

# Postmillennialism and Revelation 20

*(The following is the substance of an address given by Rev. David Silversides at the first Spring Conference in Templepatrick Reformed Church on 12<sup>th</sup> April 1997.)*

To approach this part of Holy Scripture without a sense of inadequacy would be a sign of something amiss in any man, nevertheless we know that this part of Scripture, like all of Scripture, is God-breathed and therefore is profitable if approached with reverence and humility of mind.

By way of general introduction concerning the book of Revelation, I have no real difficulty in accepting William Hendriksen's division of the book into seven visions forming what he calls progressive parallelism, that is, seven visions covering roughly the same ground – the lot of God's people during the last days. We use the term 'the last days' in the biblical sense, that is, the whole New Testament age. The phrase 'the last days' in Scripture does not refer simply to that time immediately prior to the return of Christ. It applies to the whole New Testament age between the first and the second coming of the Lord Jesus. So in Hebrews 1, "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son." The phrase 'the last days' there and elsewhere is used of the whole New Testament age.

As Hendriksen himself observes, though the visions are somewhat parallel, there is progression not only giving different aspects of the same thing but there is increasing emphasis as we go through the seven visions on what will take place at the very end. So the theme of the last judgment, for example, becomes more dominant as you go through the seven sections of the book. When we come to this last section, chapters 20 to 22, we find after the section on the millennium that the second half of this chapter deals with the last judgment and then we find chapters 21 and 22 dealing with the eternal state. So this section on the thousand years is followed by the judgment and the eternal state. There is no intrinsic objection to regarding the first half of the chapter as referring particularly to those events of the last days which are towards the very end of the New Testament age. Taking, then, the overall pattern of the book, there is no reason in that to reject the idea that chapter 20 verses 1 to 8 refers particularly to that which is nearer the very end.

Let us get to the heart of the matter.

### **1. Why Premillennialism Must be Rejected.**

By premillennialism we mean the view that Christ will come 'pre' or before the millennium, before a particular period called the millennium, the thousand years. On this view the church is at present entering increasingly difficult times and Christ could return in glory at any time. When he does, the saints will be raised and the living saints transfigured to meet him, antichrist and his

followers will be slain, Israel will repent and be restored to the land, and Christ will reign, some say, in Jerusalem for a thousand years during which multitudes of Gentiles will be converted. Then at the end of the thousand years, the rest of the dead will be raised followed by the final judgment and the eternal state.

The basic distinctive feature of this view is that Christ will come and visibly reign on earth for a thousand years before the final judgment. There are fatal objections to this view. First of all, this passage is the only one that gives any possible grounds for an earthly reign of Christ and it does not actually do that. If the basis of this view is not found here, it will not be found anywhere else. This passage says nothing of Christ's coming to earth or reigning visibly on earth at all.

Secondly, the Scriptures teach that Christ's return is a single event at the very end and accompanied by the general resurrection and the judgment. So 2 Thessalonians 1:7, "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day." There you see that the judgment of the wicked and the glorification of the saints take place at

one and the same time when the Lord Jesus returns in glory.

John 5:28-29, "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." You see "the hour is coming" which points to a single event and the resurrection of the just and the unjust takes place at the same time.

Acts 2:34-35, "For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool." Christ will reign at the right hand of the Father until all his enemies are subdued at the last day.

Acts 3:19-21, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." Christ must reign at the right hand of the Father. The heavens have received him until his coming brings to a conclusion at that point the fulfilment of all those things written by the prophets.

1 Corinthians 15:23-27, "But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his

coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet." It is evident if you examine the context that the reign in view is his reign from the right hand of the Father and that will continue until the end when he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father.

The Lord Jesus raises his people at the last day. John 6:39, "And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." The last day beyond which there are no days, there is only eternity.

