A HISTORY AND ASSESSMENT OF THE THEONOMIC POSTMILLENNIALISM OF KENNETH L. GENTRY, JR.

by

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The contemporary resurgence of postmillennialism is best seen in its militant and scholarly manifestation as the eschatology of Christian Reconstructionism. Called theonomic postmillennialism, this vigorous eschatological system has as its foremost proponent Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr. His eschatological writings are the focus of this study.

This study examines Gentry's system within the wider historical framework of postmillennialism in general as traced through its ancient, middle ages, reformation, and modern phases. Since theonomic postmillennialism is the eschatological perspective of Dominion Theology, Christian Reconstructionism is also explored as a movement.

Gentry's theonomic postmillennialism is similar to general postmillennialism principally with regard to a shared optimism regarding the future conversion of the world in this age through the church's evangelism, after which Christ will return. Theonomic postmillennialism is distinguished by its expectation of the successful impact of Christ's kingdom on the societies and cultures of the world, transforming them through the application of biblical law. The role of the Mosaic Law for Gentry's system is then explored. This is followed by an examination of the theological foundations of postmillennialism, as well as its redemptive-historical flow, as articulated by Gentry. Lastly, exegetical evidence proffered by Gentry in defense of his eschatological construct is examined.

This study critiques Gentry's eschatology, noting his failure to comprehend adequately Israel in her fully orbed past and future roles. His replacement theology is rejected, and the proper distinctions between Israel and the church are maintained. A few disputed passages to which non-dispensationalists appeal in identifying the church as the "New Israel" are evaluated and found to offer no support to covenant theology. Next, Gentry's mishandling of the major covenants is revealed, and the Abrahamic Covenant in particular is re-examined. It is argued that this covenant requires a significant future role for Israel, as do the Davidic and New Covenants, and that their material blessings to Israel cannot be reinterpreted or reapplied to the church.

The major part of this study's critique concerns the rejection of Gentry's exegetical evidence offered in support of postmillennialism. Passages examined include Psalm 2, Isaiah 2:2-4, Matthew 13 (the kingdom parables), Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Corinthians 15:20-28, and Revelation 20. This study concludes that Scriptural proof of postmillennialism is sorely lacking in Gentry's writings, and that the exegetical evidence controverts his system, and for this reason, his eschatological formulation is rejected as a misplaced, unbiblical optimism.

Lastly, this study critiques theonomic ethics, concluding that the New Testament teaches that the Mosaic Law in its entirety has been abrogated as the Christian's legal authority. Hence, the key distinctive of theonomic ethics rests upon a wholesale misunderstanding of the role of the Mosaic Law today. Just as postmillennialism offers a misplaced eschatological optimism, so too do theonomic ethics promulgate a faulty locus of authority for the church.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"Postmillennialism finds no defenders or advocates in the present chiliastic discussions within the theological world," wrote J. Dwight Pentecost in 1958, in his famous 633 page tome, *Things To Come*.[1] Indeed, Pentecost understood postmillennialism to have been dead and gone for nearly two decades when he penned his book: "Postmillennialism is no longer an issue in theology. World War II brought about the demise of this system."[2] As recently as 1970, Hal Lindsey could write (uncharitably and inaccurately) that, "No self-respecting scholar who looks at the world conditions and the accelerating decline of Christian influence today is a 'postmillennialist.' "[3] In 1977, Millard J. Erickson reviewed the eschatological scene this way:

> Postmillennialism has suffered a sharp decline in popularity in the past fifty to sixty years. In large part this has resulted more from historical than exegetical considerations. Certain developments seemed to supply empirical evidence that the millennium was not arriving. As we will note later, the connection between these developments and the abandonment of postmillennialism was more psychological

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[1] J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things To Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Dunham Publishing Company), 387.

[2] Ibid., 386.

[3] Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, Bantam edition (New York: Bantam Books, 1973), 164-65. Lindsey later offered a critique of Dominion Theology and its postmillennial eschatology in *The Road to Holocaust* (New York: Bantam Books, 1989).

> than logical. Nonetheless, the effect was there. Today postmillennialists are, if not an extinct species, at least an endangered species.[4]

Yet Erickson concluded prophetically: "It may well be that postmillennialism will become popular again."[5]

That has certainly become the case in the current millennial landscape. In the years since Pentecost and Lindsey wrote the obituary for postmillennialism, it has experienced a resurgence that is both militant and scholarly.[6] Without a doubt the most prominent variety of contemporary postmillennialism (and, at times, the most strident) is theonomic postmillennialism, promulgated by thinkers such as Rousas Rushdoony, Greg L. Bahnsen, David Chilton, and Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr. Just what are Christians to make of this growing eschatological movement, which operates under the umbrella of Christian Reconstructionism? This study intends to examine theonomic postmillennialism as a vigorous theological system deserving of attention.

The Significance of the Study

The theological significance of this study concerns primarily the area of eschatology, and particularly millennial issues. Secondarily, theonomic postmillennialism, in its distinctive adherence to theonomy, has importance for the study of Christian ethics and

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[4] Millard J. Erickson, *Contemporary Options in Eschatology: A Study of the Millennium* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), 62.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Marvin Rosenthal understates the picture when he notes: "In recent years, the writings of some credible advocates have given to postmillennialism a modest resurgence," in *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1990), 50. This resurgence is more than modest.

practical Christian living, as well as for the relationship between the Christian and the state, and the general role of government in the world.[7]

Do the Scriptures indicate that the church will triumphantly Christianize the world, such that "righteousness will prevail and evil will be reduced to negligible proportions," and "the world system will operate on a Christian ethico-redemptive basis,"[8] all *before* the Second Advent of Christ? If so, then both premillennialism and amillennialism must be rejected as eschatological frameworks. However, if theonomic postmillennialists cannot demonstrate their position biblically, the optimism of this eschatological system will prove unfounded and greatly detrimental to true Christian hope.

The Procedure of the Study

This study will first position theonomic postmillennialism within the wider historical development of postmillennialism (Chapter II). Postmillennialism will be examined as to its origin and manifestation within set periods of church history. Special attention will also be paid to the place of theonomic postmillennialism within the larger framework of Christian Reconstruction, a vigorous movement of which it is a significant constituent theological element. Following this historical sketch, consideration will be given to an explication and defense of theonomic postmillennialism by its foremost spokesman, Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr. (Chapter III). The position will be more precisely defined, and its theonomic distinctives examined. The role of the Mosaic Law in the system will be explored. Gentry's articulation

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[7] These secondary issues of importance are unfortunately much beyond the scope of this study.

[8] Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., "Postmillennialism," in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 44.

of the theological and redemptive-historical foundations of his system will be presented. Finally, exegetical evidence offered by Gentry will be detailed. The next chapter (Chapter IV) will consist of a critique of Gentry's postmillennial eschatology. The role of national Israel in Gentry's formulations will be critiqued. Further, various biblical covenants will be explored, and Gentry's alleged exegetical evidence sifted. Chapter V will offer a critique of theonomic ethics, examining scriptural evidence for the abrogation of the Mosaic Law for the Christian, with additional exploration of the Law's continuing revelatory and pedagogical role for the church.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THEONOMIC POSTMILLENNIALISM

Introduction

Keith A. Mathison is certainly correct when he states: "It is impossible to study any theological subject adequately in a historical vacuum."[9] To understand theonomic postmillennialism properly, it must be placed within the wider historical framework of postmillennialism in general. This will necessitate at least a brief overview of relevant aspects of church history. Such a sketch is particularly important given the nearly complete ignorance on the part of most Christians regarding the roots and development of postmillennialism (not to mention *theonomic* postmillennialism).

Further, theonomic postmillennialism falls under the umbrella of the movement known as Dominion Theology, or more popularly, as Christian Reconstructionism. It represents the eschatological position of the Reconstructionist camp. Though gaining in worldwide prominence and influence, Christian Reconstructionism is still relatively unknown as a system of thought, and so its broad emphases must also be understood. With these requirements in mind, the following historical background of theonomic postmillennialism is given.

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[9] Keith A. Mathison, *Postmillennialism: An Eschatology of Hope* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Puritan and Reformed Publishing, 1999), 23.

The Origin and History of Postmillennialism

Identifying the origins of postmillennialism is a somewhat subjective endeavor. The recognition depends upon how much similarity one perceives between supposed incipient manifestations of the eschatology and their more maturely articulated counterparts in later developments.[10] Nonetheless, a brief survey of various examples of postmillennialism in early church history will prove valuable to this historical overview.

Ancient Postmillennialism

Millard Erickson begins his historical sketch of postmillennialism with Tyconius (d. A.D. 390?), an African Donatist,[11] though other scholars trace its roots back even farther.[12]

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[10] Robert B. Strimple calls for necessary caution in evaluating whether or not a particular theologian of the past can rightly be identified with a particular eschatological position. Along this line, he takes Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr. to task for identifying Athanasius as a church father who expressed a nascent postmillennialism: "the documentation cited for Athanasius in Gentry's earlier book, *He Shall Have Dominion*, consists entirely of statements by Athanasius showing that 'the great progress of the gospel is expected.' On the basis of *that* criterion virtually every Christian theologian could be claimed as a postmillennialist!" (Robert B. Strimple, "An Amillennial Response" in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999], 68).

[11] Erickson, 58. Erickson leans heavily on the prior research of Hans Bietenhard. See Hans Bietenhard, "The Millennial Hope in the Early Church," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 6 (1953): 12-30. The definitive work on Tyconius is by Traugott Hahn. See Traugott Hahn, *Tyconius-Studien* (Leipzig: Dieterich'sche Verlags-Buchhandlung, 1900). The work is written in German, with footnotes in Latin.

[12] Donald G. Bloesch notes the anticipation of postmillennialism as far back as the church father Eusebius of Caesarea (A.D. 260-340). See his book, *Life, Ministry, and Hope*, Essentials of Evangelical Theology: Vol. 2 (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), 192. According to Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., Philip Schaff traces it back even farther to Origen (A.D. 185-254) (Gentry, "Postmillennialism," 15). This appears to be a misrepresentation, since Schaff does not identify Origen as a postmillennialist on the pages cited by Gentry. Schaff does note that, "Origen seems to have been the only one in that age of violent persecution who expected that Christianity, by continual growth, would gain the dominion over the

To summarize Erickson's remarks regarding Tyconius, his eschatology was marked by the following four elements: 1) the Millennium was referred to the present age, was not interpreted literally, and was seen to extend from the passion of Christ until His *parousia*; 2) the prevailing eschatological view of Revelation, according to which it taught only a future reign of Christ, was rejected; 3) the eschatological hope was nonetheless retained, with an expectation that the end of the world would come in the year A.D. 380; 4) Christ's reign was seen in the present, and in the church. [13]

It is fascinating to note that Tyconius's interpretation of Revelation 20 is said to have dominated the exegesis of that passage for the next thirteen centuries, and that even though Tyconius was a Donatist, "Augustine (354-430) popularized and promulgated Tyconius's view."[14]

Postmillennialism in the Middle Ages

The key figure identified with postmillennialism in the Middle Ages is Joachim of Fiore (1145-1202). He is said to have "inspired a new form of eschatological expectation .... Before the end of history there would be an age of the Spirit, a period of spiritual prosperity and peace for the church on earth, which was identified with the millennium of Rev. 20, though not primarily derived from that text."[15]

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world." See Philip Schaff, *History of the Church*, 8 vols. (New York: Charles' Scribner's Sons, 1910; reprint, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 2:591.

[13] Erickson, 59. See Tyconius' *Book of Rules* for confirmation (*Liber Regularum* 5).

[14] Ibid., 59-60.

[15] *New Dictionary of Theology* (1988), s.v. "Millennium," by R. J. Bauckham, 429.

In his "Book of Figures," Joachim speaks of this period: "After the destruction of the Antichrist there will be justice on earth and an abundance of peace, 'and the Lord will rule from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth' (Ps. 71:8)."[16] Further, "The Jews and many pagan races will be converted to the Lord, and all people will rejoice in the beauty of peace."[17] Joachim taught that the Millennium would be initiated not by Christ's bodily return but through His spiritual intervention in the power of the Spirit, with the Second Advent following after.[18]

Reformation to Pre-World War II Postmillennialism

Joachim's influence extended powerfully into the Reformation era. "From the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, when an optimistic expectation of history was proclaimed, it usually drew inspiration from Joachimism."[19] The inauguration of Protestant postmillennialism is attributed to three influences: 1) Joachim's influence; 2) Protestant optimism about the trends of history; and 3) an exegesis of Revelation.[20]

Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr. sees an incipient form of Reformation postmillennialism as early as John Calvin (1509-1564), with a flowering occurring with Reformers Martin Bucer

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[16] Joachim of Fiore, "Book of Figures," translated by Bernard McGinn, in *Apocalyptic Spirituality: Treatises and Letters of Lactantius, Adso of Montier-en-der, Joachim of Fiore, The Franciscan Spirituals, Savonarola* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 139.

[17] Ibid., 139-40.

[18] Bauckham, 429.

[19] *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 1972 reprint edition, s.v. "Joachim of Fiore," by Marjorie E. Reeves, 278.

[20] Bauckham, "Millennium," 429.

(1491-1551) and Theodore Beza (1519-1605),[21] though this is hotly contested.[22] Gentry further views the Puritans as following in the train of these Reformers and developing postmillennialism with greater clarity. He identifies the Puritan form of postmillennialism as consisting of the following distinct tenets: 1) a future glory is expected for the church; 2) the Millennium is a literal thousand-year period that will not begin until after the Jews' conversion, but will then rapidly develop and prevail over the earth; 3) under this intensified effusion of the Spirit, a purified church and a righteous state governed by God's law will arise; 4) this "culminates eventually in the eschatological complex of events surrounding the glorious Second Advent"; 5) during this time, the Jews would return to their land (many, not all, of the Puritans held to this last point).[23]

Gentry identifies the following Puritan postmillennialists: William Perkins (1558-1602), William Gouge (1575-1653), Richard Sibbes (1577-1635), John Cotton (1584-1652), Thomas Goodwin (1600-1679), George Gillespie (1613-1649), John Owen (1616-1683), Elnathan Parr (d. 1632), Thomas Brooks (1608-1680), John Howe (d. 1678), James Renwick (d. 1688), and Matthew Henry (1662-1714).[24]

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[21] Gentry, "Postmillennialism," 17.

[22] See, e.g., Strimple, "An Amillennial Response," 68; H. Wayne House and Thomas D. Ice, *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1988), 91-93.

[23] Gentry, "Postmillennialism," 17-18. See also Iain H. Murray, *The Puritan Hope: Revival and the Interpretation of Prophecy* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1971), upon which Gentry bases his conclusions.

[24] Gentry, "Postmillennialism," 17-18. He states that there are others too, though he does not list them here.

