

# **The King & His Kingdom Is Yet to Come to Earth!**

## **Exegetical and Theological Support for Premillennialism**

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[This was originally published at *True Declination Ministries* website in 2015.]

### **INTRODUCTION**

As the public ministry of Jesus drew near to the climactic passion week, Jesus told his hearers a parable because Jesus was near Jerusalem (for the Triumphal Entry) and they supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately (Luke 19:11).<sup>1</sup> Jesus spoke and exhorted His followers to live busy, God-honoring lives till the nobleman returns since they presumed the kingdom of God was to immediately burst in right then and there. On the night before the crucifixion of Christ, Pontius Pilate asked Jesus, “Are You the King of the Jews?”<sup>2</sup> to which Jesus responded by affirming: “It is as you say” (Matt 27:11). Jesus affirmed repeatedly that He came as Messiah and as the King to deliver His people. He validated His claims by means of undeniable miracles proving that He had come from God and with God’s power. So the question is not, “Is Jesus a King?” or “Is Jesus sovereign?” To these important questions, the Scriptures loudly and repeatedly affirm with certainty! The question is, however, does Jesus function as the ruling and reigning King over the Kingdom as the Scriptures in both testaments teach? The purpose of this essay is to present a robust, exegetical<sup>3</sup> and theological answer to that question. Indeed, Christians must study prophecy and should come to a proper understanding of the Scriptures so as to not neglect the Word and such a comforting genre of study as this.<sup>4</sup> Interpreters should heartily affirm the clear teaching of the Word of God concerning the kingdom of God which shall come.

### **EXEGETICAL SUPPORT**

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<sup>1</sup> καὶ δοκεῖν αὐτοὺς ὅτι παραχρῆμα μέλλει ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ἀναφαίνεσθαι; “And they thought that the Kingdom of God was about to immediately appear.” It appears that Jesus told the following parable of diligently serving till the King returns in order to correct the misunderstanding that His followers had that the Kingdom of God was imminent.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all English Scriptures are taken from the New American Standard Bible, 1995 updated edition.

<sup>3</sup> As Don J. Payne affirms: “the history of evangelical approaches to Scripture is marked by an insistence on taking the text at face value, letting it speak for itself (exegesis) rather than reading into it (eisegesis)” (“The Theological Method of Premillennialism” in *A Case for Historic Premillennialism: An Alternative to “Left Behind” Eschatology*, ed. by Craig L. Blomberg and Sung Wook Chung [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009], 91).

<sup>4</sup> Charles Feinberg states: “With such a large place given to eschatology in the Word by the Spirit, it not only deserves but commands our faithful and prayerful study. It certainly was never in the purpose of God that such a large portion of His Word should be neglected” (*Millennialism: The Two Major Views, The Premillennial and Amillennial Systems of Biblical Interpretation Analyzed and Compared*, 3rd ed. (Winona Lake, BMH Books, 2008), 28.

To frame one's understanding of the kingdom of God as to what it is, when it appears, who are the subjects of this kingdom and what the king's reign is like, one must turn to the Scriptures beginning with the Old Testament<sup>5</sup> and then, the New Testament.<sup>6</sup> With a topic such as eschatology — the doctrine of the last things — one must begin with and lay the foundation in the Old Testament. This is the only approach that gives proper respect to the progressive-revelation of Scripture and it allows for the single-meaning of the text by what the author and the recipients understood at the time that it was written.<sup>7</sup> Michael Vlach affirms:

The meaning of the Old Testament texts is not primarily found in New Testament interpretations. The New Testament may, with progressive revelation, shine light on Old Testament passages, offer commentary, or add additional applications or referents, but the New Testament does not override the original intent of the Old Testament writers.<sup>8</sup>

To understand what the Kingdom of God is and what it is like, the Scriptures must form and inform one's theology.

## ***Old Testament Texts***

### **The Psalms**

David wrote Psalm 2 (Acts 4:25-26) and in one of the most Messianic Psalms of the OT, he describes the reign of the Lord's Anointed. In a time of rebellion when the nations rise up against the LORD and counsel together against the LORD and against His Anointed (vv.1-2), the LORD sits in the heavens and laughs (v.4). God speaks and declares that He has installed His King upon Zion, His holy mountain (v.6). The LORD's decree to His King: "You are My Son, Today I have begotten you" (v.7). God makes the following promises to His Anointed-Son that God would give the nations as His inheritance and the very ends of the earth as His possession (v.8). Undoubtedly this speaks of a future kingdom that God gives to His vice-regent Son, the Anointed King, where God Himself will install Him upon Zion, God's holy mountain, where the nations will serve as His inheritance. This must be an earthly kingdom with literal nations since the parallel phrase in verse 8 speaks of the very ends of the earth being the Son's possession in this Kingdom.