Then a third objection to this view is that it involves the bizarre concept of a glorified Christ and glorified saints in the midst of a fallen world and an unrenewed earth, the same glorified Christ that caused the unglorified John to fall at his feet as one dead, Revelation 1:17. For Christ to return before the very end and to dwell in a world where sin still exists unjudged and unpunished would involve a measure of humiliation for the Lord Jesus Christ and that is unthinkable. Christ's humiliation is finished and he is exalted to the right hand of God. There will be no humiliation again for the Redeemer, and when he comes it will be to judge the world in righteousness and to put all contradiction of his sovereign majestic claims eternally to an end. So then for this reason, premillennialism must be rejected.

## **2. Why Amillennialism Must be Rejected.**

By amillennialism we mean non-millennialism, that is, not that this millennium or thousand years has no meaning but according to this view, there is no literal or figurative millennium, no time appointed by God when his blessing will be shed abroad on the earth in an unprecedented manner other than the New Testament age as a whole. On this view this passage does not teach a particular time within the last days when the Spirit of God will be poured out in unprecedented abundance.

The amillennial view of this passage usually runs rather like this: Firstly the binding of Satan refers to Christ's work of redemption on the cross. Secondly, the thousand years refers to the whole New Testament age between Christ's first and second coming. Thirdly, those reigning with Christ are the souls of the glorified saints between death and the last day and the resurrection of the body. Fourthly, the first resurrection is the glorification of the souls of believers following the death of the body. And fifthly, what we might call the second resurrection is the resurrection of the body. These are roughly the five points upon which the amillennial view of this passage rests although there is variation within this view.

We wish to show that all five of these points are wrong and contradicted by the text. None of these points stand up when the text is examined. Firstly, the binding of Satan does not refer to Christ accomplishing redemption on the cross. The reason for this is very simply: the passage tells us that it is reversed. Verse 3, "and after that he must be loosed a little season." Verse 7, "And when

the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison." The binding of Satan cannot possibly refer to redemption accomplished on the cross of Calvary because it is reversed at the end of the thousand years and Christ's redemptive work will never be reversed.

The binding of Satan through Christ's triumph in his life and death and resurrection is utterly irreversible. This 'binding' is followed by a 'loosing', so the binding cannot refer to redemption accomplished on the cross, nor can this thousand years be marked as beginning at Pentecost. The significance of Pentecost will never be reversed while this world endures. The church will continue to be international and with the more abundant presence of the Spirit than was ordinarily enjoyed in the Old Testament church. Whatever ebb and flow there may be in the condition of the church in this world, the significance and effect of Pentecost will never be eradicated. So the binding and loosing must refer to the application of redemption. The binding and loosing of Satan does not refer to redemption accomplished by Christ on the cross but to a variation in the degree of the application of that redemption amongst men by the Spirit of God working in the hearts of God's elect. It refers, then, not to redemption accomplished but to the application of it by the Spirit through the preaching of the Gospel; it refers to the degree of effectiveness of the preaching of the Gospel.

Secondly on this rejection of amillennialism, the thousand years does not and cannot represent the New Testament age as a whole. The reasons are as follows. First of all,

we have seen that there are no grounds for regarding this thousand years as beginning at the beginning of the New Testament age. The binding of Satan is not the cross. Yes, the language of the binding of Satan is used elsewhere of the cross but in this passage it does not refer to that and it cannot, as we have seen.

Then secondly, this thousand years ends before the end. Verse 3, "and after that he must be loosed a little season." Verse 7, "And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison." So this thousand years, whatever it is, does not start at Christ's first coming and it does not end at Christ's second coming. This millennium neither starts with the start of the New Testament age nor ends with the end of it and so it cannot possibly represent the whole New Testament age.

Then thirdly, the reigning with Christ does not refer to the heavenly intermediate state of the saints between death and the last day. Why is this? Because this reign ends before the end. Verse 4, "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them," and so on. At the end of verse 4 it says, "and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years." Verse 7, "And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison." In other words, this reign does not last until the last day and so it cannot possibly refer to the intermediate state of the believers in heaven, that is when the bodies of the glorified souls of the saints are still in the grave. It cannot. It ends before the end, whereas believers when they are absent from the body and present with the Lord, their souls are



present with Christ until their bodies are raised to glory at the last day.