In contrast to Gentry's understanding of Reformation and Puritan postmillennial development, the credit for founding modern postmillennialism is usually given to Daniel Whitby (1638-1726). Whitby was an Anglican commentator and divine from England, and also a Unitarian.[25] The descriptive title of an essay setting forth his postmillennial views is

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[25] See, e.g., Stanley J. Grenz, *The Millennial Maze: Sorting Out Evangelical Options* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 68-69; *Dictionary of Christianity in America* (1990), s.v. "Postmillennialism," by R. G. Clouse, 919; C. Marvin Pate, "Introduction to Revelation," in *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*, ed. C. Marvin Pate (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 20; Charles C. Ryrie, *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith* (Neptune, New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1953), 12-13; Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 385.

Contemporary postmillennialists appear most uncomfortable with a focus on Whitby because they see this as a way for the critics of postmillennialism to discredit the system by association, since Whitby was a Unitarian (Mathison, *Postmillennialism*, 45). A rival view of the popularizing of postmillennialism identifies Thomas Brightman (1562-1607), not Whitby, as its central figure. See Bauckham, "Millennium," 429; Gentry, "Postmillennialism," 16-17; Pate, "Introduction to Revelation," 20, n. 19. Gentry calls Brightman the modern systematizer (not creator) of postmillennialism.

A perusal of Brightman's most famous work, *A Revelation of the Revelation: That Is, the Revelation of St. John Opened Clearly with a Logicall Resolution and Exposition* [Amsterdam: n.p., 1615?] reveals an eschatological understanding which is far from a systematic and refined postmillennialism. For example, in his verse-by-verse examination of Revelation 20, Brightman identifies two important thousand-year periods. The first covers the period A.D. 300-1300, from Constantine to the "barbarous Turkes" (ibid., 1041). Satan was bound by Constantine, thus inaugurating this first millennium, marked by peace for the church from persecution and suffering. The Roman emperors were her "Patrones and protectours," restraining Satan from having any power over the church (1041-42). The second thousand years, according to Brightman, began in A.D. 1300, when the "savage Turkes," "casting away all feare of the Roman Empire" began attacking the church" (1041, 1053). The devil is said to have come in that year, and that the Turks would exercise a short tyranny for 390 years (1041, 1053). Nonetheless, this second millennium is characterized by the advance of the gospel, "Whereby continuance of the truth is promised for a thousand years"; "the truth doth gett ground & strength every day more, blessed be God for it" (1051). Following this reign of the truth among the Gentiles, Brightman also expected the conversion of the Jews (1053). Even so, Brightman wonders if the truth will be eclipsed after that second thousand-year period, and states, "we cannot be certain" (1051). How long the truth will reign among the Jews is unknown (1053).

In contrast to Brightman's eschatological understanding, which is arguably not even postmillennial, Whitby's position shows definitive postmillennial features. Postmillennialist Keith A. Mathison, though siding with Brightman as the originator of postmillennialism, nonetheless does acknowledge that, "What is distinctive about Whitby is that he was one of

"A Treatise of the True Millennium: Shewing That it is Not a Reign of Persons raised from the Dead, but of the Church flourishing gloriously for a thousand Years after the Conversion of the Jews, and the flowing in of all Nations to them thus converted to the Christian Faith."[26] This essay was part of Whitby's widely circulated book *A Paraphrase and Commentary on the New Testament*, published in 1703.

Whitby rejected the Augustinian view of the Millennium that saw it as co-extensive with the entire present age. Instead, he systematically promulgated a postmillennial view, based on Revelation 20, which posited a literal one thousand-year golden age that precedes Christ's Second Advent, and which commences at some future point, following the conversion of the Jews.[27] During this thousand-year period Satan will be bound, the church will flourish, but Christ will not personally reign upon the earth.[28]

His postmillennial views greatly influenced many later pastors and theologians, including Jonathan Edwards and many of the leaders of the Protestant missionary movement during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[29] Whitby's view of the Millennium was embraced by conservative and liberal theologians.[30] John F. Walvoord writes:

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the first to clearly and systematically present what may be termed a *futuristic* postmillennialism" (*Postmillennialism*, 45).

[26] See Daniel Whitby, *A Paraphrase and Commentary on the New Testament* (Edinburgh: Lackington, Allen, & Co., 1807), 680-705.

[27] Ibid., 681, 689. "After the fall of Antichrist, and before the second coming of our Lord to judgment, the Jews shall be converted, and become a most famous church again" (ibid., 690).

[28] Ibid., 689.

[29] Clouse, "Postmillennialism," 919.

[30] Pate, "Introduction to Revelation," 20.

> His views on the millennium would probably have never been perpetuated if they had not been so well keyed to the thinking of the times. The rising tide of intellectual freedom, science, and philosophy, coupled with humanism, had enlarged the concept of human progress and painted a bright picture of the future. Whitby's view of a coming golden age for the church was just what people wanted to hear. It fitted *(sic)* the thinking of the times. It is not strange that theologians scrambling for readjustments in a changing world should find in Whitby just the key they needed. It was attractive to all kinds of theology. It provided for the conservative a seemingly more workable principle of interpreting Scripture. After all, the prophets of the Old Testament knew what they were talking about when they predicted an age of peace and righteousness. Man's increasing knowledge of the world and scientific improvements which were coming could fit into this picture. On the other hand, the concept was pleasing to the liberal and skeptic. If they did not believe the prophets, at least they believed that man was now able to improve himself and his environment. They, too, believed a golden age was ahead.[31]

In time, two types of postmillennialism developed, "liberal postmillennialism" and "biblical postmillennialism."[32] Liberal postmillennialism reached its apex in the nineteenth century, with its adherents practicing what is sometimes called the Social Gospel. Their mission was the transformation of society and the defeat of the great societal ills, namely poverty (through economic redistribution), war, disease, racism, and other injustices. Societal change would bring personal change, since the key presupposition of the Social Gospel was the inherent goodness of mankind, with only external, environmental factors causing people to go astray. Further, the kingdom of God would largely be introduced through agencies and movements outside of the church (as with German church support of Nazism in the 1930s).

The Social Gospel floundered because of its focus on human effort with little reliance on God's Spirit, and its eschewing of biblical theology and the preaching of the true gospel.

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[31] John F. Walvoord, "Postmillennialism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 106 (1949): 154.

[32] Pate, "Introduction to Revelation," 20-21. See also Erickson, *Contemporary Options*, 61-62.

Its naive optimism was based on two faulty foundations: a rejection of the depravity of man, and a view of history derived from the evolutionary process (social evolution). "Time dealt a mortal blow to liberal postmillennialism—the catastrophic events of the twentieth century rendered it an untenable position (e.g., two world wars, the Great Depression, the threat of nuclear destruction)."[33]

In contrast to the false teachings and futile efforts of liberal postmillennialism is the more Scripturally consistent "biblical postmillennialism," which developed vigorously in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and into the first part of the twentieth. Its adherents believed that the reign of Christ would be established worldwide not through human efforts and movements outside of the church, but through the church's faithful proclamation of the powerful gospel of personal conversion and transformation through Jesus Christ. Stanley J. Grenz insightfully comments on biblical postmillennialists:

> Their outlook differed fundamentally from both secular and liberal Christian utopianism. They were optimistic concerning the future to be sure. But their optimism was born out of a belief in the triumph of the gospel in the world and of the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing in the kingdom, not out of any misconception concerning the innate goodness of humankind or of the ability of the church to convert the world by its own power.[34]

They expected that the gospel message would be taken worldwide, and would be favorably received, under the mandate and empowerment of the Lord Jesus Christ. [35]

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[33] Pate, "Introduction to Revelation," 21.

[34] Grenz, *The Millennial Maze*, 21.

[35] Note, for example, the optimism of Charles Hodge (1797-1878) that the church's assigned work of the conversion of the Gentile world was eminently possible and was even then being effected in the power of the Spirit, as seen in his *Systematic Theology*, Part IV, Ch. III, entitled "The Calling of the Gentiles" (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, n.d.), 3:800-05.

The main tenets of this postmillennial position are concisely stated by the distinguished Baptist theologian A. H. Strong, writing in the early twentieth century:

> Through the preaching of the gospel in all the world, the kingdom of Christ is steadily to enlarge its boundaries, until Jews and Gentiles alike become possessed of its blessings, and a millennial period is introduced in which Christianity generally prevails throughout the earth.[36]

The postmillennial understanding from this era could be summarized under the following points: 1) a golden age of spiritual prosperity for the entire world will come *within* the church age, but at its end; 2) this millennial epoch will appear as a result of the preaching of the gospel, the saving work of the Holy Spirit, and the Christianization of the world; 3) the Millennium will be a long age of universal peace and righteousness; 4) this golden era will be climaxed by the Second Advent of Christ.

Prominent postmillennialists from the eighteenth through the early twentieth century include Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), William Carey (1761-1834), Robert Haldane (1764-1842), Archibald Alexander (1772-1851), Charles Hodge (1797-1878), Albert Barnes (1798-1870), David Brown (1803-1897), Patrick Fairbairn (1805-1874), Richard C. Trench (1807-1886), J. A. Alexander (1809-1860), J. H. Thornwell (1812-1862), Robert L. Dabney (1820-1898), William G. T. Shedd (1820-1894), A. A. Hodge (1823-1886), Augustus H. Strong (1836-1921), H. C. G. Moule (1841-1920), B. B. Warfield (1851-1921), and J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937).[37]

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[36] Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 1907), 3:1008.

[37] Gentry, "Postmillennialism," 18-19. Gentry refers to these writers as "generic postmillennialists" to distinguish them from the postmillennialism of the Puritans "which, in addition to an interest in conversions, holy living, and missions, has a strong involvement in civil governmental matters" (ibid., 18, n. 19).

The postmillennialism of this era as a vibrant, viable eschatological position largely died out by World War II.[38] Reasons for its collapse include:

> 1) the inherent weakness of postmillennialism in that, based on the spiritualizing principle of interpretation, there was no coherence in it; 2) the trend toward liberalism, which postmillennialism could not meet, because of its spiritualizing principle of interpretation; 3) its failure to fit the facts of history; 4) the new trend toward realism in theology and philosophy, seen in neo-orthodoxy, which admits man is a sinner, and can not bring about the new age anticipated by postmillennialism; and 5) a new trend toward amillennialism, growing out of a return to Reformation theology as a basis of doctrine.[39]

Modern Postmillennialism (World War II to the Present)

Promulgations of postmillennialism were sparse on the theological scene in the two decades following World War II, but not absent. In fact, although J. Dwight Pentecost declared postmillennialism to be dead as a movement, without defenders in the then-present eschatological discussions, Loraine Boettner's book *The Millennium*, a significant advocacy of postmillennialism, had come out only the prior year, in 1957.[40] Further, there were at least three other notable propagations of postmillennialism prior to Boettner's that had been written since World War II: J. Marcellus Kik's *Matthew Twenty-Four* (1948) and *Revelation Twenty* (1955), and Roderick Campbell's *Israel and the New Covenant* (Introduction by O. T. Allis, 1954).

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[38] Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 386. Postmillennialist Keith A. Mathison notes the decline of postmillennialism in the late nineteenth century. He continues, "Postmillennialism did not completely disappear at the turn of the century. But the number of its adherents was rapidly dwindling"; he attributes the subsequent "steady decline" to the rising of dispensationalism to eschatological dominance, and the self-conscious differentiation of amillennialism from postmillennialism in Reformed circles (Mathison, *Postmillennialism*, 48).

[39] Ibid., 386-87.

[40] Loraine Boettner, *The Millennium* (Philadelphia: Reformed, 1957).

Nonetheless, despite these publications, Kik, Campbell, and Boettner remained a distinct minority in their adherence to postmillennialism, which still lacked a following of any significance. The revivification of postmillennialism is generally placed within the latter third of the twentieth century. Specifically:

> Beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, postmillennialism began once again to be seriously studied and taught. Renewed interest in the English Puritans and the simultaneous rise of Christian Reconstructionism led to a rethinking of several areas of theology, including eschatology. This has resulted in the publication of several important works on eschatology by noted postmillennial authors such as Rousas J. Rushdoony, J. Marcellus Kik, Greg L. Bahnsen, Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., John Jefferson Davis, Gary DeMar, and R. C. Sproul. Because these works are being read and studied by more and more Christians, this renewed faith in an eschatology of hope shows no signs of slowing down.[41]

Currently, among non-theonomic postmillennialists, John Jefferson Davis of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary is perhaps the most prominent proponent,[42] having represented postmillennialism in the Christianity Today Institute discussion of this issue.[43] He stands squarely in the tradition of "the classical postmillennialism of the nineteenth-century theological giants and of twentieth-century adherents such as Loraine Boettner."[44]

Without question, however, the greatest resurgence of postmillennialism can be traced to the theonomic postmillennialists. Kenneth L. Gentry Jr. briefly outlines this movement's distinctives:

> A development within the postmillennial tradition since the 1960s is known as Christian Reconstructionism, involving "theonomic" ethics ("theonomy" = "God's

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[41] Mathison, *Postmillennialism*, 52-53.

[42] Grenz, *The Millennial Maze*, 222, n. 7.

[43] "Our Future Hope: Eschatology and Its Role in the Church," *Christianity Today* 31 (February 6, 1987): 1/I-14/I.

[44] Grenz, *The Millennial Maze*, 67.

> law"). Theonomic postmillennialism (a feature of Christian Reconstructionism) combines the inter-advental gradualism of the modern generic variety with the socio-political interests of the older Puritan form. The theonomic postmillennialist sees the *gradual* return to biblical norms of civil justice as a *consequence* of widespread gospel success through preaching, evangelism, missions, and Christian education. The judicial-political outlook of Reconstructionism includes the application of those justice-defining directives contained in the Old Testament legislation, when properly interpreted, adapted to new covenant conditions, and relevantly applied.[45]

Like non-theonomic postmillennialism before it, this recent version of postmillennialism emphasizes the gradual triumph of the church within *this* age, prior to the Second Coming of Christ. However, the addition of theonomy gives great prominence to Old Testament Law as being relevant and binding upon church and society. To understand this added dimension of theonomy, an overview of Christian Reconstructionism is necessary.

Theonomic Postmillennialism as the Eschatology of Christian Reconstructionism

The background of Christian Reconstructionism is given in many different writings.[46] The rise of this movement can be attributed to a great extent to the impact of three primary figures: R. J. Rushdoony, Gary North, and Greg Bahnsen.[47] All three men hold earned doctorates: Rushdoony in educational philosophy, North in economics, and Bahnsen in philosophy. "Each one has made a contribution of singular importance to Reconstruction

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[45] Gentry, "Postmillennialism," 19.

[46] Thomas D. Ice, "An Evaluation of Theonomic Neopostmillennialism," in *Vital Prophetic Issues*, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1995), 96-98; Michael D. Gabbert, "An Historical Overview of Christian Reconstructionism" *Criswell Theological Review* 6/2 (1993): 281-301; House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*; Rodney Clapp, "Democracy as Heresy," *Christianity Today* 31 (February 20, 1987): 17-23.

[47] House and Ice, *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?*, 17; Clapp, "Democracy as Heresy," 18.

through writing, debates, and organizational development."[48] But any account of the *origins* of the movement must begin with its white-bearded patriarch, Rousas John Rushdoony.