Another Psalm that nearly all commentators affirm is Messianic is Psalm 22. Much of the psalm speaks of the Messiah's suffering on the cross. For instance, He would cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (v.1), He is a reproach of men and despised by the people (v.6), all who see Him wag their heads (v.7), all his bones would be out of joint (v.14), His tongue

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<sup>5</sup> Hereafter, OT.

<sup>6</sup> Hereafter, NT.

<sup>7</sup> One of the presuppositions of this essay is that one must begin the study with the OT for a proper foundation. In other words, one cannot begin with the NT and read the OT through the lens of the NT since that was not how the original author nor the original readers understood that particular text. One must allow for the progressive revelation of Scripture. That means that God progressively imparted revelation as time went on that built on previous revelation. They do not contradict each other; they harmonize together masterfully. But one must not commit the hermeneutical error of beginning with the NT and reading that back into the OT to understand theological issues, particularly in the realm of eschatology.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Vlach, "What Is Dispensationalism," in *Christ's Prophetic Plans: A Futuristic Premillennial Primer*, ed. by John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue (Chicago: Moody, 2012), 24.

would cleave to his jaws (v.15), the enemies would pierce His hands and His feet (v.16), those nearby divide His garments and cast lots for His clothing (v.18). Few would deny that these prophecies were literally fulfilled in Christ. As one progresses through the remaining part of the psalm, the brightness of hope dawns. If the first part of the psalm that described Messiah's suffering was literally fulfilled, then it would only follow that the remaining part of the psalm that speaks about the LORD's kingdom would be literally fulfilled also. Indeed, "The Old Testament promises are yet unfulfilled, but they will one day be realized—in the same way that biblical prophecy was fulfilled in Christ's first coming."<sup>9</sup> Psalm 22 affirms that all the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD (v.27) and all the families of the nations will worship before the LORD (v.27b). Indeed, the Kingdom is the LORD's and He rules over the nations (v. 28). The Messiah came, suffered, and died, and yet the Psalm provides the hope that one day the nations of the earth will in fact worship the LORD again.

Another text in the Psalter that provides characteristics about the coming Kingdom, Psalm 72 provides a lengthy treatment of the this great period. The psalm speaks of the King who would rule from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth (v.8). Even nomads of the desert would bow before Him and His enemies would lick the dust (v.9). Furthermore, all the kings would bow down before Him and even serve Him (v.11). This King would deliver the needy, the afflicted, and He would abound with compassion for the oppressed (vv.12-14). Significantly, this psalm shows that the people (the context of vv.9-14: the nomads, the enemies, the kings, the needy, afflicted, oppressed) would pray for Him continually and bless Him all day long (v.15). The end of the psalm affirms that the whole earth would be filled with His glory (v. 19). So supreme is this King that His name endures forever and men will bless themselves by Him (v.17). The language of this psalm describes a King who rules on the earth as all the kings and all the families come to worship Him, bless Him, and serve Him. These psalms describe an earthly kingdom with an earthly king with the nations of the earth coming to worship the LORD.

### ***The Prophets***

#### **Isaiah 2 (Micah 4)**

The prophet Isaiah speaks of the events of the last days in this magnificent prophecy of both coming judgment and future deliverance. In 2:2, Isaiah speaks of what will happen in the last days when the mountain of the house of the LORD will be established as chief of the mountains. So glorious will the mountain of the LORD be that all the nations will stream to it, many peoples will come up to the mountain of the LORD so that they may walk in His paths (vv. 2-3). Indeed, at that time, the Law of God will go forth from Zion and the Word of the LORD from Jerusalem. Thus, it speaks of a time in the latter days when the nations will stream to Zion itself — Jerusalem — to worship the Lord. At this time, the LORD will judge between nations and render decisions for many peoples (v.4). So significant will this time be that they will hammer swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks since they will never again learn war (v.4).

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<sup>9</sup> John MacArthur, "Does the New Testament Reject Futuristic Premillennialism?" in *Christ's Prophetic Plans: A Futuristic Premillennial Primer*, ed. by John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue (Chicago: Moody, 2012), 175.