So this reigning with Christ cannot possibly refer to the glorified state of the souls of believers because it does not last until the last day when the body is resurrected and the eternal state is ushered in. Calvin, incidentally, rejects the view that the thousand years represents the heavenly blessedness of the church. That is in his Institutes, Volume III, 25.5. Much less does it represent regeneration because the effects of regeneration in the soul are eternal whereas this reigning with Christ lasts to the end of a thousand years but not beyond.

Fourthly, the first resurrection is not the entry of the believer into glory at death. This follows from what we have already said. Regarding this first resurrection mentioned in verse 5, if you put the previous part of verse 5 in brackets, "This is the first resurrection," refers back to verse 4. This resurrection leads to something that ends with Satan's little season coming in and so it cannot refer to the entry of the believer into glory at death. That automatically follows from what we have said.

Then fifthly, the second resurrection mentioned in verse 5 is not the resurrection of the body. Verse 5, "But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished." There are three reasons why this cannot refer to the resurrection of the body. Firstly, it applies only to the rest, not to all. It is not descriptive of a general resurrection. Secondly, it has something analogous to the first resurrection in the passage. The first

resurrection of saints lived with Christ for a thousand years, then these lived not until the end of it. There is something that corresponds between the two and if the first is not a physical resurrection, then neither is the second. Then thirdly, this resurrection does not take place at the last day. It says, "But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished," but that does not take us to the last day, there is still Satan's little season. So it cannot possibly refer to bodily resurrection which takes place only at the last day.

So all-in-all, the failure of the amillennial view to recognize that the thousand years do not include Satan's little season which the text makes abundantly clear, is fatal to all five of its main pillars and the full interpretation collapses and so it has to go. Good and godly men have held it but it will not stand up in the text.

## **2. Why Rushdoony's Postmillennialism Must be Rejected.**

This view is not unique to Rushdoony, no doubt others of the reconstructionist school and some of an earlier period held this view but I refer to it as Rushdoony's postmillennialism because I know that it is his. The basic framework of Rushdoony's position is the same as the amillennial one except that the reigning with Christ seems to be applied to the overall triumph of the Gospel. In other words, on Rushdoony's view, the thousand years is the whole New Testament age but the reigning with Christ is applied to the overall progress and triumph of the Gospel throughout the whole New Testament age.

On this view, the thousand years and Satan's little season are not periods of time at all. They are figurative periods of time representing in terms of time the relative triumph of the Gospel all through the New Testament age and the feebleness and futility of Satan's resistance. In other words, on Rushdoony's view, time periods, the one much longer than the other, are mere symbols of the relative strength of things. The progress of the Gospel on the one hand is represented by a prolonged period and Satan's resistance on the other, by a little season because the Gospel will prevail and Satan's resistance will prove futile. So for Rushdoony, there is here, from Christ's first to his second coming, only a pattern of overall advance of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. As the word of God is preached, individuals, families and nations come into submission to Christ in an overall upward manner.

This view must be rejected for the following reason: Although numbers are symbolic in Revelation, symbolic periods of time are symbolic of real periods of time. The quantity of time is symbolic but it is still time that it refers to. So in chapter 11:2 you have the 42 months; in verse 3 the 1,260 days; and in verse 11 the 3 ½ days. We take these as referring to the New Testament age: 3 ½ days, half of seven. The idea is of half of the whole of history, history being divided not necessarily in terms of length of time but divided in terms of the one event in history that is of comparable significance with the creation and the last judgment – the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ. We take these symbolic periods of time as referring to

features that will be found throughout the New Testament age. The point is that symbolic periods of time still represent real periods of time and that is why Rushdoony's form of postmillennialism must be rejected.

#### **4. Why Orthodox Puritan Postmillennialism is the Truth.**

By postmillennialism we mean Christ's coming 'post' or after a millennium, after a period of great blessing and great advance of the truth. We hold that the orthodox Puritan postmillennialism is the truth of Scripture and the reasons are as follows:

##### **1.) The Binding of Satan Must Refer to the Progress of the Gospel.**

We have seen that the binding of Satan is reversible. The progress of the Gospel is subject to divinely ordained ebb and flow. There are times when the Gospel advances mightily and there are times of declension and apostasy when the church of Christ is diminished on earth. This binding and loosing of Satan must refer to the progress of the Gospel. It can refer to nothing else.