Rushdoony, of Armenian heritage, could trace his family line back nearly two thousand years. He proudly related that there was a continuous succession of fathers and sons or nephews who were pastors from the early fourth century until the present. Of significance to note as a background to Rushdoony's Reconstructionist thought is the "exhaustive literalness characteristic of Armenian biblical exegesis."[49] Michael D. Gabbert writes, "Even into the modern period in Armenia, the Old Testament sacrifices are observed in a Christian form. Animal sacrifices are no longer seen as atoning activities but rather as memorials to the sacrifice of Christ. Even so, the portions are divided biblically between the pastor and the pilgrim."[50]

Rushdoony was a prolific writer, and first received notice in 1958 with the publication of *By What Standard?*, a presentation of Cornelius Van Til's presuppositional principles. His early books were not overtly Reconstructionist, and earned him respect as a thoughtful analyzer of the American scene. However, his magnum opus, the massive two-volume work *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (over 1,600 pages) marked a turning point in the Reconstructionist movement, as the tome attempted to apply systematically the Ten Commandments to American society. As a Presbyterian Calvinist theologian, with over

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[48] Gabbert, "An Historical Overview of Christian Reconstructionism," 283. Gabbert's article will be predominantly cited in the footnotes below only for convenience sake, as the other works listed in the above footnote give much of the same information and therefore could also be cited.

[49] Ibid., 284.

[50] Ibid.

thirty volumes to his credit, Rushdoony was "the spiritual and intellectual inspiration of the entire Reconstructionist movement,"[51] whose importance may not be overestimated.

Of particular importance to this study is Rushdoony's postmillennial eschatology, which has subsequently impacted the entire Reconstructionist movement. This eschatology can be clearly seen in his book *Thy Kingdom Come: Studies in Daniel and Revelation.*[52] Rushdoony's eschatology is characteristically postmillennial, marked, for example, by optimism regarding the triumph of the church in this age as well as the binding of Satan through Christ's first coming.[53] His understanding of the Millennium, however, identifies it as co-extensive with the church age,[54] which some theonomic postmillennialists have not followed.[55]

A second key figure in the development of Christian Reconstructionism is Gary North. North has earned the reputation of being the most controversial and acerbic of the leading Reconstructionists, often goading and belittling his theological foes in his writings. Also a prolific author, North has penned a multi-volume "economic commentary" on the Bible, and has written on a diverse range of topics (including occultism, conspiracy theories, and computers).

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[51] Ibid.

[52] Rousas John Rushdoony, *Thy Kingdom Come: Studies in Daniel and Revelation* (Fairfax, Va.: Thoburn Press, 1970).

[53] Ibid., 211-12.

[54] Ibid., 211.

[55] Most notably, Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr. has followed the traditional postmillennial understanding of a future "golden age" prior to the Second Coming of Christ.

Though North is Rushdoony's son-in-law, the two were not on speaking terms after 1981. The rupture came with a disagreement over an article by another author that North wanted to publish in *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction.* North agreed with the article's thesis, that the Passover blood on the doorpost bore symbolic overtones of virginity. Rushdoony countered that that position reeked of a fertility cult. "Chronic tensions exploded and the men parted company. While Rushdoony remains the mainstream representative of Reconstruction, North became more militant in both his biblical exegesis and his philosophical tactics for dominion."[56]

Greg Bahnsen, while not as prolific, was the most scholarly of the three. (He died in 1995). Rodney Clapp wrote of him, "Much less the activist and organizer than Rushdoony and North are, he prides himself on being a systematic thinker and painstaking logician."[57] Bahnsen reportedly read some of Rushdoony's works as a young boy. By the age of 16, he became a candidate for the ministry in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and his intelligence shone especially at Westminster Theological Seminary. There, he was the first student to finish both the Master of Divinity and Master of Theology degrees within three years and was said to have been Cornelius Van Til's most brilliant student.[58]

Bahnsen established himself immediately as a Reconstructionist expert on theonomy with the publication of his extensive work, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics.* In this book, Bahnsen argued for the continuing validity of Old Testament law. The moral law was still

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[56] Gabbert, "An Historical Overview of Christian Reconstructionism," 287.

[57] Clapp, "Democracy as Heresy," 18.

[58] Gabbert, "An Historical Overview of Christian Reconstructionism," 285.

authoritative for the Christian, asserted Bahnsen, and the civil (or judicial) law was still authoritative for this and all other nations, including its penal sanctions (e.g., capital punishment for homosexuals). In time, Bahnsen even eclipsed Rushdoony as the recognized spokesman for theonomy.[59] With theonomy under the scholarly direction of Bahnsen (who published three more major books on theonomy before his death, in addition to various contributions to other works), Reconstructionism was making great strides as an intellectually compelling movement.

However, one of the other crucial constituent components of Reconstructionism was causing growing tension within the Reconstructionist ranks, namely its postmillennial eschatology. The issue was not whether postmillennialism was true (which was still a given), but rather how it was being explicated by a certain sub-group of Reconstructionists. To understand the significance of eschatology to Reconstructionism, and this festering problem within the camp, a definition of this movement must now be given.

Greg L. Bahnsen defined "Christian Reconstructionism" as the broader theological outlook that includes three crucial constituent elements: 1) a postmillennial view of eschatology; 2) a theonomic view of ethics; and (usually) 3) a presuppositional approach to apologetics patterned after Cornelius Van Til.[60]

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[59] As a result, Bahnsen represented Reconstructionism (particularly, theonomy), for example, in the "Five Views" book *The Law, the Gospel, and the Modern Christian.* See his "The Theonomic Reformed Approach to Law and Gospel," in *The Law, The Gospel, and the Modern Christian,* ed. Wayne G. Strickland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), 93-143.

[60] Greg L. Bahnsen, *No Other Standard: Theonomy and Its Critics* (Tyler, Tex.: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), 19, n. 2.

The third constituent element listed above, presuppositional apologetics, is the least controversial of the three among evangelical Christians. It hardly needs to be said that one need not be a Reconstructionist to be a presuppositionalist. In fact, Cornelius Van Til never supported Christian Reconstructionism,[61] though Greg Bahnsen studied under him and highly esteemed him.[62] Presuppositional apologetics is not germane to this study and will receive no additional mention.

As is evident from Greg Bahnsen's definition above, the first constitutive element of Reconstructionism is its postmillennial eschatology, making it very important to the overall framework. While Bahnsen was making great strides in his assiduous defense of theonomy (the second constitutive element), problems were festering within the camp regarding the articulation of its eschatology.

The problems developed due to the eschatological publications of David Chilton. In 1985, he published *Paradise Restored: An Eschatology of Dominion*.[63] At the time, it was the standard work on theonomic postmillennialism, articulating and arguing for a preterist

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[61] Gary North reveals that Van Til "regarded the Christian Reconstruction movement as a fringe movement, not the cutting edge," and that he never trusted theonomic postmillennialism (Gary North, "Cutting Edge or Lunatic Fringe?" *Christian Reconstruction* 11 [January-February 1987]:2.

[62] Interestingly enough, Gary North states that Bahnsen was Cornelius Van Til's first choice to replace him in the classroom, a fact "widely known at the time," so Bahnsen went off to earn his Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Southern California. "Who finally got Van Til's chair? The son of the then-president of Westminster Seminary, a young man who held an M.A. in philosophy from a minor university. This is how the academic game is played, and not just in the secular world" (Gary North, publisher's forward to *House Divided: The Break-Up of Dispensational Theology*, by Greg L. Bahnsen and Kenneth L. Gentry Jr. [Tyler, Tex.: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989], xl, n. 43).

[63] David Chilton, *Paradise Restored: An Eschatology of Dominion* (Tyler, Tex.: Reconstruction Press, 1985).

interpretation of Matthew 24 (the Olivet Discourse) and the book of Revelation that placed the fulfillment of all biblical events before A.D. 70.[64] Then in 1987, Chilton published a lengthy (664 page) commentary on Revelation, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation.*[65] Again, Chilton gave a preterist interpretation of the book of Revelation.[66]

But there are some unique distinctives of the Revelation commentary that are worthy of note. Gary North, in his publisher's preface to Chilton's commentary, reveals that it was not composed in isolation, but depended very much on the insights from other men in what had become known as "the Tyler group."[67] The name comes from the town of Tyler, Texas, where North has surrounded himself with other Reconstructionists that he has funded, such as David Chilton, Ray Sutton, and James Jordan. As a result, North writes about Chilton's commentary, "This book is a good example, for better or worse, of what has become known as 'Tyler theology.' "[68]

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[64] See within this work by Chilton "Appendix A," which lists the 45 major arguments of the book.

[65] David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth: Dominion Press, 1987).

[66] "*Revelation is a prophecy about imminent events*—events that were about to break loose on the world of the first century" (ibid., xi).

[67] Gary North, publisher's preface to *The Days of Vengeance*, by David Chilton, xix.

[68] Ibid. In characteristic fashion, North also calls Chilton's book "the new reference work on the Book of Revelation" (xv). Important to note for later discussion below, North identifies this book together with Chilton's last (*Paradise Restored*) as the "foundational exegesis" for the Reconstructionist movement (he also includes Rushdoony's "far less exegetical book," *Thy Kingdom Come*).

These books are said to answer the critics of Reconstructionism that its optimistic eschatology lacks biblical exegetical justification: "For over two decades, critics chided the

How did "the Tyler group" impact Chilton's commentary? First, Ray Sutton provided *the* missing piece for Chilton, the "Covenant Structure."[69] Revelation needed to be interpreted under a five-part Covenant Lawsuit, Chilton claims to have discovered.[70] Further, from James Jordan, Chilton picked up what is called "Interpretive Maximalism." This hermeneutical methodology affirms that, "*Everything* in Scripture is 'symbolic.' "[71] As a result, in interpreting any passage of Scripture, associations from any number of other biblical passages can be transported and inserted into the meaning assigned.

Note the following illustration given by Chilton:

> A good example of this is Jordan's discussion of Judges 9:53: "But a certain woman threw an upper millstone on Abimelech's head, crushing his skull." (Note: The text does not simply say that "Abimelech got killed." The details are there for a reason.) It is important, for symbolic reasons, that a woman crushed the tyrant's head (see, e.g., Gen. 3:15; cf. Jud. 5:24-27); that he was destroyed by a stone (cf. Deut. 13:10; Jud. 9:5; 1 Sam. 17:49; Dan. 2:34; Matt. 21:44); and that it was a millstone, an

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Christian Reconstructionists with this refrain: 'You people just haven't produced any Biblical exegesis to prove your case for eschatological optimism.' Then came *Paradise Restored* in 1985. A deathly silence engulfed the formerly vociferous critics. Now comes *The Days of Vengeance*. The silence will now become deafening" (xxiii-xxiv).

Throughout his preface, North castigates the "pessimillennialists" (amillennialists and premillennialists) for their paucity of commentaries on Revelation, especially recent commentaries of substance. He throws down the gauntlet: "But someone in each of the rival pessimillennial camps had better start producing answers to what Christian Reconstructionists have already written. Specifically, someone had better be prepared to write a better commentary on Revelation than *The Days of Vengeance*. I am confident that nobody can" (xxxii). This writer is confident that someone has: Robert L. Thomas, whose Revelation commentaries, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary* (1992) and *Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* (1995), are the longest, most substantial Dispensational and premillennial contributions on this book in history, the quality of which far surpasses Chilton's Revelation commentary.

[69] North, publisher's preface to *The Days of Vengeance*, xvii.

[70] Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance*, 17.

[71] Ibid., 37.

implement of work to overcome tyranny (cf. Zech. 1:18-21).[72]

Other Reconstructionists outside the Tyler group saw the dangers inherent in such unbridled, imaginative hermeneutical procedures, and as a result did not affirm Chilton's eschatological efforts. Greg Bahnsen offered an especially strong critique of Chilton's interpretive efforts:

> David's commitment to the imaginative guesswork of interpretive maximalism renders his commentary on Revelation unsound. . . . Error is laid upon error to reach this height of imagination. . . . These kinds of flaws and misreadings make the commentary unreliable for the reader. . . . We must all realize that, while creativity is a virtue in an original author, it is a crime in an interpreter.[73]

In 1991, Bahnsen again strongly rejected "the Tyler hermeneutic" as it came to be called, as represented by Jordan and Sutton:

> Especially troublesome are certain hermeneutical abuses: for instance I cannot concur with the fanciful stream-of-consciousness connections, allegorical flights, and even numerology proposed by James Jordan (e.g., *The Law of the Covenant.* Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984, appendices F and G) or the artificial imposition of an imagined, blanket outline (with imprecise, pre-established categories) on Biblical materials suggested by Ray Sutton (*That You May Prosper.* Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987, e.g., appendices 1-5).[74]

Fellow Reconstructionist Joseph C. Morecraft III wrote approvingly:

> For a long time now I have been praying for Greg Bahnsen to write a critique of 'the Tyler hermeneutic.' I agree with Doug Wilson that that hermeneutic 'will prove destructive in any serious attempt to restore a biblical foundation for our society.' In his insightful, concise and irrefutable way, Greg Bahnsen puts the blowtorch to 'the Tyler hermeneutic,' for which I praise Almighty God.[75]

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[72] Ibid., 37-38.

[73] Greg L. Bahnsen, cited by Joseph C. Morecraft, III, in his editorial in newsletter *The Counsel of Chalcedon* (July 1988):3.

[74] Bahnsen, *No Other Standard,* 21.

[75] Joseph C. Morecraft, III, "Editorial," *The Counsel of Chalcedon* (July 1988):3.

The upshot of all this is that *the* definitive eschatological writings of the Reconstructionists were rejected by the most scholarly members of the movement. So, while great progress was being made in the defense of theonomy, relatively little progress had occurred with regard to Reconstructionist eschatology. There was a need for a more hermeneutically solid defense of the tenets of theonomic postmillennialism.[76]

To answer this need, Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr. rose to the fore. Gentry was originally a dispensationalist, who was enrolled for two years at Grace Theological Seminary.[77] While there, he rejected dispensationalism, and transferred to Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi. Through several courses taught by Greg L. Bahnsen, Gentry became a convinced theonomic postmillennialist.

Gentry's first major contribution to the postmillennial cause came in his collaborative effort with Greg L. Bahnsen, *House Divided.* Roughly half the book features Bahnsen's defense of theonomy, with the other half featuring Gentry's defense of postmillennialism. With this work, Gentry established himself as the new spokesman for theonomic postmillennialism. His other works have further cemented his role as the chief articulator of Reconstructionist eschatology:

(1) *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation* (1989) in which Gentry argues for an early (pre-A.D. 70) composition of Revelation;

(2) *The Beast of Revelation* (1989);

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[76] Bahnsen had himself done very little to advance postmillennialism through his *writings*, although he had written one journal article: Greg L. Bahnsen, "The Prima Facie Acceptability of Postmillennialism," *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction* (Winter, 1976-77):48-105. His focus was primarily on his explications of theonomy.

[77] See his preface, "Why I Could Not Remain a Dispensationalist," in Bahnsen and Gentry, *House Divided*, xlvii-lii, from which this biographical information is obtained.