In fact, the prophet Micah repeats this eschatological prophecy thus affirming its truthfulness, importance and certainty. Indeed, Micah notes that “in that day,”<sup>10</sup> God will assemble the peoples and the LORD will reign over them in Mt. Zion from now on and forever. In the eschaton, the Lord will reign over the peoples in Mt. Zion.<sup>11</sup> To be consistent, interpreters should see this as a prophecy about the future kingdom when the Lord reigns in Mt. Zion because in the very following chapter, the prophet speaks of the Messiah who would be born in Bethlehem Ephrathah (5:2). No one disputes that this prophecy was fulfilled just as the text describes, so it follows that the prophecy in the previous chapter should be seen in the same way as well.

## **Ezekiel**

The prophet Ezekiel abounds with prophecies regarding the eschaton. In chapter 36, Ezekiel speaks of the mountains of Israel (v.1) that will be blessed and how the LORD would gather Israel and sprinkle clean water on them and give them a new heart and a new spirit within them and cause them to walk in His statutes (vv.26-27). Indeed, Israel would live on the land that God gave to their forefathers so that they would be His people and that He would be their God (v.28). Chapter 37 describes that glorious prophecy of the valley of dry bones when God would take the sons of Israel, gather them into their own land and make them one nation on the mountains of Israel with one king who will be king for them all (vv.20-22). The prophet further explains some features of this coming kingdom beginning in verse 24.

God declares that His servant David will be king over them (Israel) and they will all have one shepherd and they will walk in God’s laws (v.24). They will live on the land that God gave to Jacob (cf. Gen 35:11-12) and David, God’s servant, would preside as their prince forever (v.25). God will make a covenant of peace with them (Israel) and God would place His sanctuary in their midst forever (v.26-27). In so doing, the nations will know that He is the LORD who sanctifies Israel (v.28). Speaking of this remarkable chapter, Vlach writes: “Nothing in Israel’s past history since the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles comes remotely close in kind to this scenario that Ezekiel describes in meticulous detail.”<sup>12</sup> This prophecy speaks of the end when the LORD will dwell among His people, the nation of Israel, in the land of Israel as He blesses them and as they follow Him. These texts clearly speak of a future, earthly kingdom with God’s king ruling over the people of Israel.

## **Amos**

In one of the sternest OT prophecies that describes the divine judgment that will come upon Israel because of her unfaithfulness to the LORD (chaps. 1-3), the book concludes with a

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<sup>10</sup> Hebrew, “in that day” is a prophetic formula that speaks of the time of the end (בְּיוֹם הַהוּא).

<sup>11</sup> The way the Hebrew is constructed shows that the LORD will reign in, or at, the location of Mt. Zion (בְּהַר צִיּוֹן).

<sup>12</sup> Michael Vlach, “Why Futuristic Premillennialism?” in *Christ’s Prophetic Plans: A Futuristic Premillennial Primer*, ed. by John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue (Chicago: Moody, 2012), 79.

glorious promise of Israel's restoration.<sup>13</sup> In chapter 9, God reveals that His eyes are on the sinful kingdom of Israel and He would destroy it from the face of the earth, but not to total annihilation (v.8). In the prophetic formula speaking of the eschaton, Amos speaks of the future day when God would raise up the fallen booth of David and God promises to rebuild it as in the days of old (v.11). Indeed, God declares that the fallen booth of David, the people of Israel, would possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by God's Name (v.12) for days are coming when the land of Israel will prosper and flourish (v.13) and God will restore the captivity of His people, Israel (v.14a). God affirms that Israel will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them (v.14b) and that God Himself would plant them on their land so that they would never be uprooted again from their land which He had given to them (v.15). The prophet Amos frames this final restoration promise (vv.11-15) around the theme of the rebuilding of the cities in the land of Israel. The unit contains no less than five divine promises ("I will") as He speaks of the future to His people. Again, this prophecy in Amos reveals a future rebuilding of the cities in the land of Israel.

## **Jeremiah**

Jeremiah prophesies to the people of Judah just prior to the Babylonian siege and subsequent destruction of Jerusalem (586B.C.). In large part, Jeremiah's messages cover the gamut of Judah's idolatry, wickedness and full deservedness of divine wrath. But glittered throughout these messages of judgment, Jeremiah provides divine promises of hope. In Jeremiah 23, God pronounces a 'woe' judgment upon Israel's shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of God's pasture (v.1). Because of the negligence of Israel's leaders, God promises that He will attend to them for the evil of their deeds and will gather Israel out of all the countries where they reside and He will bring them back to their pasture and they will be fruitful and multiply (v.3). The prophecy clearly refers to the later times because of the prophetic eschatological formula that introduces the pericope (v.5). The days are coming when God will raise up for David a Righteous Branch (v.5). The way God describes this Righteous Branch and the surrounding characteristics deserve careful study.