##### **2.) The Thousand Years Must Refer to a Period of Great Gospel Advance.**

We have seen that this thousand years does not represent the whole New Testament age. It is a comparatively long period that precedes a comparatively short period, Satan's little season, which precedes the last day. If you work backwards there is the last day, the

final judgment, Satan's little season, and prior to that this thousand years, this symbolic period when Satan is said to be bound. If the little season of Satan where he is loosed results in the church being opposed, then the period when Satan is bound must mean a period when his ability to oppose the Gospel is restrained.

The thousand years is not to be taken literally. It certainly indicates a fixed, appointed and complete period of time. The fact that it is 10 x 10 x 10 indicates a prolonged period of time but not a literal thousand years. It is, then, a prolonged period when Satan's activity in opposing the Gospel is particularly limited. It coincides with the reign of the saints and evidently comes after many having been martyred for the witness of Jesus as can be seen from verse 4. The vision includes at the beginning of the thousand years those who have been martyred for the witness of Jesus so it does not start with the beginning of the New Testament age and, of course, it does not end at the close of it before the close of the New Testament age.

### **3.) The Reigning with Christ Refers to the Glorious Advance of the Cause for which the Martyrs Died.**

Notice that we are not told where the thrones are. Verse 4, "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them." No doubt this is deliberate. We are just told there were thrones.

Secondly, judgment is given to them, verse 4. What does this mean? Judgment indicates the vindication of one's righteous cause. So in Isaiah 40:27, "Why sayest thou, O

Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God?" Judgment being given unto them means the vindication of their righteous cause, that they are given redress for the injustice done to them, that the Lord avenges them and their righteous cause. Daniel 7:21-22, "I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them; Until the Ancient of days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom." Judgment was given to the saints of the most High. They had been oppressed by the little horn, the antichrist, and now judgment is given to them. Their righteous cause which they as a body, not necessarily the same people, but as a body suffered and died for, is vindicated. Now judgment is given to the saints and the kingdom is given to the them over against the antichrist who in that passage is destroyed, that antichrist who sought to wear them out.

The other reference to the souls of the martyrs in Revelation is in chapter 6 verses 9 and 10, "And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" It is the vindication of the martyrs that is in view and it takes place before the last day. Of course, a full vindication of the truth of God is at Christ's second coming but this vindication of the truth for which the

martyrs suffered, takes place during this thousand years and, therefore, it refers to the vindication of the martyrs' cause on earth through the glorious advance of the Gospel that they suffered and they died for.

The church in verse 4 is represented as a continuous stream of witnesses, as it is in Daniel 7. It is not the same saints that the antichrist, the little horn, persecuted that the judgment is given to and the kingdom is given to, but it is their spiritual descendants and successors. It is here that the church is represented as one continuous stream of witnesses: some suffer horrendously for the cause of the Gospel, but judgement is given to those who come after them. In other words the martyrs are vindicated by the Gospel advancing in unprecedented manner.

#### **4.) The First Resurrection is the Glorious Reviving of the Church on Earth.**

We read in verse 4, "and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years." This is a period beginning after the beginning of the New Testament age and ending before the end of the New Testament age, and so this resurrection is not a physical resurrection. It is something that can be reversed because the thousand years comes to an end and Satan's little season follows. So it must refer to the reviving of the church on a previously unequalled scale. Once we grasp that this first resurrection is the resurrection of the reviving of the cause of truth, the cause for which the martyrs suffered, then we understand, what the second resurrection is.

## **5.) The Second Resurrection is the Resurgence of Ungodliness that Brings in Satan's Little Season.**

So in verse 5, "But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished." The resurrection of the saints is the resurrection of the cause of Christ on earth. The resurrection of the rest of the dead is the resurgence of ungodliness at the end of this glorious period of the church for a little season before the return of Christ. The second resurrection is confined to the rest of the dead in verse 5, that is those who are not the saints. Their cause revives briefly before the end.