(3) *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World,* 2d. ed. (1993);

(4) *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology,* 2d. ed., revised (1997);

(5) *Perilous Times: A Study in Eschatological Evil* (1998);

(6) "A Preterist View of Revelation" in *Four Views on the Book of Revelation* (1998);

(7) "Postmillennialism" in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond* (1999).

Due to Gentry's obvious ascendancy in the Reconstructionist ranks, any assessment or critique of current theonomic postmillennialism must focus predominantly upon him.[78]

Conclusion

In this chapter, in order to understand more adequately theonomic postmillennialism, the system was placed within the wider historical framework of postmillennialism in general. Postmillennialism was traced through its ancient, middle ages, reformation, and modern phases, with developments to the eschatology being successively noted.

Further, since theonomic postmillennialism is the eschatological perspective of Dominion Theology, Christian Reconstructionism was also explored. Its history as a movement, as well as its broad emphases, were duly noted. Within the constellation of Reconstructionist authors, Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., was identified as its foremost

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[78] When House and Ice first wrote *Dominion Theology* in 1988, Gentry was not yet exerting significant influence among Reconstructionists in the area of eschatology. However, Ice's article, "An Evaluation of Theonomic Neopostmillennialism," was already badly dated when published in 1995 in *Vital Prophetic Issues* in that it completely failed to take into consideration Gentry's crucial role in the advance of theonomic postmillennialism to that point.

eschatologian. As the chief articulator and promulgator of theonomic postmillennialism, his eschatological system is worthy of attention.

CHAPTER III

GENTRY'S DEFENSE OF THEONOMIC POSTMILLENNIALISM

Introduction

Due to Gentry's ascendancy as the foremost proponent of Reconstructionist eschatology, any assessment of current theonomic postmillennialism must focus primarily on his writings. With that fact in mind, a fairly recent essay of Gentry's will provide a perfect case study of theonomic postmillennialism, as presented and defended by its strongest advocate. The essay is "Postmillennialism," in the book *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond.*[1]

This essay provides a good case study because: 1) this is Gentry's most recent defense of postmillennialism, published in 1999; 2) an essay, due to space restrictions, forces an author to distill his position to its most significant points and strongest arguments (theonomic postmillennialists have not always been succinct and easy to follow). The major outline of Gentry's essay will be followed in this chapter's exploration of how Gentry explains and defends theonomic postmillennialism.[2]

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[1] Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., "Postmillennialism," in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999)

[2] Gentry's older, though lengthier, defense of theonomic postmillennialism (*He Shall Have Dominion)* will also be referenced to supplement the discussion of his essay below, as well as other seminal works by him.

The Position Defined

One of the most prominent distinguishing features of postmillennialism is its optimism regarding the success of the church's evangelization of the lost. Postmillennialists are confident of the future conversion of most unbelievers worldwide. Gentry gives the following helpful definition of postmillennialism, which evidences this favorable anticipation:

> Postmillennialism expects the proclaiming of the Spirit-blessed gospel of Jesus Christ to win the vast majority of human beings to salvation in the present age. Increasing gospel success will gradually produce a time in history prior to Christ's return in which faith, righteousness, peace, and prosperity will prevail in the affairs of people and nations. After an extensive era of such conditions the Lord will return visibly, bodily, and in great glory, ending history with the general resurrection and the great judgment of all mankind.[3]

Several points are worthy of note from the above quotation. First, as already stated, postmillennialism is obviously quite optimistic about the impact of the gospel upon the unbelieving world in this present age.[4] It will be the majority, nay the *vast* majority, of human beings who will be saved in the end. Further, this conversion of the world will not so much be sudden or explosive, but rather gradual, successfully occurring over time in an

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[3] Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., "Postmillennialism," in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 13-14.

[4] Compare Greg L. Bahnsen's postmillennial comments in "The Theonomic Reformed Approach to Law and Gospel," in *The Law, The Gospel, and the Modern Christian*, ed. Wayne G. Strickland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 120-21. Bahnsen refers to the "growth dimension" of the present kingdom, stating that it will "become large and transform all things." The objective reign of Christ "will more and more become a recognized reign in actual fact as it spreads redemptive blessing." He speaks of the onward march of the church, and of many sinners being saved. Christ's kingdom "will come to dominate the kingdoms of this world" (hence, the appropriate title "dominion theology"), and God's will "shall be more and more done on earth" in both the church and political realm.

incremental progression. Lastly, Christ's return "occurs *after* an era of 'millennial' conditions,"[5] hence meriting the name *post*millennial.

In this definition, nothing distinctive to the *theonomic* postmillennial position, in contrast to the non-theonomic postmillennial view, can be seen.[6] For example, traditional postmillennialist Loraine Boettner clarifies his eschatological expectations also in glowingly optimistic terms, stating his belief that "the world eventually is to be Christianized and that the return of Christ is to occur at the close of a long period of righteousness and peace commonly called the millennium."[7]

The Theonomic Distinctives

It is with his lengthier articulation of his postmillennial eschatology, in *He Shall Have Dominion*, that Gentry clarifies the distinctives of *theonomic* postmillennialism. This more

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[5] Gentry, "Postmillennialism," 14.

[6] Robert B. Strimple, in his response to Gentry's essay, notes that the distinctives of *theonomic* postmillennialism are not emphasized, in fact, in the essay generally. He is certainly correct in this evaluation. See Robert B. Strimple, "An Amillennial Response to Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr.," in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond,* 58.

[7] Loraine Boettner, "Postmillennialism," in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 117. This optimism can also be seen in older postmillennialists, as might be expected. For example, Gentry has written the introduction for a recent reprint of a postmillennial classic by David Brown, *Christ's Second Coming: Will It Be Premillennial?* (Edmonton: Still Waters Revival Books, 1990). Brown, of the famous "Jamieson, Fausett, Brown" trio, originally published this updated work in 1882. In it he details a future millennial period, prior to Christ's second advent, that will be marked by "the universal diffusion of revealed truth," "the universal reception of the true religion, and unlimited subjection to the sceptre of Christ," "universal peace," and so on (397-413).

extensive explication is worthy of summation below. Gentry articulates the nature of theonomic postmillennialism under seven points:[8]

1. Postmillennialism, asserts Gentry, holds that Christ, during His earthly ministry and through His redemptive labors, founded the Messianic kingdom upon the earth. In particular, the church becomes the fulfilled/transformed Israel, being called "the Israel of God" (Gal 6:16).

2. That kingdom's fundamental nature is essentially redemptive and spiritual, rather than political and corporeal.

3. Christ's kingdom, due to the intrinsic power and design of His redemption, will exercise a transformational socio-cultural influence in history as more and more people are converted to Christ.

4. Thus, postmillennialism expects the gradual, developmental expansion of the kingdom of Christ in time and on earth. That expansion occurs through the spiritual means of the ministry of the Scriptures, prayer, and the labors of Spirit-filled Christians, not by a minority revolt and seizure of political power. The kingdom progresses apart from Christ's presence on earth, which is not needed, since He directs it from heaven as the ruler over the earth.

5. Postmillennialism confidently anticipates a time in earth's history (continuous with the present) in which the overwhelming majority of men and nations will be

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[8] Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion*, 2nd rev. ed. (Tyler, Tex.: Institute for Christian Economics, 1992), 72-74. It should be noted that this seven-point exposition was already given by Gentry in a shorter form, though with nearly identical wording, in his anti-dispensational book co-authored with Greg L. Bahnsen. See *House Divided: The Break-up of Dispensational Theology* (Tyler, Tex.: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), 140-41.

Christianized. The gospel's victory or prosperity is the *essential distinctive* of postmillennialism, separating it from amillennialism and premillennialism.

6. Two types of contemporary postmillennialism are to be distinguished, writes Gentry: pietistic and theonomic. Pietistic postmillennialists (such as those in Banner of Truth circles, according to Gentry) deny any connection between theonomic ethics and postmillennialism. They deny that the postmillennial advance of the kingdom includes the complete transformation of culture through the application of biblical law, which theonomic postmillennialism affirms. The focus is pietistic and introspective, whereas theonomic postmillennialism is Cromwellian (his term) and culturally oriented. As noted above under Gentry's third point, he believes Christ's kingdom will exercise a transformational socio-cultural influence in history as people are increasingly converted to Christ.

7. Building on point five above, Christianity will be triumphant over the entire earth for an extended period of time, a golden age continuing for perhaps centuries or even millenniums. Then, Christ will personally, visibly, and bodily return, bringing earth history to a close. He will bring His people into the consummative and eternal form of the kingdom, to forever be with Him.

What is it then that distinguishes *theonomic* postmillennialism from nonreconstructionist postmillennialism? It is the expectation of the successful impact of Christ's kingdom on the societies and cultures of the world, transforming them through the application of biblical law. First comes widespread gospel success, through preaching, evangelism, missions, and Christian education; then, as a consequence, there will be a

gradual return to "biblical norms of civil justice."[9] It is this "socio-cultural,"[10] or "socio-political," or "judicial-political outlook"[11] which distinguishes theonomic postmillennialism.

The Role of Mosaic Law

What does this return to biblical norms of civil justice actually entail? Gentry answers: "The judicial-political outlook of Reconstruction includes the application of those justice-defining directives contained in the Old Testament legislation, when properly interpreted, adapted to new covenant conditions, and relevantly applied."[12] In *He Shall Have Dominion*, the seventh chapter, entitled "The Righteousness of God," is illuminating.[13] There, Gentry affirms the continued relevance of Mosaic Law for social righteousness (primarily on the basis of his typical Reconstructionist understanding of Matthew 5:17-19, which he believes upholds the Law's continuing validity). He does distinguish between the "distinctive ceremonial laws (redemption-expounding)" and the "[m]oral commandments (justice defining)."[14] The former laws were binding only on Israel, and are not therefore perpetually obligatory, whereas the moral requirements (what is normally referred to as the

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[9] Gentry, "Postmilliennialism," 19.

[10] See point six above.

[11] For these last two phrases, see Gentry, "Postmilliennialism," 19.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion,* 125-47.

[14] Ibid., 139.

moral and civil aspects of Mosaic Law) are. The Law, in its continuing relevance, is binding upon all the nations today.[15]

Gentry affirms the separation of church and state under Mosaic Law, identifying "a distinction between the civil ruler, Moses, and the priestly head, Aaron; between the offices of priest and king; between the temple and palace."[16] This separation between church and state continues in the New Testament era, according to Gentry. Hence, the civil magistrate today must mete out the just recompense upon evil-doers that the Law requires. Since the theonomic position is that God's Law is the standard for justice in every area of life, this necessarily includes penology. However, such penal sanctions, cautions Gentry, can only be carried over from Mosaic Law through careful exegesis of the Old Testament context, and subject to New Testament controls.[17]

The theonomic approach to law and order will bring many societal benefits, Gentry believes. In his book *God's Law in the Modern World: The Continuing Relevance of Old Testament Law,*[18] he gives a picture of what a theonomic society would look like today. Theonomy: 1) obligates government to maintain just monetary policies (Deut 25:13-15); 2) provides a moral basis for electing governmental officials (Deut 1:13, 15, 17); 3) forbids undue, abusive taxation of the rich (Exod 30:15); 4) calls for the abolition of the prison system and the establishment of a system of just restitution (Exod 22:1-4); 5) forbids the

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[15] Ibid., 142.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *God's Law in the Modern World* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Puritan and Reformed Publishing, 1993).

release, pardoning, and paroling of murderers by requiring their execution (Deut 19:11-13); 6) prohibits industrial pollution that destroys the value of property (Exod 22:6); 7) punishes malicious, frivolous malpractice lawsuits (Deut 19:16-21); and lastly; 8) forbids abortion (Exod 21:22-23).[19]

Theonomy affirms that the Christian is obligated to keep the whole law of God, including the Mosaic Law (as clarified above), since it is a pattern for social righteousness, as well as personal sanctification.[20] Gentry gives examples of how Mosaic Law outlines specific moral behavior for Christians: 1) "It obligates us to treat with respect even our personal enemy" (Exod 23:4-5); 2) "It obligates us to love our neighbors as ourselves" (Lev 19:18); 3) "It obligates us to insure the safety of guests on our property" (Deut 22:8, Exod 21:33-34); 4) "It obligates us to full financial remuneration to those whom we harm" (Exod 21:18-19); 5) "It forbids us to loan money at interest to a needy person" (Exod 22:25-27).[21]

Theonomy, then, sees a continued relevance of the Mosaic Law for social righteousness, as well as the personal sanctification of the believer. It is Reconstruction's judicial-political outlook which distinguishes theonomic postmillennialism from nontheonomic varieties of postmillennialism. Theonomic postmillennialism's optimism with regard to the gospel's victory in the church age is linked, then, to socio-political transformation of the nations through the proper incorporation of Old Testament law. Gentry concludes:

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[19] Ibid., 60-64. It should be noted that all Scripture references given as support by Gentry are from Mosaic Law.

[20] *He Shall Have Dominion,* 144-45.

[21] *God's Law in the Modern World,* 64-65.

> The postmillennial kingdom in history grows on the basis of the God-blessed—positive sanctions—proclamation of the gospel of God's saving grace. God's word does not return to Him culturally void. As God's kingdom expands in history, it produces an explicitly Christian and biblical culture—Christendom—by means of the comprehensive application of biblical law. In this sense, the kingdom of God is a true civilization, one which rivals all other civilizations in history.[22]

How does Gentry defend his understanding of postmillennialism? First, in his essay in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond,* Gentry provides a section on the theological foundations of postmillennialism, to show that "the basic theology of Scripture is congenial to it."[23] The factors discussed suggest the prima facie plausibility of postmillennialism.[24] These elements will now be briefly examined, following Gentry's essay.

Theological Foundations of Postmillennialism

God's Creational Purpose

The postmillennialist notes that God created the universe in six days, for His glory, and that it was originally very good. Because of God's love for His creation, He will restore it to its original purpose of bringing glory to Him. "Thus, the postmillennialist's hope-filled expectation is rooted in creational reality."[25]

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[22] *He Shall Have Dominion,* 146.

[23] Gentry, "Postmillennialism," 22. See pages 22 through 25.

[24] This is reminiscent of Bahnsen's earlier mentioned essay "The Prima Facie Acceptability of Postmillennialism."

[25] Gentry, "Postmillennialism," 23. Emphasis his.

God's Sovereign Power

God sovereignly controls all things, including history. Therefore, for the postmillennialist, the prospects of future gospel success depend on this sovereign God, and should not be prejudged based on past historical factors or present cultural circumstances. (Evidently, then, Gentry will not try to prove from a historical sketch that the church is marching triumphantly into greater gospel success in converting the world.) "Thus, the postmillennialist's ultimate confidence is in the sovereign God."[26]

God's Blessed Provision

The church's worldwide evangelistic success is also guaranteed by the Lord of lords, who has amply supplied His people to carry out this global endeavor. Gentry notes the following provisions for the church: 1) the presence of the risen Christ with His church; 2) the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, who regenerates and sanctifies believers, and blesses their gospel proclamation with conversions; 3) the Father who delights in saving sinners; 4) the gospel, which powerfully saves, and the powerful word of God, which believers wield in spiritual battle; 5) access to God in prayer through Jesus' name; 6) the defeat of Satan through the first advent of Christ, guaranteeing the believer's victory over him in spiritual battle and evangelism. "Thus the church's ample equipment is given by a gracious Savior."[27]

In light of those theological foundations, that is, "since God creates the world for his glory, governs it by his almighty power, and equips his people to overcome the enemy," Gentry asks, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom 8:31). These theological

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[26] Ibid. Emphasis his.