This Branch will reign as king and will act wisely. He will perform justice and righteousness in the land of Israel. Jeremiah goes on to promise that in His days (the days of the reigning of this Branch) Judah will be saved and Israel will dwell securely. God specifically names this Branch as The LORD our Righteousness (Jer 23:6).

All of this leads to the following "Therefore" in verse 7. Days are coming when God will bring His people Israel back from the north lands and from all the countries where God scattered them, and they will live on their own soil (v.8).

The divine promises that God makes with the nation of Israel through the mouth of Jeremiah the prophet must reach fulfillment. In Jeremiah 24, God provides a series of "I will" promises to the nation of Israel. God speaks and utters true promises of hope by affirming: "I

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<sup>13</sup> Michael Vlach notes: "The concept of 'restoration' certainly includes the idea of Israel being reinstated as a nation, in her land, with a specific identity and role of service to the nations. In other words, in a literal, earthly kingdom—a millennium—the nation Israel will perform a functional role of service to the nations" ("What Is Dispensationalism?" in *Christ's Prophetic Plans: A Futuristic Premillennial Primer*, ed. by John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue [Chicago: Moody, 2012], 33).

will regard as good the captives of Judah whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans” (v.5), “I will set my eyes on them for good” (v.6a), “I will bring them again to this land” (v.6b), “I will build them up and not overthrow them” (v.6c), “I will plant them and not pluck them up” (v.6d), I will give them a heart to know me, for I am the LORD” (v.7a), and finally, “they will be my people and I will be their God, for they will return to me with their whole heart” (v.7b). So sure was God’s Word that Judah would go into exile at the hands of the Babylonians, so sure is God’s Word that He Himself will restore them to Himself and that He would bring them back into their own land.

Another text that speaks of the future is Jeremiah 33 where God decrees that He will return and restore Israel to their land with joy and thanksgiving (vv.1-13). Beginning in verse 14, God utters a remarkable prophecy through Jeremiah about the days to come. “Days are coming” (v.14a), declares the LORD when He will cause a Righteous Branch (v.15a) to spring forth and this Branch shall execute justice and righteousness on the earth. So clear and so certain is this prophecy that God promises that in those days (of the Branch executing justice and righteousness on the earth) Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell securely (v.16b). Writing in the days of the Judean kings sitting on David’s throne from Jerusalem, God promises that David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel (vv.17-18). Clearly, this must refer to an earthly kingdom that centers in Jerusalem.

## **Zechariah**

In a prophecy that speaks of the Lord’s greatness and power, Zechariah “proclaimed the Lord as king over Judah and promised that He would become king over all the nations.”<sup>14</sup> In chapters 7-8, Zechariah gives four messages (7:4-7, 7:8-14, 8:1-17, 8:18-23) to the people of Israel during the reign of King Darius (7:1). In 8:2, the Lord declares that he has exceeding jealousy for Zion and he decrees that He will return to Zion and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. This verse shows that earthly Zion is intended because of the parallel reference to Jerusalem (cf. 1:14, 17; 9:9). After the exile, God gives a ray of hope in delineating how old men and old women will sit in Jerusalem’s streets (v.4) and how boys and girls will play in her streets (v.5). God will bring His people back to the land and they will live in the midst of Jerusalem. The covenantal overtones are unmistakable: “they shall be my people, and I will be their God in truth and righteousness” (v.8). At this time, the land will abound with prosperity (vv.12-13). In this future time (v.20), peoples will come and will go to one another to approach the favor of the Lord and to seek the LORD (v.21). Further describing this era, many peoples and mighty nations will come to seek the LORD of Hosts in Jerusalem (v.22). The prophet shows the eschatological fulfillment of this phrase with the prophetic formula, “in those days” (v.23a). At that time, ten men from all the nations will grasp the garment of a Jew saying, “let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you” (v.23b).