Now we have the picture: towards the end of the New Testament age there shall be a prolonged period of glorious Gospel advance signified by the resurrection or the living of the saints and the cause of the martyrs being raised up and the saints reigning with Christ. After that glorious period of unprecedented Gospel advance, there will be the resurrection of ungodliness in a brief period called Satan's little season which will take place before Christ comes to judgment. Do you understand the basic idea? Toward the end of the New Testament age, a prolonged period of vast Gospel expansion, a short period of revived opposition to the cause of the Gospel, and then the return of Christ.

### **5. Confirmatory Evidence.**

#### **1.) The Parallel with Ezekiel 37 to 48.**



In Ezekiel chapters 37 to 48 there is the vision of Israel's reviving, the valley of the dry bones brought to life. Then, secondly, you have the destruction of Gog and Magog. Then thirdly, you have the vision of the beautiful temple. In Revelation 20 to 22, first you have the millennium; second Gog and Magog destroyed; and third the holy city and the glorified temple. That means that if the two passages are parallel, and they obviously are meant to be, the millennium, the thousand years, corresponds to the vision of the dry bones being brought to life. This is a vision of Israel, the Old Testament church, reviving. So the thousand years and the living of saints and reigning with Christ is of the same significance. It is the most glorious period of the church's reviving that this world will ever see and it is still to come.

## **2.) The Destruction of Antichrist.**

Daniel 7:26, "But the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it unto the end. And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him." The Puritan, John Owen, applied this to the latter-day glory of the church, the consuming of antichrist, the pope of Rome, through the Gospel.

When we turn to 2 Thessalonians 2:8, we find greater weight to this view. 2 Thessalonians 2:8, "And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume

with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming." The man of sin which we take to be the pope, the papacy, is said to be consumed "with the spirit of his mouth and destroyed with the brightness of his coming." The first phrase, "consumed with the spirit of his mouth," is evidently a reference to Isaiah 11:4, "But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked." That phrase, "the breath of his lips," is evidently the phrase in view when the apostle under the inspiration of the Spirit speaks of "the spirit of his mouth." The Old Testament word "breath" can also mean "spirit" and this refers to the word of his mouth. This indicates that it is through the word of God proclaimed that the man of sin shall be brought down.

So John Calvin on Isaiah 11:4 says, "When the prophet says 'by the breath of his lips,' this must not be limited to the person of Christ for it refers to the word which is preached by his ministers." Popery will be brought down through the preaching of the Gospel. For the overturning of popery to take place through the preaching of the Gospel, we must believe that there will be a future mighty revival on a scale as yet not seen. The Reformation was a marvellous work of God but the papacy survived it. So there is to be an advance of the Gospel that will exceed anything that we have yet seen so that the man of sin will be consumed with the breath of Christ's mouth, the word of God proclaimed among the nations.

### 3.) Israel's Ingathering.

Romans 11:12 is speaking of Israel. Throughout this chapter Israel refers to ethnic racial Israel. I believe there is no ground whatsoever for causing it to mean anything other than that. The theme of this chapter is to show that Israel's rejection is not total nor is it final; that even in the Apostle Paul's day as in ours, there was a remnant according to the election of grace among the Israelites who believed. Then he goes on to show that that remnant will not always be a remnant, it will become a fullness. So in verse 12, "Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?" And in verse 15, "For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?" What took place following the bulk of Israel's rejection of the Gospel with the advance of the Gospel among the Gentiles, Pentecost onward, was glorious. The Apostle Paul is saying when Israel is gathered in, when the veil is taken from their hearts and the Jews are brought not into some separate organisational arrangement, but into the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, it will bring great blessing, great Gospel advance that has not been seen from Pentecost to this day. "How **much more** their fulness?"

That passage requires separate treatment but I believe that that is the only tenable view of the passage, the only view which requires no forcing or imposition upon the text. So the ingathering of the Jews to Christ through the Gospel, (not some separate message of the kingdom

distinct from the Gospel, ignore all of that nonsense,) will bring greater blessing still to the Gentiles, what the Puritans often called the latter-day glory of the church.