[27] Ibid., 25. Emphasis his.

foundations are not meant to prove postmillennialism, says Gentry, but they are given only to show it to be a viable evangelical option. Exegetical evidence must still be adduced from the Scriptures, but not until a further question is examined: "Is the postmillennialist hope rooted in God's inspired and inerrant word?"[28]

The Redemptive-Historical Flow of Postmillennialism

Gentry gives brief exegetical notations in his essay as he highlights several prominent proof texts for postmillennialism. Having given its general theological framework, he now traces, in broad strokes, its redemptive historical flow.

The Creation and Edenic Covenants[29]

God is a God of covenants, writes Gentry, who relates to and rules over people and creation through covenants. Though Genesis 1 does not contain the term "covenant," he believes covenant is nonetheless there. The *creation covenant* involves man's appointment by God to be vice-regent over the earth. Man, created in God's image, must develop all creation to God's glory. That involves a cultural dimension as well. "As the image of God under covenantal obligation, Adam and Eve must develop human culture to his glory, exercising righteous dominion over all the earth"; "And because human culture is the sum deposit of humankind's normative activities in the world, this necessitates the *corporate*

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[28] Ibid., 25.

[29] See the corresponding sections in *House Divided* (149-51) and *He Shall Have Dominion* (183-89).

activity of human beings working in *concert.* This requires social order and civil polity to promote the development of civilization and the progress of culture."[30]

Tragically, with the entrance of sin man's nature and urge to exercise dominion were perverted from power utilized under God and for His glory to a desire to be God instead. God's response was the initiation of covenantal redemption to bring reconciliation with fallen man. He promises redemption and the crushing of Satan, in the Edenic covenant, "which is the foundation of redemption," and which supplements the creation covenant.[31]

Genesis 3:15 anticipates struggle in history, ultimately between Christ and Satan, "a contest played out *on earth and in time* between the city of humanity (under the dominion of Satan) and the city of God."[32] The struggle ends with Christ's victory over Satan at His first advent, with the results being progressively worked out in history.[33] This is the basis of postmillennial hope.

The Abrahamic Covenant[34]

With the Abrahamic covenant, the revelation of the covenant seed focuses more narrowly to Abraham's family. Through Abraham, all the peoples on earth will be blessed.

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[30] "Postmillennialism," 26-27. Emphasis his.

[31] Ibid., 28.

[32] Ibid. Emphasis his.

[33] See Gentry's "The Post-Fall Expectation of Victory" section in both *House Divided* (151-52), and *He Shall Have Dominion* (189-92, nearly identically worded to the former, but slightly expanded).

[34] See *House Divided* (152-53); *He Shall Have Dominion* (196-202).

That provides support for postmillennialism's historic optimism, notes Gentry: "Abraham's cosmic heirship develops by means of the spread of the gospel."[35]

Further, contrary to premillennialism's "catastrophic imposition," the gospel victory which brings blessing on all nations comes "by gradualistic conversion."[36] Gradual progress is God's modus operandi, argues Gentry, as with the conquest of the Promised Land (Deut 7:22). "Prophecy also expects the incremental progress of redemptive victory among all nations: We see the water of life flowing gradually deeper (Ezek. 47:1-12), and the kingdom of heaven slowly growing larger (Dan. 2:35) and taller (Ezek. 17:22-24; Matt. 13:31-32), permeating more fully (Matt. 13:33), and producing more fruitfully (Mark 4:1-8, 26-28)."[37]

The New Covenant

Gentry notes that Christians presently partake of the new covenant, established by Christ in His death, and commemorated in the Lord's Supper. As with the Abrahamic covenant, the new covenant contains blessings for all peoples on earth. Yet, the new covenant is far more glorious than the old, and thus, "we may expect a wondrous exhibition of God's rule in history through this glorious covenant."[38]

Exegetical Evidence for Postmillennialism

In his essay, Gentry next offers some "specific passages undergirding and illustrating" the expectation of postmillennial victory. He writes, "Contrary to some

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[35] "Postmillennialism," 29.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid., 31.

complaints, postmillennialism is not a theological construct lacking exegetical foundations."[39] He claims that "numerous passages in both Testaments support the postmillennialism system so that the Scripture as a whole breathes the optimistic air of hope."[40] Citing space constraints, Gentry is only able "to highlight a few of these" passages.[41]

Assorted Messianic Psalms

Gentry notes that the messianic psalms are particularly important to the eschatological debate, yet he devotes only two paragraphs in his essay to all of them except for Psalm 2. He asserts that the postmillennialist derives great encouragement for historical optimism from these psalms. He first mentions Psalm 22:27, which states: "All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will worship before Thee" (NASB).[42] This will take place, he opines, "apparently on the basis of evangelistic persuasion rather than Armageddon imposition."[43]

He then briefly mentions other psalms, which "follow suit":

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[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid., 32.

[41] Gentry's readers will be disappointed at the paucity of attention he gives to the actual exegesis of crucial passages in making his case for postmillennialism in *House Divided* and *He Shall Have Dominion.* This is especially true with Old Testament texts: *House Divided* gives little more than two pages (154-156), and *He Shall Have Dominion* offers a mere fourteen pages (203-216), which are only lightly exegetical. The latter book is 560 pages long.

[42] Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are from the New American Standard Bible, 1977 edition.

[43] "Postmillennialism," 32.

> His salvation is to be known among all nations (67:2); all the ends of the earth will fear him (67:7); all nations will come and worship (86:9); renowned enemies will be converted (87:4); all kings will revere him (102:15). In fact, Messiah will be seated in heaven until his enemies become his footstool (110:1).[44]

Psalm 72:5-8 is also mentioned, which speaks of Christ's worldwide rule, a "messianic victory. . . tied to preconsummative history, before the renovation of the present universe and the establishment of the eternal new heavens and earth."[45]

Psalm 2

As "a particularly instructive psalm," Psalm 2, notes Gentry, gives the inspired interpretation of history, showing the glorious outcome of cosmic turmoil among the nations—temporal struggle followed by historical victory. The nations are in rebellion against God and His sovereign rule. The New Testament interprets this psalm messianically, especially with regard to the crucifixion (Acts 4:25-27). Beginning with His resurrection, Christ was exalted in the first century and installed as the King, ruling from God's right hand.

Christ presently rules over His kingdom from heaven. This enthroned Messiah needs only to ask, and God will give Him the nations as an inheritance (Ps 2:8). Gentry equates this securing of the nations to the very task assigned by Christ to His followers in the Great

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[44] Ibid. In *He Shall Have Dominion*, Gentry makes the following points about Psalm 110 (206-07). 1) The Psalm anticipates Christ's enemies being subjected by Him. 2) Christ does this while sitting at God's right hand ("sitting until" -- "The Hebrew adverbial particle *'d* indicates duration"), not in arising, leaving heaven, and returning to the earth at the Second Advent. 3) This Psalm is now in force, expecting Christ's ultimate victory, as evidenced in both its numerous New Testament allusions and in that He is already the Melchizedekan priest, mentioned in verse 4. 4) His strong rod, which is His word, will rule from Zion. This portrays the New Covenant-phase Church as headquartered at Jerusalem where the gospel was first preached. 5) The allusion to kings in verse 5 indicates that Christ's rule will be over governments as well as individuals, societal as well as personal.

[45] Postmillennialism," 32.

Commission, to go and make disciples of all the nations. Remarkably, given this understanding, Gentry next remarks: "He will rule over them [the nations] with his rod and dash in pieces those who refuse to submit (Ps 2:9)."[46] He does this by His mighty Word and under his controlling providence."

He concludes: "This psalm continues developing the redemptive-historical theme of struggle and victory that began with the protoevangelium. It throbs with historical optimism and serves virtually as a postmillennial tract."[47]

Isaiah 2:2-4

Gentry begins:

> In Isaiah 2:2-4 (and Mic. 4:1-3) we learn that the 'last days' will witness the universal attractive influence of the worship of God, which requires the international dispersion and influence of Christianity. This will issue forth in righteous living on a personal and social level and international peace on the cultural and political level.[48]

He briefly argues, based on New Testament usage, that the "last days" refer to the period from the first coming of Christ until His second coming, with no days to follow. "Judah and Jerusalem" in verse 1 represent the whole of the people of God. Further, "the references to the 'mountain,' the 'house of the God of Jacob,' and 'Zion' refer to the church."[49]

He continues along this line: "Thus, the church is so firmly established as to tower over the world."[50]

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[46] Ibid., 35.

[47] Ibid., 36.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid.

> 'All nations will stream' (Isa. 2:2) into the church to worship the Lord, who saves them. Political force does not compel them; rather, the grace of God constrains them. There they will be discipled in his ways and from his law (v. 3). Christianity will become the agent of gracious redemptive influence in the world. The swelling river of people urging others to 'come, let us go' to the house of God (v. 3) portrays successful evangelism leading to the gospel prosperity. With overwhelming numbers converting to Christ and being discipled in God's law, great socio-political transformation naturally follows.[51]

Matthew 13

Gentry summarizes, "In his kingdom parables of Matthew 13 the Lord sketches some of the basic aspects of his spiritual kingdom, two of which are particularly helpful for postmillennialism's optimistic gradualism and deserve our attention."[52] He refers here to the parable of the mustard seed, and the parable of the yeast in the bread dough. But before he looks at those two, he comments on the other parables as well.

The Parable of the Sower

"In the parable of the sower (Matt. 13:3-23) Christ identifies the righteous citizens of his kingdom: those who rightly receive the Word of God"; "In keeping with postmillennial expectations . . . their numbers will greatly increase: thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold."[53]

The Parables of the Weeds and the Net

"The parables of the weeds (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43) and the net (13:47-50) warn that despite the incredible growth of its citizenry, the historical manifestation of the kingdom will

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[51] Ibid., 37.

[52] Ibid., 39.

[53] Ibid. It is noted that Gentry only gives one paragraph to this parable in *He Shall Have Dominion* (245). No argumentation is offered.

always include a mixture of both the righteous and the unrighteous. These will not be separated absolutely until the resurrection at the history-ending Second Advent. The kingdom will never be perfect while on earth."[54]

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

"This passage speaks of the universal magnificence and glorious exaltation of the kingdom of heaven, which, when fully grown, will graciously provide shelter for all"; "the parable of the mustard seed speaks of the gradual *extension* of the kingdom in the world."[55]

The Parable of the Yeast

"Whereas the previous parable speaks of extensive expansion, this one speaks of the kingdom's intensive penetration." In Matthew 13:33, he believes, yeast symbolizes the "kingdom of heaven."[56]

Gentry summarizes the lessons from the kingdom parables as follows:

> Christ emphatically teaches, in other words, that the kingdom will thoroughly suffuse itself in the whole world (cf. Matt. 13:38). The glorious expectations for the kingdom of heaven are clear: The kingdom will penetrate all (13:33), will produce up to a hundredfold return (13:8), will grow to great stature (13:31-32), and will dominate the field/world (having sown the wheat seed in the world, that world to which Christ returns will be a wheat field, not a weed field, 13:30). The kingdom's gracious and righteous influence will totally penetrate the world system.
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> The kingdom parables, then, comport well with the victory expectations of the Old Testament. The kingdom of the God of heaven (Dan.2:44), which Christ

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[54] "Postmillennialism," 39. These two parables get two sentences in *He Shall Have Dominion* (245). Two other parables get only one sentence in both the essay and book. "The parables of the hidden treasure (Matt. 13:44) and the pearl of great price (13:45-46) speak of the priceless value and blessings of the kingdom" ("Postmillennialism," 39; cp. *He Shall Have Dominion,* 245).

[55] "Postmillennialism," 40. Cp. *He Shall Have Dominion,* 246-47.

[56] "Postmillennialism," 40-41.

urgently preaches (Mark 1:15) and which is a joyous treasure (Matt. 13:44), will grow to a position of dominance in the world.[57]

Matthew 28:18-20

Gentry writes concerning this passage, "The Great Commission is widely known and loved, but little understood. Properly considered it is truly a *Great* Commission and a foundational element of the postmillennial hope."[58]

How does this passage support and prove postmillennialism? First, notes Gentry, Christ was given all authority at His resurrection. This bestowal of kingly authority fulfills Psalm 2:6-7, as seen earlier, and penetrates every realm and all spheres of life.

As the sovereign Lord, Christ then calls upon His church, His Spirit-blessed people, to extend His kingdom influence through His indwelling and leadership. Based on the command of the Great Commission, Gentry argues that Christ expects the church to fulfill His obligation, and He will make certain that all nations will be discipled under His universal authority.

The Great Commission, asserts Gentry, is "the obligation and plan for *universal conquest"* delivered by Christ to His followers.[59] Christ's command is to bring all nations *as nations* to conversion and baptism, demonstrating His concern for the transformation of all of culture, not just individuals.[60] Indeed, as Gentry argues in his book on the Great

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[57] Ibid., 41.

[58] Ibid., 44.

[59] *He Shall Have Dominion,* 227. Emphasis his.

[60] Ibid.

Commission, *The Greatness of the Great Commission*,[61] Christ's orders will be carried out by the church, leading to the inevitable socio-cultural and political transformation of the nations of the world in this age. "As the numbers of converts increase, this providentially leads to the subsuming under the authority of Christ whole institutions, cultures, societies, and governments."[62]

He faults the eschatological systems of dispensationalism, amillennialism, and historic (non-dispensational) premillennialism for being "pessimistic" in contrast to the "optimistic" postmillennial view of the Great Commission. Typical of the posture of Reconstructionist literature is his clarification of his charge of pessimism against the other three eschatological positions:

> (1) As systems of gospel proclamation each teaches the gospel of Christ will not exercise any majority influence in the world before Christ's return;
> (2) As systems of historical understanding each, in fact, holds the Bible teaches there are prophetically determined, irresistible trends downward toward chaos in the outworking and development of history; and therefore
> (3) As systems for the promotion of Christian discipleship each dissuades the Church from anticipating and laboring for wide-scale success in influencing the world for Christ during this age.[63]

For Gentry, on the other had, the Great Commission assures "Christianity's victorious future."[64]

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[61] Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission* (Tyler, Tex.: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990).

[62] Ibid., 54. Emphasis his. "The saving of multitudes of individuals *must* eventually lead to cultural Christianization under Christ's rule" (ibid., 58).

[63] Ibid., 147.

[64] *He Shall Have Dominion,* 242. See page 245, and the heading "Dominion Assured."

