lessons for the modern church from this episode in Spurgeon's ministry. He includes five short appendices of illustrative material, including excerpts from two sermons by Spurgeon on 1 Timothy 2:3-4 (149-54) and on "The Injury Done by Hyper-Calvinism and Antinomianism" (155-57).

With his clear writing style Murray has brought his usual historical insight to bear on this subject. Along with Murray, many have noted the resurgence in the last several years of "Calvinistic" belief within evangelicalism. This volume will encourage new Calvinists toward a biblical Calvinism as embodied in Spurgeon's ministry and warn them away from the unbiblical practices of Hyper-Calvinism and its errors.

Thom S. Ranier. *Giant Awakenings: Making the Most of 9 Surprising Trends that Can Benefit Your Church*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1995. 198 pp. \$17.99 (cloth). Reviewed by Richard L. Mayhue, Senior Vice President and Dean.

Thom S. Ranier, founding dean of the Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism, and Church Growth at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville has brought great insight and balance to understanding what is happening in the local church today. Most pastors feel like they are caught in the cross fire of two sides at the "OK corral." On one side are those advocating the "traditional church" in opposition to those who are promoting the "contemporary church." Ranier brings a fresh perspective on being a "biblical church."

He looks back over the last ten years (1986-95) and surveys the scene of major and potentially alarming trends and change in the church that are rooted in the soil of "contemporary church growth" and "being contemporary." Based on his recent visits to a large

number of churches around the country, his opinion is that the tide is turning back to the Scriptures to evaluate what the church should be and what the church should not be. He very optimistically looks forward to the next ten years (1996-2005). In this reviewer's opinion, his assessment and advice are thoroughly biblical, worthy of prayerful consideration by every pastor in America.

Ranier places a strong emphasis on the following essentials for the local church: (1) a biblical model of ministry, (2) expository preaching, (3) holy worship, (4) scriptural evangelism, (5) lay involvement, (6) fervent prayer, and (7) a rapid return to theology as the foundation for all that is done in the church.

Steven Tsoukalas. *Masonic Rites and Wrongs: An Examination of Freemasonry*. Phillipsburg, N. J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1995. xii + 241 pp. \$12.99 (paper). Reviewed by Eddy D. Field III, Adjunct Professor of Biblical Education, Philadelphia College of Bible, and an alumnus of The Master's Seminary.

Steven Tsoukalas began his examination of Freemasonry because he heard that Freemasonry was not compatible with Christianity, and yet his father was a Christian and a Mason. His study led him to conclude that the two are opposed to each other, and it is this thesis that Tsoukalas defends in the book (ix-x).

Tsoukalas' methodology has four phases: "(1) to cite various rituals and monitors from Grand Lodges, (2) to support the conclusions of Masonic scholars by these sources, so as to avoid the allegation that these are the opinions of particular Masonic scholars, (3) to draw similar conclusions, and (4) to show how they conflict with Christianity" (xi). This methodology is sound: though other investigations focus on the possible occult background of Masonry, or on what non-authoritative experts on Masonry say, Tsoukalas' study refers directly to Masonic rituals and monitors. Another commendable feature of the author's approach is his reference to rituals and monitors from different areas of the United States and the rest of the world. By this he shows that Masonry is consistent in all these locations.

The author divides the book into two parts: the Blue Lodge and the Scottish Rite. As membership in the Blue Lodge is requisite to

membership in the Scottish Rite, study of the latter is somewhat superfluous, though nonetheless helpful.

First, Tsoukalas addresses the question, "Is Freemasonry a Religion?" Using nine "religion-making characteristics" from *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, he demonstrates that Masonry is, in fact, a religion. This is a point of contention with many Masons, though, because it depends on the definition of "religion," and because many Masons already affirm another religion. While Masonry is religious in nature (a sort of meta-religion), this fact is really beside the point, and not likely to be advantageous in reasoning with Masons.

Most helpful is the author's demonstration that Masonry affirms a specific Deity and teaches entrance to heaven by works. Masonry requires belief in a "Supreme Being," but does not define this Being. Yet the Supreme Being of Masonry encompasses all the varied deities of Masons and Masons designate it "The Great Architect of the Universe." It is this Deity that all Masons worship and give devotion to. Further, Tsoukalas proves that elements from the Masonic rituals teach that the Mason gains admission to the "Celestial Lodge above" by his good works. For example, the Lambskin Apron, the most important object in Masonry, reminds the Mason of "that purity of life and rectitude of conduct so essentially necessary to his gaining admission into the Celestial Lodge above."

This leads to a crucial consideration that Tsoukalas is careful to address. Many Christian Masons respond that they interpret Masonic teachings in accord with Christianity. For instance, they respond that, *to them*, the Great Architect of the Universe is Jehovah and none other, and the Lambskin Apron reminds them of Christ, the Lamb of God. Tsoukalas responds to this difficult problem of relativity several times (18, 61 n. 22, 50, 72, 90), arguing that the true evaluation of Masonry must be by what it objectively teaches, not by how a Mason subjectively interprets that teaching.

The author explores the corporate nature of Masonry and proves that it is not a mere fraternity, but rather a spiritual union that God forbids in 2 Cor 6:14-18 (69-71).

Tsoukalas also discusses the important and controversial legend of Hiram Abif. He refutes the interpretation that it teaches resurrection, and makes a strong case that it teaches salvation.

Stephen Tsoukalas' work here is superb. His arguments are sound and his documentation thorough. *Masonic Rites and Wrongs* is

the most searching critique of Masonry known to this reviewer, and the author's conclusion is correct: a Christian can be a Mason, but he should not be (225-26).

Gunter Wagner, ed. *An Exegetical Bibliography of the New Testament: Romans and Galatians*. Macon, Georgia: Mercer University, 1995. xiv. + 379 pp. \$35.00 (cloth). Reviewed by Dennis M. Swanson, Seminary Librarian.

The fourth and most recent volume in this proposed six-volume series, is a delight to both the librarian and the biblical researcher. The editor has developed a remarkable method for listing significant articles on individual verses and passages in the NT.

Wagner has brought together an immense amount of research and organization to "enable the student to get down to research as quickly as possible without wasting days, even weeks, on the search for literature" (ix.) The design of the work is remarkably simple: in a verse-by-verse arrangement Wagner has listed all the articles that deal specifically with the particular verse or passage.

The sources correlated are extensive, if not exhaustive (for example there are over two hundred citations for Romans 12:1-2). He has indexed over three hundred theological journals from around the world. The book's beginning has a very helpful list of journal abbreviations. In addition to journal literature, it contains citations from significant theological works, multi-author works and *festschriften*. The format is clear and readable and the type-set is easy on the eye.

This volume will be valuable primarily to those in graduate or post-graduate biblical studies and those doing significant in-depth writing on NT themes. No theological library can afford to be without it (and the rest of the series). Although not intended for pastors, it would help them save research time on special projects.

In a day when technology has taken over almost every aspect of research, it is refreshing to see a book that shows computer wizards how a bibliographic database should look.