Paul refers to this as a mystery in verse 25, "I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery." This mystery is not something weird and strange but the mystery of God: God's secret or hidden purposes unknowable to man except that God has revealed them. That term 'mystery' is applied, for example, in Ephesians 3 to the interaction between Jew and Gentile in the unfolding of God's purposes of salvation. And it is used here in Romans of the same thing. Paul is saying, Gentile brethren, do not be ignorant of this mystery. What you see now is not always going to be what there will be. When the fullness of the Gentiles are brought in, then Israel will be gathered and there will be greater blessing still for the Gentiles.

#### **4.) Old Testament Prophecy.**

Psalm 22:27, "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD." Psalm 67:7, "The earth shall yield her increase and men shall fear him to earth's utmost end." Psalm 72:17-19, "His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed." Not just one or two in every nation, but all nations shall call him blessed. The promise to Abraham that in his seed all nations of the earth would be blessed will receive abundant fulfilment. Verse 19, "And blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be

filled with his glory." David's prayer has not yet been answered but that prayer of David, also the prayer of the people of God in succeeding generations, will be fulfilled. Psalm 86:9, "All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship reverently before thy face and they, O Lord, thy name shall glorify." Psalm 102:22, "When the people are gathered together, and the kingdoms, to serve the LORD." When will this happen? Verse 16, "When the LORD shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory." The Psalms speak constantly of the ingathering of the nation through the Gospel. That is why historically Psalm-singing churches have tended to be of an optimistic view of the advance of the Gospel in the world. Keep singing them.

Isaiah 60:8-12, "Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows? Surely the isles shall wait for me, and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring thy sons from far, their silver and their gold with them, unto the name of the LORD thy God, and to the Holy One of Israel, because he hath glorified thee. And the sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee: for in my wrath I smote thee, but in my favour have I had mercy on thee. Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought. For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted." Look at verse 16, "Thou shalt also suck the milk of the Gentiles, and shalt suck the breast of kings: and thou shalt know that I the LORD am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob."

Malachi 1:11, "For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts."

So there is abundant testimony in the Old Testament to lead us to believe that the advance of the Gospel will not be just in terms of the conversion of a representative remnant, a mere few here and there from every nation. That will not do, but the church will advance ultimately mightily among the nations. The parable of the mustard seed indicates that also. It starts as a small seed, it becomes a great tree that fills the whole earth and the heavens, and the birds of the air lodge in it.

"Ah," but you say, "this means that Christ cannot come any day." Absolutely right. The Bible does not teach that every generation of Christians has to believe that Christ could come at any moment. The Bible does not teach that and the apostles did not believe it in their day. 2 Thessalonians 2:1, "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition." The apostle is saying to the Thessalonians, "If anyone tells you that Christ can come any day now, they are wrong." From his point of view, there was still to be the development of the man of

sin which we regard as the development of the papacy. But the point is Paul did not believe that Christ could come any day. He is telling them not to believe it and we do not have to believe it either. Even though that particular strand of prophecy has developed in that we have the papacy in Rome and have had it for generations, it does not mean that there are not other scriptural prophecies yet to be fulfilled and that we cannot say the time of his coming is not yet.

The Apostle Peter did not believe at all that he would live to see the return of Christ. 2 Peter 1:14, "Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me." The Lord Jesus had shown Peter in John 21:18-19 what kind of death he was going to die to glorify God. Peter knew Christ would not come while he was still alive. His body would go to the grave. He expected to die. He did not believe that Christ could come tomorrow or the day after or the day after that. He knew he was going to die and yet he still talks of looking for and hasting unto the day of Christ. How are you supposed to do that? Do you have to believe that you might not see death? You do not. There is nothing about looking for the glorious hope of the coming of the Lord that requires us to say Christ could come any day and it would come perhaps in our lifetime. Many of the parables indicated lengthy delay from Christ's first and second coming. Many of the parables were given for that purpose to assure the disciples that the consummated kingdom was not now, it was when he returned, and his

return would be a long way future from when he was speaking to them.