Toward the end of Zechariah’s prophecy, he shows that the LORD will be king over all the earth (14:9). In that day (eschatological formula), the LORD will be one, and His name, one (14:9b). Zechariah speaks of topographical changes (v.10) and then affirms that peoples will live in it (the land) and there will no longer be a curse, for Jerusalem will dwell in security (14:11).

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<sup>14</sup> C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books* (Chicago: Moody, 1986), 310.

## ***New Testament Texts***

### **Luke 19:11 (Acts 1.8)**

In the NT, during the life and ministry of Jesus, he affirms that the Kingdom is yet future rather than an immediate phenomenon.<sup>15</sup> After passing through Jericho on the final journey to Jerusalem for the passion week, Jesus taught those who traveled with Him (Luke 19:11a) and He told them a parable because He was near Jerusalem and they “supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately” (Luke 19:11).<sup>16</sup> Luke provides this helpful comment to show that many of the followers believed the grand messianic kingdom-event was to dawn imminently, and yet Jesus told a parable (vv.12-27) to assure them that it will come but not immediately — it will remain to be fulfilled in the future.<sup>17</sup> The parable that Jesus tells describes a nobleman who went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself and then return (v.12). So he called ten of his slaves and gave them ten minas and told them to busily work till he returns (v.13). While the man traveled, the first slave showed how he labored and made ten additional minas (v.16). The second slave also proved himself faithful (vv.18-19). But another slave came to his master and delivered the mina because he had hidden it in a handkerchief and was afraid of the master and did not work in his master’s absence (vv.20-21). In this parable, Jesus warned that the Jews would act this way toward Himself, their true Messiah, and He also affirms that those who work busily in serving Him in His absence will be rewarded in the end, “well done, good slave” (v.17).

### **Revelation 20:1-6**

Nearly all conservative interpreters interpret the immediate context in a straight-forward way. For instance, 19:11-21 refers to the second coming of Jesus Christ in power and glory to wage war with all His enemies. He slaughters all His enemies and casts the beast and the false prophet into the lake of fire. And, in 20:10, commentators all understand that the devil himself who deceived many will be cast by God Himself into the Lake of Fire where they will reside under God’s judgment forever and ever. Even in chapter 20:11-15 speaks of the final scene in all human history, the final judgment of God Almighty. But sandwiched right in the middle of the second coming of Jesus Christ (19:11-21) and the account of the devil being cast into the Lake of Fire, there is a brief section that has sparked no shortage of theological discussions and viewpoints. In keeping with a consistent hermeneutic (following from chapter 19), one should

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<sup>15</sup> One should observe Matt 19:28 when Christ speaks of those who have followed Him who will sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel in the regeneration [τῆ παλιγγενεσίᾳ] of the Son of Man when He will sit on His glorious throne [ἐπὶ θρόνου δόξης αὐτοῦ]. Christ Himself spoke of this as a future event.

<sup>16</sup> Note how Luke phrases this: δοκεῖν αὐτοὺς ὅτι παραχρῆμα μέλλει ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ἀναφαίνεσθαι. Luke uses the causal infinitive δοκεῖν because the crowds supposed/thought that God’s Kingdom was about to appear. Luke highlights the immediate expectation of the crowds’ conviction with the word παραχρῆμα.

<sup>17</sup> As J. Bradley Chance affirms (speaking of the Apostles’ expectation of the kingdom in Acts 1:8): “Jesus’ response challenges the hope for an immediate restoration of Israel. It does not challenge the hope of such a restoration itself” (*Jerusalem, the Temple, and the New Age in Luke-Acts* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988), 133.

read Revelation 20:1-6 in a normal, plain fashion so as to understand the glorious plan that God unfolds in these verses.

No less than six times the Apostle John mentions a period of ‘a thousand years’.<sup>18</sup> John begins this pericope in the same way that he has customarily began others in the book, “then I saw” (6:1; 7:1; 14:6; 19:11; 20:11 et al). This passage provides the duration of the coming kingdom that the OT prophets spoke so much about.<sup>19</sup> Without Revelation 20, God’s people know about the coming kingdom and the characteristics of it, but this text provides the length of time that it will reside on earth. John speaks of a period when Satan will be bound for a thousand years (v.2) so as to forbid that he would deceive the nations any more (v.3). John then describes the thousand years by describing what he observed. He saw thrones and many who sat on them (v.4a). He saw the first resurrection which consists of those who suffered for their testimony of Jesus and who came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years (v.4-5). To be clear, John remarks that the rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed (v. 5a). A divine blessing comes upon all those who have a part in the first resurrection (v.6a). All who enjoy the glory of this resurrection are the saved since they will never experience the second death (the Lake of Fire; cf. 20:14). Moreover, these who rise will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years (v.6). The following section in vv.7-10 describes the loosing of Satan and how he will deceive the nations for one last raging battle against the Lord. He will most definitely lose and God will cast him into the Lake of Fire and brimstone (v. 10). If the Lord did intend to convey that the future kingdom would in fact endure for one-thousand years, one wonders how much clearer He could convey that simple truth than to repeat the phrase six times for dramatic emphasis.<sup>20</sup> Waymeyer aptly concludes: “There is simply no compelling reason in the immediate context to interpret the thousand years as anything other than literal.”<sup>21</sup>