John 12:31-32

The last gospel passage to which Gentry devotes significant attention in his essay is John 12:31-32. Gentry sees the "judgment" of the world as rather its "reformation" (following, he claims, Calvin's interpretation here) into its properly ordered state. This occurs because of Christ's casting out of Satan, which then coincides with and facilitates His work of redemptively drawing all men to Himself. Gentry writes:

> The massive influence of Christ's reconciling death will operate in history through the age-long drawing of all men (cf. Isa. 2:2; Matt. 28:20), resulting in the world-as-a-system returning to God. He will not accomplish this catastrophically by external political imposition, but gradually by internal personal transformation. Redemptively transformed people generate a righteously transformed world. God's gracious drawing finally results in a massive, systemic conversion of the vast majority of humankind.[65]

1 Corinthians 15:20-28

Gentry tells us the significance of this passage for his eschatological system:

> Along with the kingdom parables and the Great Commission, Paul's resurrection discourse in 1 Corinthians 15 provides us with strong New Testament evidence for the postmillennial hope. Here Paul speaks forthrightly of Christ's present enthronement and insists he is confidently ruling with a view to subduing his enemies in history.[66]

First Corinthians 15:20-22, notes Gentry, gives the ordering of the eschatological resurrection: Christ is raised in the first century, and becomes the first fruits guarantee of the future resurrection of every Christian. In verses 23-24, more detail is given regarding the order and events connected with the resurrection. Paul writes, "But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then comes the end,

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[65] "Postmillennialism," 42.

[66] Ibid., 48.

when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power."

Christ, the first fruits, is resurrected already. Next, He will come for the church, and effect its resurrection. But, argues Gentry, Paul teaches that Christ's second coming marks "the end" (τέλος), implying two things: 1) history at that point will be over, and 2) this rules out any millennial age to follow on the earth.[67]

There are other truths in this passage that support the postmillennial position, argues Gentry. Verse 24 states, "then comes the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father." Gentry brings out several exegetical points : 1) the end of history occurs "whenever" (ὅταν) Christ delivers up the kingdom to the Father. Syntactically, this delivering up must occur together with the end; 2) "delivers up" (παραδιδῷ) is a present subjunctive. "When the present subjunctive follows *hotan,* it indicates a present contingency relative to the main clause, which here is that 'the end will come.' So the contingency regards the date of the end: 'whenever' it may be that he delivers up the kingdom;"[68]
3) Christ will not deliver up the kingdom to the Father until after "He has abolished all rule and all authority and power." "Has abolished" (καταργήσῃ) is an aorist subjunctive following ὅταν. This construction indicates that the action of the subordinate clause ("He has abolished") *precedes* that of the main clause ("then comes the end"). The context also supports this, since Christ could not hand over an unsubdued kingdom.

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[67] "Postmillennialism," 48. Compare the nearly identically worded treatment by Gentry of this passage in *He Shall Have Dominion* (253-56), and *House Divided* (214-16).

[68] "Postmillennialism," 49.

Gentry then pulls together these disparate notes to insist that the end is contingent, coming at some unrevealed, unknown future time when Christ delivers up the kingdom to the Father. But this deliverance only occurs *after* Christ has abolished all rule, authority and power. That offers a strong argument for postmillennialism, he maintains, since the end does not occur and Christ will not deliver the kingdom to the Father, until *after* He abolishes all opposition prior to His return.

Gentry concludes: "Paul's glorious teaching in 1 Corinthians 15 virtually demands a postmillennial interpretation. Christ is presently ruling until his rule subdues all of his enemies—in time and on earth."[69]

Revelation 20

Readers of Gentry's defense of postmillennialism may be surprised by his comments regarding this important chapter: "I would prefer to leave Revelation 20 out of my presentation. It plays too prominent a role in the eschatological debate, overshadowing much clearer passages and bringing confusion into the debate."[70]

So what does Gentry understand the significance of Revelation 20 to be? The following points can summarize his position: 1) Revelation is a highly symbolic book, "the most symbolic book in all of Scripture."[71] Further, the "material is taken from a scene that is manifestly figurative";[72] 2) the thousand years must also be symbolic, not literal, since this is

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[69] Ibid., 50.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid., 51.

[72] *He Shall Have Dominion*, 296.

a vision, the number is perfectly rounded and exact, and the binding of Satan with a chain is not literal; 3) the figurative thousand years symbolize the long-lasting glory of the kingdom Christ established with His first coming; 4) the angel who binds Satan is Christ Himself; 5) Satan's binding occurred at Christ's first advent, and refers to the increasing constriction of Satan by Christ's power through the Christian era, preventing him from deceiving the nations, until a brief period just prior to the Second Advent; 6) the first resurrection refers to the spiritual resurrection of those regenerated by God's grace; 7) the saints presently reign with Christ.[73] This concludes the summation of the major points of Gentry's theological and exegetical case for theonomic postmillennialism.

Conclusion

This chapter noted the similarity between general postmillennialism and theonomic postmillennialism. This is found principally with regard to their shared optimism regarding the future conversion of the world in this age through the church's evangelism, after which Christ will return. Theonomic postmillennialism was then distinguished by its expectation of the successful impact of Christ's kingdom on the societies and cultures of the world, transforming them through the application of biblical law. The role of Mosaic law for Gentry's system was then explored. This was followed by an examination of the theological foundations of postmillennialism, as well as its redemptive-historical flow, as articulated by Gentry. Lastly, exegetical evidence proffered by Gentry in defense of his eschatological

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[73] "Postmillennialism," 50-55.

construct was examined. In the next two chapters, his eschatological position will be critiqued (Chapter IV), and his theonomic ethics evaluated (Chapter V).

CHAPTER IV

A CRITIQUE OF GENTRY'S MISPLACED ESCHATOLOGICAL OPTIMISM

Introduction

Now that Gentry's advocacy of theonomic postmillennialism has been summarized, an assessment and critique of his eschatological position can be developed. The following evaluation will first examine Gentry's rejection of a future role for national Israel. Since his covenant theology defines the church as the "New Israel," its theological and exegetical underpinnings will be subjected to a dispensational critique. This will include an evaluation of several disputed passages in the New Testament that allegedly refer to the church as "Israel," especially Galatians 6:16.

Next, Gentry's mishandling of the major covenants will receive attention. Particularly pertinent will be a re-examination of the Abrahamic Covenant, and Israel's role as a covenant participant. Finally, the bulk of this chapter will consist of a refutation of the exegetical evidence offered by Gentry in support of postmillennialism. It is here that postmillennialism must stand or fall, for Scripture alone must be the final judge of the validity of any eschatological construct.

National Israel's Future Role Rejected

It is obvious from Gentry's articulation of postmillennialism that he believes *national* ethnic Israel has no role to play in God's future eschatological program. Indeed, even in

Gentry's evaluation of the Old Testament's redemptive historical flow in his essay, Israel can rightly be said to be entirely expunged. On the whole, Israel carries almost no significance in his eschatological formulations.[1] He shows a gross disregard, almost to the point of dishonesty, of Israel.

Gentry's misunderstanding of Israel is seen, for example, in his comments on Isaiah 2. He exemplifies classic replacement theology (as well as spiritualizing elements of the text) by identifying the "mountain," "the house of the God of Jacob," and "Zion" as the church, and in making "Judah" represent "the whole of the people of God."[2] Gentry does not argue for this replacement theology—he merely assumes it. The church then becomes for him the means of the socio-political transformation of the world.

Gentry's understanding of Israel's position in eschatology may be surmised from several discussions he offers in his writings. First, Gentry affirms the rejection of national Israel by God due to her rejection of the Messiah. Israel instigated and demanded Christ's crucifixion. This most heinous sin of all time was committed by the Jewish nation, bringing "covenantal ethical cause-and-effect," namely, God's curse upon Israel and her national casting aside.[3] Secondly, the Israel of the Old Testament is understood as the forerunner of

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[1] This is also the evaluation of Craig A. Blaising in "A Premillennial Response To Kenneth L. Gentry Jr." in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999). He writes that "Israel has no place in Gentry's postmillennialism" (78). In Gentry's favor, it must be noted that elsewhere in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, in his "A Postmillennial Response To Robert B. Strimple," Gentry does argue from Romans 11 for a future mass conversion of Jews which will accelerate the advance of Christianity (132-42; also see his chart, 237). Nonetheless, this future conversion of Jews does not ascribe to Israel a particular special place as a nation among the nations, with a distinct salvific role. Jews merely become a part of the church.

[2] "Postmillennialism," 36.

[3] *House Divided,* 166-67.

and continuous with the new covenant phase of the church, which is "the fruition of Israel."[4] As such, the church represents a purified Israel (Rom 2:28-29), and is not racial in composition. It is spiritual Israel, the Israel of God (Gal 6:16). In addition to being called Israel, the church is also designated by other terms associated with the old covenant people: "seed of Abraham," "the circumcision," "a royal priesthood," and so on.[5] The church is the recipient of Israel's promises, and fulfills Old Testament prophecies.[6] Third, the church represents a new union under which "The distinction between Jew and Gentile has *forever* been done away with" (Eph 2:11-16; Gal 3:28; Col 3:11).[7] Nonetheless, Gentry anticipates a future conversion of racial Jews on a large scale, but this does not mean that Jews will be exalted over or distinguished from saved Gentiles (especially not in a national sense).[8]

Gentry's unsupported identification of the church as the "New Israel" and recipient of Old Testament prophetic promises is met by dispensationalism's strong case against equating the church and Israel. The crucial distinction between all dispensational and non-dispensational systems centers on the meaning of Israel and the church.[9] Even with the

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[4] *He Shall Have Dominion*, 171.

[5] Ibid., 171-75.

[6] Ibid., 177, 175.

[7] Ibid., 515.

[8] Ibid., 515, 237.

[9] See Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationlism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 39. Ryrie argues that a dispensationalist keeps Israel and the church distinct, which "is probably the most basic theological test of whether or not a person is a dispensationalist." Anthony Hoekema agrees: "one of the determinative principles of dispensational theology is that there is a fundamental and abiding distinction between Israel and the church" (*The Bible and the Future* [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979], 196).

modifications brought by progressive dispensationalism, which affirms greater unity between Israel and the church as the one people of God serving one historical purpose, still this clear distinction remains between dispensationalists and non-dispensationalists.[10]

Dispensationalists across the board, then, affirm that Israel retains its Old Testament meaning as an ethnic people throughout the New Testament. Further, they assert that Israel as historically understood will yet fulfill the destiny promised her in the Old Testament. John S. Feinberg notes that "holding a distinctive future for ethnic Israel is essential to Dispensationalism."[11] The distinction between Israel and the church is rooted in a careful definition of Israel in its Old Testament usage, and a rejection of any equation of the two based on alleged New Testament evidence.

Israel refers to the physical descendants of Abraham (Rom 11:1) through Isaac (Gen 21:12) and Jacob (Gen 35:9-12). The term first appears in Scripture as a name of honor divinely bestowed on Jacob following his struggle with God at Peniel (Gen 32:38), and is used as an alternate name for Jacob both during his life and after his death (e.g., Gen 35:21; Exod 32:13). His twelve sons are called "the sons of Israel" (Gen 42:5), and eventually the term "Israel" came to describe all his descendants in general (Exod 1:7), and then the nation formed from them (Exod 19:5). Israel owes her existence as a people to God's election and calling (Rom 9:6-13), to God's actions (Deut 4:7-8, 32-37; 7:6-8; 14:2; Ezek 16) and to God's creation (Ps 100:3; Isa 64:8).

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[10] Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), 187.

[11] "Systems of Discontinuity," in *Continuity and Discontinuity*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1988), 81.

As a term, *Israel* is *not* applied to all God's people irrespective of nationality. Rather, it retains its reference to a particular national people in accordance with the covenants and promises of Scripture, which are irrevocable. Of crucial importance is the recognition that the community of Israel constituted a *nation*. God had promised Abraham that his physical descendants would become "a great nation" (Gen 12:2; 17:5; 18:18), which they formally became (Deut 26:5) at Sinai following the Exodus (Exod 19). This national status belongs to the very essence of the concept of Israel in the Old Testament and cannot be separated from its religious meaning as "the people of God."[12]

Israel is to be distinguished from the church, with the recognition that the two are *never* equated anywhere in Scripture.[13] The ethnic people alone are in view in Romans 9:6, 2:28-29, and Galatians 6:16 (see discussion of these passages below). It is the lack of national characteristics that distinguishes the church from Israel. Israel, formed and chosen as a nation among nations, stands in contrast to the church, a community or people called out of all nations, and composed of both Jews and Gentiles (Eph 2:11-22) in which neither race nor nationality nor ethnic identity has any bearing on status or function (Gal 3:28). The church is never to be identified as the "New Israel" or as "Spiritual Israel," but is distinctively different from Israel.

New Testament Alleged Support of the Church as "Israel"

There are a few disputed references in the New Testament to which non-dispensationalists appeal in seeking to show that the term "Israel" (or "Jew") does not refer

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[12] See Saucy, 190-94.

[13] See, in this study, Appendix I, "A Synopsis of the Church," and Appendix II, "A Synopsis of Israel."

to the national covenant people of the Old Testament, but to the church instead. How do continuity scholars (like Gentry) argue that "Israel" includes Gentiles, and that the church is in fact the "new Israel"? Three passages are frequently cited: Romans 9:6, 2:28-29, and Galatians 6:16.

Romans 9:6

"But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel." Charles Hodge reflects the non-dispensational understanding of this verse which equates Israel with the church, when he writes:

> *For they are not all Israel which are of Israel, i.e.*, all the natural descendants of the patriarch are not the true people of God, to whom alone the promises properly belong. The word *Israel* may refer either to Jacob or to the people. 'All descended from the patriarch Jacob called Israel, are not the true people of God;' or, 'all belonging to the external Israel are not the true Israel;' *i.e.*, all who are in the (visible) Church do not belong to the true Church.[14]

As Carl B. Hoch, Jr., points out, Paul's employment of Israel twice in this verse clearly makes a distinction between one use of "Israel" and another.[15] But is Paul distinguishing between true Israel (just another name for the church) and the nation of Israel? Hoch argues that such a conception is a misrepresentation of the passage.

Three important points must be made for the proper understanding of this text. First, arguing that the "true Israel" is the church ignores Paul's argument in this section of Romans. The entire context of this passage is dealing with the problem of national Israel, not Gentiles. Paul does not mention Gentiles until verse 24. He introduces his discussion in this section by

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[14] Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on Romans* (Carlisle, Pa.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), 305.