## **6. Summary.**

In summary, three things stand out in Scripture. First of all, Christ's coming is a single event at the very end. Secondly, there are promises of great Gospel blessing among the nations. Thirdly, there are some passages of Scripture which seem to indicate the church in difficulties at the very end. Three points which are very important. Premillennialism falls on number 1 because it does not teach that Christ's return is a single event at the very end. Amillennialism falls on number 2. I know amillennialists do not think that but it falls on number 2 because they dilute the promises to mean that merely a representative remnant in each nation will be converted. The premillennialist knows that that is wrong but he comes up with the wrong solution. Rushdoony's postmillennialism falls at number 3 because there are some passages which indicate difficulties at the very end. That is why only orthodox Puritan postmillennialism squares with all three and the greatest days of Gospel blessing are still to come and then a short sharp resurgence of ungodliness before Christ returns. This is the truth of the word of God.

## **7. Practical Application**

Now what is the practical application? Is there a practical application? Does it matter? Well, it does. It affects our outlook. The Covenanters believed that though they



would not live to see it, yet the cause that they were suffering for would one day fill the earth and so they aimed high. This was the official view of the Reformed Presbyterian Church expressed in its testimony until the earlier part of this century. This view, Puritan postmillennialism, is orthodox Reformed Presbyterianism. So Richard Cameron two months before his death preached on the text "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life," (that sermon was so blessed of God that the memory of it was handed down and people talked about it having heard of it from their fathers and grandfathers 200 years later) and in the middle of that sermon, Cameron stopped and wept and prayed for the restoration of the Jews, for the fall of antichrist, for the day when the Stuarts would be swept from the throne. The third part of his prayer has been answered, the rest will follow. Three days before his death, Cameron preached on Psalm 46:10 and said this, "The Church of Christ is to be so exalted that its members shall be made to ride upon the high places of the earth. Let us not be judged to be of the opinion of some men in England called the Fifth-Monarchy Men, who say that, before the great day, Christ shall come in person from heaven with all the saints and martyrs and reign a thousand years on earth. But we are of the opinion that the Church shall yet be more high and glorious, as appears from the book of Revelation, and the Church shall have more power than ever she had before."

James Renwick said this, "There have been great and glorious days of the Gospel in this land but they have been

small in comparison of what shall be." So James Guthrie when he was about to be hanged and the rope was around his neck, lifted up the napkin they put over his face and cried out, "The Covenants, the Covenants shall yet be Scotland's reviving!" He knew he would not see it in this world but he knew that the cause for which he was about to die would flourish again and it will! Whether we live to see it or not, the Lord will perform all his work. What he has promised he is able also to perform.

Let us aim high in our doing and in our praying. Listen to the postmillennial flavoured Larger Catechism Answer 191, "In the second petition, (which is *Thy kingdom come*,) acknowledging ourselves and all mankind to be under the dominion of sin and Satan, we pray, that the kingdom of sin and Satan may be destroyed, the Gospel propagated throughout the world, the Jews called, the fullness of the Gentiles brought in; the church furnished with all gospel-officers and ordinances, purged from corruption, countenanced and maintained by the civil magistrate." You should pray for those things. When we pray "thy kingdom come," we pray for the coming of the kingdom of glory but we also pray for the advance of the kingdom of grace and that is what we should have in our minds.

John Howard, a Puritan, lamenting the lack of belief in these things, says, "We expect to see what we have been wont to see and men are apt to measure their faith by their eyes for the most part in reference to these things. Only that can be done which they have seen done and men are hardly brought to raise their faith and expectation higher than this. Why should it be thought

an incredible thing that there should be a resurrection of religion?"

You say, "Oh, the Puritans were men of their times." Nonsense, it is us that are men and women who are influenced overmuch by what we see rather than what God has said. And so we look around us, we see the cause of biblical and Reformed truth at a low ebb and we think it will always be so or there will not be much more than it is. We stagger at the promises of God. Abraham did not and neither must we. He will do it. He will perform his pleasure and fulfil all that is written and we are to pray and to live in that blessed stream of those whose hearts have been attached to that cause which shall yet have its resurrection day in this world. The ends of the earth shall remember and they shall turn unto the Lord and the zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform it. Amen.