## THEOLOGICAL RAMIFICATIONS

### 1. *Bibliology: The Perspicuity of Scripture*

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<sup>18</sup> In Greek, χίλια ἔτη.

<sup>19</sup> Intriguingly, Philip Schaff comments: “The most striking point in the eschatology of the ante-Nicene age is the prominent chiliasm, or millenarianism, that is the belief of a visible reign of CHrist in glory on earth with the risen saints for a thousand years, before the general resurrection and judgment” (*History of the Christian Church*, vol. 2, *Ante-Nicene Christianity from the Death of John the Apostle to Constantine the Great, A.D. 100–325*, 5th ed. [New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1889; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrikson, 1996], 614). Additionally, Robert Clouse asserts that “During the first three centuries of the Christian era, premillennialism appears to have been the dominant eschatological interpretation” (introduction to *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. by Robert G. Clouse [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1977], 9).

<sup>20</sup> Robert Thomas speaks to Rev. 20:1ff: “It is clearly a future kingdom with an initial phase that will extend for a thousand years upon the present earth” (“The Timing of the Millennium,” in *Basic Theology: Applied*, ed. by Wesley and Elaine Willis and John and Janet Master [Wheaton: Victor Books, 1995], 274).

<sup>21</sup> Matthew Waymeyer, “What About Revelation 20?” in *Christ’s Prophetic Plans: A Futuristic Premillennial Primer*, ed. by John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue (Chicago: Moody, 2012), 134.

One of the historical tenets of Reformed theology is the perspicuity of Scripture and the *analogy of Scripture*. Scripture interprets itself. Beginning with the OT and then working to the NT, one sees the plan of God that begins with Abraham and his posterity, Israel, and how God initiates unalterable, eternal covenants with him, with David, and with the nation of Israel (the Abrahamic, the Davidic, and the New Covenants). The adherence to the perspicuity of Scripture affirms that God intends His people to understand the Bible in all that it says, even though one can never exhaust the infinite meaning of the Divine mind. Nevertheless, Reformed, historic theology affirms the notion that God's people, indwelt with God's Spirit, can in fact rightly interpret God's Word. "The teachings of the Bible are not inaccessible to the average person....As God's written revelation, the Bible *reveals* to us His character, plans, and standards."<sup>22</sup> When coming to the text and in employing proper hermeneutics, the man of God can interpret the Word of God so as to arrive at the meaning of the original author.

## ***2. Israelology: The Fulfillment of God's Covenant Promises to Ethnic Israel***

In the early chapters of Scripture, God sovereignly chooses for Himself the nation of Israel out of all the nations of the earth to be His cherished possession (Deut 7:6-8). God initiated promises with the nation of Israel that will never be revoked or superceded by another entity since that would impugn God's faithfulness to His Word and His integrity in fulfilling His Word to the original recipients of the unalterable covenants.<sup>23</sup> Bruce Ware speaks to this:

There can be no question that the prophets meant to communicate the promise of a national return of Israel to its land. To the extent that our hermeneutics are regulated by the principle of authorial intent, we are given ample reason to accept this literal rendering of what God, through the prophets, originally promised to his people Israel.<sup>24</sup>

When God promises Israel that they will dwell in safety (Jer 33:16), all nations will come up to Zion to worship (Mic 4:1-2), that the Lord will descend to the Mount of Olives and His feet will stand upon the mountain that He will reign as king over all the earth (Zech 14:4-9), that many peoples will come and mighty nations will seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem grasping the garment of a Jew because they hear that God is with him (Zech 8:20-23), and that God will sprinkle clean water on Israel and give them a new heart and a new spirit and that God will put His Spirit in them so they will be saved and observe God's ordinances (Ezek 36:22-28). God made all these promises to the nation of Israel (not to the church) and none of these have been fulfilled yet with the ethnic people of Israel. Lest a NT believer lose hope, God promises in Romans 11 that when God saves the full harvest of the Gentiles that all Israel will be saved (Rom 11:25-26) and this will happen in conjunction with the second coming of Jesus Christ with power