[15] Carl B. Hoch, Jr., *All Things New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 272.

sharing his deep concern for "my brethren, my kinsman according to the flesh, who are Israelites" (9:3-4). Verse 6 refers to ethnic Israel. His continued discussion elaborates God's election operative among the *physical* descendants of Abraham (9:7-13). Second, the point of the passage is that the promises of God to Israel retain their validity, in spite Israel's unbelief, because there is a remnant within Israel to whom the promises are fulfilled. Finally, the context proves that the distinction with regard to Abraham's descendants is limited to ethnic Israel. Though God's elective mercy is extended to Gentiles, Paul does not call Gentiles "Israel." "This is clear from the use of δὲ and the repetition of "Israel" in verse 27.[16] This excludes any idea that "Israel" is being redefined to include Gentiles, which would equate spiritual Israel with the church.[17] Therefore, as Hoch rightly concludes, "although the term Israel is still restricted to the physical descendants of Jacob, there is division within this physical descent: (1) those who are merely physical descendants; and (2) those who are not only physical descendants but also believers."[18]

Romans 2:28-29

"For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God." Since the "Jew" is described as one who is "circumcised in heart" by the Holy Spirit, some scholars have surmised that all believers in Christ (including Gentiles) are "Jews," and

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[16] Ibid.

[17] Saucy, 196-97.

[18] Hoch, 272.

therefore "Israel." Gentry himself states that the church represents a purified Israel, citing this passage for support.[19] Again, consideration of the context leads to the correct interpretation of who the real "Jew" is in this passage. By verse 17, Paul is addressing those who call themselves "Jews," and most probably has been from the beginning of chapter 2. Therefore, this passage's context is concerned with ethnic Jews and *not* believers in general. Paul then is here explaining the true *religious* meaning of the term "Jew." Saucy explains:

> The term "Jew," like "Israel, carried not only ethnic but also religious meaning, and the apostle was concerned to define its true meaning, which always involved faith and obedience and not simply an external covenant claim. The presence of the Spirit brought a new depth to the inward reality in accord with the promise, but neither in the Old Testament promise nor in the New Testament teaching is there any indication that this changes the meaning of "Jew." Although depth of inwardness was new under the new covenant, one could argue that Paul's notion of inwardness was not essentially different in kind from that under the old covenant, which likewise called for spiritual reality (cf. Dt 10:16; Jer 4:4).[20]

This passage, then, can be coupled with the last, Romans 9:6, in that both discuss the significant distinction between those who are Jews ethnically and those within than group who truly bear the name in its more significant religious sense. Neither passage gives any exegetical support to the reductionistic application of the term "Israel" to the church. Neither the term "Israel" nor "Jew" can be emptied of their national, ethnic meaning.

Galatians 6:16

"And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God." As Hoch notes, the last past of verse 16 contains the *crux interpretum*: what is meant by "the Israel of God"? The difficulty of the problem is increased by the fact that

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[19] *He Shall Have Dominion,* 171.

[20] Saucy, 198. See also Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Thelogy* (Tustin, Cal.: Ariel Ministries Press, 1989), 703-08.

this phrase is only found here in the entire Greek New Testament.[21] A perusal of non-dispensational writings will reveal that this verse is the one most frequently used to buttress the identification of the church as the "new Israel."[22] This equation of the church and Israel understands the Greek word translated "and" (καὶ) to have the explicative or appositional sense of "even," as in the *New International Version*. That translation allows the interpretation that "those who will walk by this rule" (the church) are identical to "the Israel of God."

Verse 16 is the last verse of the subscription or final paragraph of Paul's letter to the Galatians, which begins at verse 11. This concluding subscription varies from Paul's typical epistolary practice in several ways.[23] First, it is longer than usual, containing as it does "a summary recapitulation of the main themes Paul has pursued throughout the letter."[24] Further, there are no personal greetings, either from Paul or anyone else (including the unnamed "brethren who are with me" of 1:2). Lastly, there is no doxological confession of praise, nor a personal touch (neither does Paul reiterate his hope of seeing the Galatians soon, or request their prayers on his behalf).[25] Nonetheless, there is a "peace benediction" in verse 16, and a "grace benediction" in verse 18. George concludes: "Thus, despite the lack of

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[21] Hoch, 275.

[22] Gentry repeatedly refers to Galatians 6:16 in his writings, as seen above. Fruchtenbaum refers to this verse as "the *only* passage produced by all Covenant Theologians as evidence that the Church is the spiritual Israel, or that Gentile believers become spiritual Jews" (ibid., 690-91).

[23] See Timothy George's excellent treatment of this passage in *Galatians,* NAC (Grand Rapids: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 428-41.

[24] Ibid., 429.

[25] Ibid.

personal greetings and intimate disclosures, Paul did not lose sight of his primary reason in writing this letter to the Galatians: to win them back from the brink of apostasy to a full-orbed faith in the one and only gospel of Jesus Christ, his Lord and theirs."[26]

Verse 11 begins abruptly, and emphasizes the fact that Paul wrote the epistle himself: "no one came between him and them, not even a secretary."[27] This does interject an autobiographical, personal element into Paul's closing. Verse 12 introduces once more the antithesis between circumcision and the cross, recalling "the great struggle between Paul and his Judaizing opponents."[28] This verse gives Paul's last warning against these antagonists, exposing the motive for their insistence upon circumcision as indispensable to salvation: they were trying to shield themselves from persecution.[29]

Verse 13 exposes the inconsistency of the Judaizers—οὐδὲ γὰρ, "not even they," keep the Law. Here again, Paul attributes an evil motive for their activity: "that they might glory over the circumcision of their converts."[30] In contrast to their boasting, Paul will boast in the cross of Christ alone (v. 14). "Paul's entire theology of justification is reflected in the way he used the word 'boast' in this context (vv. 13-14). On this side of forgiveness and new life, the only boasting permitted is that of the justified sinner who has surrendered the autonomy

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[26] Ibid.

[27] John Eadie, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1884; reprint, Minneapolis: James and Klock Christian Publishing co., 1977), 458.

[28] George, 429.

[29] Eadie, 459.

[30] Ibid., 464.

of the self to the lordship of Christ."[31] The cross of Christ becomes the line of demarcation between the Christian (represented by Paul) and the world.

In verse 15, Paul contrasts the new life effected through the cross of Christ, "a new creation" (καινὴ κτίσις), with the irrelevance of circumcision and uncircumcision. An earlier parallel in the letter occurs at 5:6, where Paul teaches that "in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love." Verse 15 reveals that only through the cross work of Christ, not through external rites and human works, is anyone made right with God. "Put otherwise, justification by faith is not a legal fiction but a living reality that manifests itself in the new creation."[32]

As he approaches the conclusion of the letter Paul appends a conditional benediction in verse 16: "And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them" (καὶ ὅσοι τῷ κανόνι τούτῳ στοιχήσουσιν, εἰρήνη ἐπ' αὐτοὺς καὶ ἔλεος). The rule (τῷ κανόνι) is that one plainly taught in verse 15, that what is outer is worthless, but what is inner is everything. The "new creation" of verse 15 is apparently the general rubric which summarizes Paul's principle of justification by faith.[33] Thus, this formal and restricted benediction is invoked "upon those members of the gospel Paul had originally preached among them."[34] This conditional blessing simultaneously inserts a threat against those who will not conform to Paul's rule, and hence fall under the conditional curse with which Paul opened the epistle (1:6-9). The Galatians are forced to make a choice: "On the one side of

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[31] George, 430.

[32] Ibid., 438.

[33] Ibid., 438-39.

[34] Ibid., 439.

that choice was the apostolic curse; on the other, the apostolic blessing."[35] Then the verse concludes by extending the benediction "upon the Israel of God" (ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ). The interpretation of this phrase turns upon the sense assigned to "and" (καὶ). As noted above, if καὶ is understood as explicative or appositional ("even"), then "those who will walk by this rule" (the church) are identical to "the Israel of God." Such an understanding makes the church the "new Israel," fortifying the position of covenant theology.

However, such an equation is incorrect for several important reasons. As S. Lewis Johnson argues, this view must resort to a secondary or lesser meaning of καὶ without justification.[36] This explicative sense is uncommon in Paul's writings. Therefore, since there are not strong contextual reasons to the contrary, the usual copulative translation ("and") must be retained.[37] Secondly, notes Johnson, if Paul had wanted to identity "those who will walk by this rule" as being "the Israel of God," the best way of showing this was to leave the καὶ out altogether. This he did not do.[38] Of highest importance, if "the Israel of God" refers to the church, this would be the *only* instance where Paul gives "Israel" this meaning. In

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[35] Ibid.

[36] S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., "Paul and 'The Israel of God': An Exegetical and Eschatological Case-Study," in *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost,* eds. Stanley D. Toussaint and Charles H. Dyer (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 187.

[37] Johnson writes: "in the absence of compelling exegetical and theological considerations, we should avoid the rarer grammatical usages when the common ones make good sense" (ibid.). Why do covenant theologians (like Gentry) translate differently? Johnson astutely observes: "Because the latter usage serves well the view that the term 'the Israel of God' is the church, the dogmatic concern overcame grammatical usage. An extremely rare usage has been made to replace the common usage, even in spite of the fact that the common and frequent usage of *and* makes perfectly good sense in Galatians 6:16" (ibid., 188).

[38] Ibid.

particular, he does not refer to a "new Israel" anywhere else in Galatians, or in Romans 9-11, where he deals most extensively with "Israel," or in his many writings penned after Galatians. This is inexplicable, since Galatians was one of Paul's earliest epistles, and if he believed the church was identical to the "Israel of God" at this early stage, "why do we not find evidence of this meaning in his many subsequent uses of the term 'Israel?' "[39] Lastly, the overall purpose and message of Galatians points to the conclusion that "the Israel of God" is a reference to the Jewish people, not the church. The message of Galatians is a defense not only of justification by faith alone, but "also of Paul's ministry of salvation to Gentiles as Gentiles."[40] That is, Paul taught the equal participation of Gentiles with Jews in the new messianic salvation which Christ brought, without those Gentiles becoming Jews or a part of Israel. For Paul to conclude the argument of Galatians by calling Gentiles "the Israel of God" would contradict the argumentation of the entire book. So who does this phrase refer to? In answer, it must be remembered that Paul is specifically addressing Gentile Christians throughout this epistle. All agree to this, since the recipients of the epistle had not yet been circumcised (see 5:2ff). In 6:16, he blesses these Gentile Christians, but then gives an additional blessing for Jewish believers as well. Saucy persuasively notes, "It is much more probable, in view of his strong condemnation of the Judaizers who sought to enslave the Gentile converts, that Paul sought to recognize also the validity of a true Israel," whether that be the "Jews in the church who were presently walking according to Paul's rule

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[39] Saucy, 199.

[40] Ibid., 201.

or to the 'all Israel' destined for eschatological salvation (Ro 11:26)," in either case a reference to Jewish people.[41]

The few disputed references to "Israel" in the New Testament lend no credence to the non-dispensational position that asserts that the church assumes the role of a "new Israel" or "spiritual Israel" in God's historical redemptive plan, superseding historic Israel.[42] In fact, such *replacement* theology is foreign to the New Testament, since historic Israel, though temporarily partially hardened, still has a future in God's salvific program, and therefore cannot be superseded by a new people of God (cf. Rom 11:25-26).[43]

This insurmountable conclusion is of course devastating for Gentry's postmillennialism. His argument that the church replaces Israel as the vehicle for socio-

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[41] Ibid. The best defense this writer has found of the view that Galatians 6:16 refers to Jews within the nation of Israel, who, although elect, had not yet come to faith in Christ, is that given by Hoch, 274-78.

[42] Despite the absence of explicit statements calling the church "Israel," non-dispensational scholars still uphold this supersession. Yet, application to the church of various terminology previously ascribed to Israel (e.g., "the circumcision," Phil 3:3) proves nothing more than that many aspects of Israel are applicable to the "people of God" in the church. The two entities nonetheless maintain distinct identities and roles, as noted above. John Feinburg lists four evidences for the church as a distinctive New Testament organism which began at Pentecost, and which, accordingly did not exist in any form in the Old Testament. 1) At salvation, a believer is baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13), an activity begun at Pentecost. 2) Believers are "in Christ," a phrase referring to their union with Christ, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This is a uniquely New Testament reality. 3) According to Eph 4:15 and Col 1:18, Christ is the head of the church, which He became upon His conquest of death through His resurrection and ascension (Eph 1:19-23, esp. vv. 22-23). Therefore, the church must be a New Testament organism. 4) Finally, 1 Cor 12 and Eph 4:11-12 teach that Christ gave spiritual gifts to the church through the Holy Spirit for the work of the ministry. Believers receive their gifts upon being saved and baptized into the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:11-13). But Eph 4:8 teaches that Christ did not bestow these gifts upon the church until His ascension, leading to the conclusion that the church did not exist until the New Testament. See Feinberg, 83-84.

[43] See argumentation to that effect below. Also see Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "Kingdom Promises as Spiritual and National," in *Continuity and Discontinuity,* 289-307.

political salvation accordingly crumbles, and he must further deal with all the implications of a fully-orbed future role for national, ethnic Israel. Israel cannot be redefined out of existence. Gentry faces other significant problems as well from his articulation of postmillennialism.

General Criticisms

First, it must be noted that Gentry's essay did not in any way defend the distinctives of *theonomic* postmillennialism. In fact, *eschatologically,* his position is indistinguishable from historic postmillennialism, since theonomy is not an eschatological issue. Therefore, theonomic postmillennialism is a fair target for all the arguments that have traditionally been leveled against postmillennialism.

Further, Gentry's section, "Theological Foundations of Postmillennialism" presents no doctrines that are unique to and distinctive of postmillennialism. All eschatological positions affirm God's creational purpose, sovereign power and blessed provision. Therefore, this section does nothing to advance his argument. Readers of his essay could only wish that Gentry had cut out this section and devoted more space to making his exegetical argument, which, as will be noted, is quite weak.

Gentry's next section, "The Redemptive-Historical Flow of Postmillennialism," is again so general that the distinctive, particular emphases of postmillennialism received no special affirmation. Not only that, but points of discussion within this section leave much to be desired. For example, the treatment of the Abrahamic Covenant shows an incredible disregard for Israel's central role in the promises of this foundational covenant. Gentry is so quick to relate this covenant to the church that he says nothing about Abraham's physical seed, national Israel. Dispensationalism's handling of the covenant is much more insightful

and accurate, and certain points from such treatments will be briefly explicated below to expose and correct the shortfalls of Gentry's discussion.

The Abrahamic Covenant Examined

God's purpose with Abraham began with God's gracious promises to him, which are attached to the call to separation (Gen 12:1-3). Those promises were later codified in a formal covenant agreement, and ratified by God alone (Gen 15:4-21), yet they form the substance of the Abrahamic covenant. Though God begins with promises and blessings for Abraham personally (he would be blessed, his name made great, he would be primogenitor of a great nation), there is more than this particularism to the promises. There are additional universal aspects, since God's purpose encompasses all the earth, which will be blessed through Abraham.

The covenant promises can be summarized under three essential elements: a seed, a land, and a blessing for all families of the earth.[44]

1. The Seed. The term *seed* is not found in the initial promises of Genesis 12:1-3, which instead promise the closely associated "great nation" from Abraham. The concept of "nation" in the Old Testament involves race, government, and territory.[45] Thus, argues Saucy, this term points not only to the physical nature of the seed that would come from Abraham, but also the political form which that seed would take. Genesis 12:7 does promise the land to Abraham's "seed." Thenceforth, "seed" takes precedence over "nation," and even becomes the predominant aspect of the promise. The promise of extensive progeny is stated

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[44] See Eugene H. Merrill, "A Theology of the Pentateuch," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 28-29.