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<sup>22</sup> Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation: A Practical Guide to Discovering Biblical Truth* (Colorado Springs: Cook Communications, 1991), 26.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Vlach states: "as a theological position, supersessionism has serious weaknesses. In regard to hermeneutics, the view of NT priority over the OT is flawed. It emasculates the OT's ability to speak to the issues it addresses" (*Has the Church Replaced Israel? A Theological Evaluation* [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2010], 164.

<sup>24</sup> Bruce A. Ware, "The New Covenant and the People(s) of God," in *Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. by Craig A. Blaising and Darrel L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 93.

and glory (Rom 11:26-27; cf. Zech 12:10-13:1). All this to say, when God made covenant, irrevocable promises with the ethnic nation of Israel, He will — and must — fulfill His Word to His them just as He said.

### ***3. Hermeneutical Consistency: Interpreting the Immediate Context Normally***

The Reformed doctrine of Regeneration is a tenet of soteriology. Truly, salvation is monergistic! That God would sovereignly open a dead sinners heart and fully do the work in effectually save a soul and quickening him to new life consists of a glorious and encouraging doctrine. Believers cling this precious truth and ministers preach it just as Jesus did to Nicodemus. The notion of the new birth and being washed with water and made anew by the Spirit of God, and God removing the heart of stone and replacing it with a heart of flesh comes from the OT when God made irrevocable promises *not* originally with the Church but with the nation of Israel (Ezek 11:14-21; 36:22-28; Jer 31:31-37).<sup>25</sup>

To understand these verses with a plain and straightforward hermeneutic and employing proper methods in interpretation, one should see the immediate context (e.g., to whom the promises were originally made and how long the promises will endure) and interpret the passage normally.<sup>26</sup> Even some covenantal interpreters admit that if one employs a normal, consistent hermeneutic, he will conclude with premillennialism. For instance, Allis writes: “The Old Testament prophecies if literally interpreted cannot be regarded as having been fulfilled or as being capable of fulfillment in this present age.”<sup>27</sup> Again, Hamilton affirms: “Now we must frankly admit that a literal interpretation of the Old Testament prophecies gives us just such a picture of an earthly reign of the Messiah as the premillennialist pictures.”<sup>28</sup> And Boettner admits: “It is generally agreed that if the prophecies are taken literally, they do foretell a restoration of the nation of Israel in the land of Palestine with the Jews having a prominent place in that kingdom and ruling over the other nations.”<sup>29</sup> Especially in prophetic literature where God clearly conveys His truth through His mouthpiece (i.e., the prophet), so that the recipients hear

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<sup>25</sup> Later revelation cannot cancel (or alter) previous irrevocable promises that God made with the nation of Israel. John Feinberg writes: “If an OT prophecy or promise is made unconditionally to a given people and is still unfulfilled to them even in the NT era, then the prophecy must still be fulfilled to them. While a prophecy given unconditionally to Israel has a fulfillment for the church if the NT *applies* it to the church, it must also be fulfilled to Israel. Progress of revelation cannot cancel unconditional promises” (“Systems of Discontinuity,” in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments*, ed. by John S. Feinberg [Wheaton: Crossway, 1988], 76).

<sup>26</sup> One should also remember that premillennialists “use a consistent grammatical-historical approach to both the Old and New Testament Scriptures by which the Bible is interpreted normally throughout, regardless of whether the subject matter is eschatological (future-related) or not” (“Why Futuristic Premillennialism?” in *Christ’s Prophetic Plans: A Futuristic Premillennial Primer*, ed. by John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue [Chicago: Moody, 2012], 61).

<sup>27</sup> O. T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church* (1945; repr., Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1977), 238.

<sup>28</sup> Floyd E. Hamilton, *The Basis of the Millennial Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1942), 38.

<sup>29</sup> Loraine Boettner, “Postmillennialism,” in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1977), 95.

‘the Word of the Lord’, hermeneutical consistency must allow for the meaning of the text to arise from what the original author meant by what he wrote to the original audience.<sup>30</sup>

#### ***4. Christology: The Sovereign Reign of Christ as Kingly-Messiah Over His People from Zion***

To refuse to accept a future, earthly kingdom where Jesus Christ will rule sovereignly over the nations from Zion is to sorely diminish the glory of Christ. God promised His Son that He would in fact rule from Zion with a rod of iron over all the nations (Ps 2:6-9).<sup>31</sup> God also prophesied that Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Mic 5:2) and that He would arise and shepherd in the strength of the Lord and at that time He would be great to the ends of the earth; He would in fact be the Peace (Mic 5:3-4). God promises to pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem (=Israel) the Spirit of grace and of supplication so *they* will look upon Christ whom they have pierced and mourn for Him (Zech 12:10). So clear is this prophecy of the Jewish people’s salvation that the prophet declares that in that future day a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for iniquity (Zech 13:1). Reading the OT with a plain hermeneutic, one must affirm that the OT pictured the coming kingdom in clear terms. It was undeniably an earthly kingdom, with an earthly king, established from Zion, that would stretch to the ends of the earth. To see these promises that God made with Israel superseded by the Church is to infringe God’s faithfulness, His integrity, and His trustworthiness. It is to diminish the glory of Christ and take away the coming kingdom that He gloriously promised and that He rightfully deserves. Futuristic premillennialism alone upholds the ultimate glory of Christ and sees Him just as He promised ruling over the nations of the earth from Zion in peace and security.

#### ***5. Theology Proper: The Unchanging Character of God***

The Lord does not change (Mal 3:6) and does not change his mind (1 Sam 15:29). He makes promises and faithfully brings them to pass precisely as He said. When dealing with future events as revealed in the Scriptures, interpreters cannot divorce eschatology from theology proper. That which makes eschatology comforting is the very fact that the God who ordains all things before they happen ensures that all things will happen according to His eternal and sovereign decree.<sup>32</sup> Thus, when God made promises to ethnic Israel in the OT, and remain unfulfilled even to the present era, the unchanging character of God and the unwavering

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<sup>30</sup> On this note, Elliott Johnson writes: “The words of a text, understood in context, determine the type of meaning expressed in the Bible. As such, Scripture determines the meaning in distinction to some other person or context being treated as the determining authority” (“Literal Interpretation: A Plea for Consensus,” in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, ed. by Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy [Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1995], 219).

<sup>31</sup> One may thus conclude that for the Father to not fulfill His promise that He made with His Son in giving Him all the nations as His inheritance as He would reign from Zion on the earth would be for God to lie against God.

<sup>32</sup> Richard Mayhue provides some positive outcomes that representatively illustrate how and why the Bible extols studying biblical prophecy and how it comforts the believer (“Why Study Prophecy?” in *Christ’s Prophetic Plans: A Futuristic Premillennial Primer*, ed. by John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue [Chicago: Moody, 2012], 16). For example, fulfilled prophecy proves that the Bible is true and inspires confidence in Scripture (Acts 13:32-35 with 42-44). Furthermore, prophecy is a source of hope, comfort, and encouragement for the Christian (1 Thess 4:18; 5:11; Titus 2:13).

faithfulness of God ensures that He will fulfill His kingdom promises to the people of Israel just as He promised them in the OT. Truly, “Israel’s restoration is sure because God is faithful and He keeps His promises.”<sup>33</sup>

## CONCLUSION

When the Christian comes to the Word of God and employs proper hermeneutics, one comes to the understanding that the kingdom of God is the reign of God most gloriously found in the sovereign Christ who will rule over the nations in the future eschaton just as the prophets of old declared. These promises that God gave to the nation of Israel in the OT have not faded away, nor have they been superseded by the church, nor have they been spiritualized. The irrevocable covenants that God made with His people and the promises that God made with Israel of old still await future consummation and perfect fulfillment. A plain, straightforward understanding of the Bible demands this. The faithfulness of God confirms this. And the single meaning of Scripture requires this. A fitting way to conclude is to encourage eschatological study and theological conviction even in this important area of eschatology by heeding the words of Charles Ryrie who warns against being eschatological agnostics. “An eschatological agnostic is one who says the biblical teaching about the future is unknown and unknowable and therefore a subject to be avoided.”<sup>34</sup> May God’s people faithfully study the Word, interpret the Word, glory in the Word, and receive much comfort from studying eschatology in the Word!

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<sup>33</sup> Michael Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel? A Theological Evaluation* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2010), 201.

<sup>34</sup> Charles Ryrie, Foreword in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, ed. by Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1995), 7.