[45] Ibid., 43.

again and again: Abraham's descendants would be "as the dust of the earth" (Gen 13:16), with God multiplying his seed "as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is on the seashore" (Gen 22:17; cf. 15:5).

The promise of a seed to Abraham was a continuation of the original promise of the *protevangelium* in Genesis 3:15, that spoke of a victorious seed of the woman that would conquer evil for all mankind (see Gal 3). Additional support for the physicality of the seed comes from the promise of descendants to Abraham "from your own body" (e.g., Gen 15:4). Yet this physical dimension does not tell the whole story, as the references to innumerable seed adumbrate the inclusion of others in the promise beyond those physically related to Abraham. In fact, the New Testament witness includes all who follow in the footsteps of Abraham's faith as "sons" of Abraham, whether Jew or Gentile (Rom 4:10-17; Gal 3:7-14). Yet this must in no way be construed as a denial of a continuing distinction for Israel in the New Testament:

> [T]he New Testament teaching of the inclusion of the Gentiles in the seed of Abraham is never related to the fulfillment of the promise of a "great nation" (Ge 12:2). Rather, it is always tied to the promise of universal blessing to all the nations (Gal 3:7-9). Thus the promises concerning the physical seed constituting the nation of Israel remain alongside this universal promise even as they did in the original statement in the Old Testament.[46]

2. The Land. This promise is at first only implied in Abraham's call to go to a land God would show him, and God's promise to make Abraham "a great nation," which carries with it a territorial component. Nonetheless, the promise is made explicit to Abraham in Genesis 12:7, after he reaches Canaan: "To your descendants I will give this land." The land was a necessary conjunctive to the promised seed, providing territory in which the "great

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[46] Saucy, 50.

nation" could exist and function. Further, the specific description of the land as "From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates" (Gen 15:18), showed that Canaan had become the locus of God's salvific plan through Abraham.[47]

The crucial fact that the land was promised eternally to Abraham as part of God's unilateral covenant must be noted:

> The land was promised as "an everlasting possession" for Abraham and his descendants (Ge 17:8; cf. 13:15). It is also mentioned in the context of the solemnizing of the covenant in Genesis 15 (cf. vv. 15-21). These statements demonstrate that the land promise cannot be singled out from the other aspects of the Abrahamic promise as only temporary or a type of something "spiritual" or "heavenly." According to the Old Testament, the land promise was absolutely essential to the theology of Israel.[48]

3. The Universal Blessing. Genesis 12:3 climaxes the divine promise to Abraham with its promise of blessing or cursing to the nations dependant on their response to Abraham's seed. This universalistic aspect is the goal of this covenantal arrangement, encompassing God's plan for the entire world. Through the personal promises to Abraham God aims to bring worldwide blessing. This underscores a mediatorial function for both Abraham and the chosen nation, as a vehicle through which God would dispense His gracious salvific blessings on fallen humanity. Saucy writes: "The people of Israel were

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[47] Merrill, 29.

[48] Saucy, 45. Merrill adds: "The biblical witness is that Israel is inconceivable without land, whether in historical or eschatological times" (ibid.) Tying seed and land together, Keith H. Essex writes: "if Abraham is to be a great nation, he must have numerous offspring who will occupy a certain land. Accordingly, the LORD promised Abraham a multitude of Descendants (Gen 13:16; 15:5; 17:2, 4-6; 22:17a) who would receive the land of Canaan (Gen 13:14-15; 17; 15:18-21; 17:8)." See Keith H. Essex, "The Abrahamic Covenant," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 10 (1999): 208.

called to be a channel of God's grace to all peoples."[49] The promises of God to Israel as made to Abraham still belong to the people of Israel according to the apostle Paul (Rom 9:4), argues Saucy, since "God's 'gifts and his call,' which refer to Israel's special place in salvation history, are 'irrevocable' (Rom 11:29)."[50]

These promises to Israel have not been cancelled and reapplied to the church as a "New Israel":

> These blessings promised to Israel are nowhere reinterpreted as presently belonging to the church. The fact that the promises remain in force anticipates their future fulfillment. Thus, while there is in the present salvation in Christ a partial fulfillment of the spiritual blessing promised to all people through Abraham and his seed, many aspects of the promise remain to be fulfilled, especially those dealing with the "great nation" seed and the "land," but also the final inheritance of spiritual salvation.[51]

The dispensational understanding of the Abrahamic covenant argues strongly for discontinuity between Israel and the church, allowing for an important future role for national Israel. Gentry's postmillennial understanding of this covenant is accordingly quite unsatisfactory and greatly mistaken in its devaluation of Israel's significance in redemptive history. And, as noted below, Gentry's treatment of the other major biblical covenants is equally inadequate.

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[49] Saucy, 46.

[50] Ibid., 58.

[51] Ibid. See also the superb treatment of the Abrahamic Covenant, which reaches similar conclusions regarding national Israel's prominence in its future fulfillment, by Robert B. Chisholm, "Evidence from Genesis," in *The Coming Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1997), 35-54. See also Craig A. Blaising, "The Structure of the Biblical Covenants: The Covenants Prior to Christ," in *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 128-73.

Gentry's Postmillennialism and the Other Major Covenants

First, it must be noted that Gentry fails in his essay to even mention the Davidic Covenant.[52] This is a striking absence, since he argues elsewhere for the current reign of Christ. Surely some correlation should be expected from him in his essay. His citing of space restrictions is an unacceptable excuse, given the frivolous points he makes earlier in the essay, which could have easily been removed in favor of weightier matters. Secondly, regarding the covenants, it is also surprising that he does not give special treatment to the Mosaic Covenant. Certainly the significance of this covenant should be underscored by a *theonomist* of all people, and its relevance for Gentry's eschatology should have been articulated (since he is a *theonomic* postmillennialist). Lastly, his discussion of the new covenant was again reductionistic, completely failing to accord to Israel the significant role she plays as the primary party with whom the covenant is made! His postmillennial case again is seen to be palpably weak.

On the other hand, Gentry fails to take into account the *material* blessings of the new covenant, which accompany the spiritual provisions (see, e.g., Jer 31-33; Ezek 11:16-19; 36:8-12, 24-38). Further, it must be emphasized that nowhere in the New Testament are any of these new covenant material provisions applied to the church, even by way of "reinterpretation," which would be expected if the church is a new "spiritual Israel." Therefore, the church is *not* fulfilling the new covenant in the place of Israel, and these

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[52] The Davidic Covenant receives scant attention in *He Shall Have Dominion,* and no mention in *House Divided*, as the subject indexes reveal.

material blessings remain unfulfilled. The promise of God's future dealings with Israel (see Rom 9-11) gives assurance that the promises for this nation will yet be fulfilled.[53]

Exegetical Evidence for Postmillennialism Examined

Moving on from Gentry's "The Redemptive-Historical Flow of Postmillennialism" in his essay, the reader encounters his exegetical evidence offered in defense of postmillennialism. Although he claims that numerous passages from both Testaments support postmillennialism, he cites space constraints in only highlighting a few. Gentry's first exegetical stop, his discussion of assorted messianic psalms, is so general as to offer no support for postmillennialism. He does devote more than three pages to Psalm 2, however.

Psalm 2

Psalm 2 is classified as a *royal* psalm, since its subject concerns the anointing and coronation of a Davidic king.[54] There is no general agreement on the historical context of the psalm, though it "reflects the period of the Davidic-Solomon empire when many of the surrounding vassal nations must have sought to free themselves from Israelite rule."[55] The text offers little support for any attempt to tie the psalm with an actual coronation of a Judean king.[56] It is best to read the psalm, with the other royal psalms, as a development of the

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[53] See Kaiser, "Kingdom Promises as Spiritual and National," 289-307.

[54] Willem A. VanGemeren, "Psalms," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary,* ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 5:64.

[55] Robert B. Chishom, Jr., "A Theology of the Psalms," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, 269.

[56] Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, WBC (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1983), 65.

Davidic covenant.[57] This psalm has its roots in the promise to David (2 Sam 7:5-16), a fact that Gentry either completely overlooks or ignores.

The psalm is composed of four easily recognizable divisions, which demonstrate good movement from beginning to end: (1) the rebellious nations on earth (vv. 1-3); (2) God in heaven (vv. 4-6); (3) the Lord's decree regarding the king (vv. 7-9); and (4) the anointed king on earth (vv. 10-12).[58] In the first division (vv. 1-3), the nations rebel by outrightly rejecting the Davidic king. This subversion is against YHWH and His Anointed. Yet YHWH haw already promised to establish the Davidic throne forever (1 Sam 7:13,16). Therefore, YHWH laughs and scoffs at these insubordinate kings and rulers, emphasizing that despite the opposition, His decree stands. He has installed His anointed king (vv. 4-6).

Gentry has great trouble with the installation "on Zion." Through nearly comical exegetical gymnastics, earthly Zion becomes heavenly Jerusalem, as Gentry reads the New Testament back into this context in a way that violently displaces authorial intent. His failure to note the centrality of the Davidic covenant to this psalm leads him astray. As a point of fact, God's "gracious consecration of Zion [earthly Jerusalem] as his dwelling place was part of the promise to establish the Davidic dynasty (2 Sam 7:5-16)."[59] The Davidic king ruled in Jerusalem, or Zion, on earth. It is there that Solomon built the temple, in fulfillment of God's promise to David that his son "shall build a house for My name" (2 Sam 7:13). Jerusalem was God's chosen dwelling place, where He elected to establish His name (Ps 132; Deut

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[57] Darrell L. Bock, "Covenants in Progressive Dispensationalism," in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism,* ed. Herbert W. Bateman IV (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999), 185.

[58] Following VanGemeren, 64.

[59] Ibid., 69.

12:14, 18; 14:23, 15:20). As the city of God, God had sanctified the location by His presence, making it His "holy mountain" (v. 6; cf. Ps 48:1-2). Further, in conjunction with Psalm 2, the prophets looked for the day when a Davidic king would rule Israel and Judah *from Jerusalem* (Isa 9:2-7; Jer 23:5-6; 33:14-16; Ezek 34:23-24; 37:24-28; Hos 3:5), and the nations would be subject to him (Isa 11:10; Mic 4:1-5).[60] Such a day best finds fulfillment in the millennial kingdom, not in a current theocratic rule of Christ from heaven, as Gentry asserts.[61]

In verses 7-9, the psalm's third division, the divinely appointed king recounts YHWH's decree, "publicly proclaiming his own relationship with God."[62] God is the Davidic king's "father." Here is YHWH's son proclaimed by decree (v. 7). As Bock notes, "The reference to decree refers to an article of covenant."[63] Again the Davidic Covenant is the backdrop to this psalm, as 2 Samuel 7:14 makes clear: "I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me." Psalm 89:20-28 also speaks of this father/son relationship inherent in the Davidic Covenant, with the Davidic king particularly highlighted as son in verse 26: "He will cry to Me, 'Thou art my Father, My God, and the rock of my salvation.' " In Psalm 2, this relationship is confirmed at the moment of coronation: "Today I have begotten Thee."[64]

Verse 8 continues to interpret God's covenant with David, properly extending David's rule to the ends of the earth. The Davidic king will receive the nations as an

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[60] Ibid., 67.

[61] Gentry, "Postmillennialism," 35.

[62] VanGemeren, 69.

[63] Bock, 184.

[64] VanGemeren, 70.

inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as his possession (Ps 72:8—a rule "from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth"). This ruler will usher in the era of peace and prosperity spoken of by the prophets (Isa 2:2-4; 4:1-6; 9:6-7; 11:1-16; Jer 33:14-26; Ezek 37:24-28; Mic 4:1-5; Zech 9:9-10:1).[65] Gentry badly misreads this psalm, to the point of dishonesty, when he relates verse 8 to Christ's Great Commission and the "securing" of the nations by Christ's followers.[66]

But Gentry's position becomes even more untenable in light of verse 9. YHWH's Davidic king will break the nations with a rod of iron, and shatter them like earthenware. "The rule of God's messiah brings stability, even if he has to use force. The Lord's king has power to smash all opposition to his rule. His sovereignty may be expressed as an 'iron rule' in which rebels are crushed like fragile clay vessels (cf. Jer 19:11)."[67] The problem this presents to Gentry's postmillennial interpretation is succinctly stated by Craig A. Blaising: "Gentry does not do well, however, in explaining how the themes of rebellion and subjugation by force in this psalm find their fulfillment at this time. Is the preaching of the gospel the fulfillment of dashing to pieces those who refuse to submit to him [Christ] (cf. Ps. 2:9)?"[68] Clearly not.

A brief look at the application of this psalm in the New Testament to various phases of Christ's ministry will be most instructive. First, at the baptism of Christ, the Father

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[65] Ibid.

[66] Gentry, "Postmillennialism," 35.

[67] VanGemeren, 70.

[68] Craig A. Blaising, "A Premillennial Response to Kenneth L. Gentry Jr.," in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 76.

alludes to Psalm 2:7. "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased" (Matt 3:17; cf. Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22). Further, the words of verse 7 are especially applicable to the resurrected and ascended Christ who sits at the Father's right hand (Acts 13:33; Heb 1:5; 5:5). Psalm 2:1-2 is quoted and applied in Acts 4:25-28 to the opposition of Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles and the people of Israel to Christ, leading to His crucifixion. "These are inaugurated aspects of the eschatological kingdom, which are manifest in the interadvent period."[69] But what Gentry fails to mention is the New Testament application of Psalm 2 to Christ's Second Coming.

Revelation 19:15 describes the return of Jesus Christ, at which time He smites the nations, and proceeds to "rule them with a rod of iron," a clear allusion to Psalm 2:9.[70] Blaising further supports this identification:

> Paul's description of the Second Coming in 2 Thessalonians 1:6-12 reinforces this image. Matthew 25:31-46 also presents Christ as ruling and judging the nations from an enthroned position after his return. These texts see the final fulfillment of Psalm 2's regal language in a kingdom that ensues from that Second Coming.[71]

Psalm 2, then, provides an insurmountable problem for Gentry's postmillennial system. He cannot properly fit all of the psalm's language into the church age. Instead, Psalm 2 offers strong support for a millennial reign of Christ over the nations based in Jerusalem, as dispensationalists contend.

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[69] Ibid.

[70] Robert L. Thomas writes, "The Old Testament allusion is, of course, to the warrior-Messiah prophesied in Ps. 2:9" (*Revelation 8-22* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1995], 389).

[71] Blaising, 76.

Isaiah 2:2-4

Next, Gentry travels to Isaiah 2:2-4. Several points need to be made about this significant passage. First, Gentry's understanding of the "last days" as being the interadvent period is based on New Testament usage, and accords too great a time specificity to the Isaiah passage.[72] The phrase here can be viewed as an introduction to an eschatological prophecy, and points to a future affected by God's breaking in on the direction of history, according to John H. Sailhamer.[73] Sailhamer contends that there are several features of this passage that suggest the vision was meant to be taken *literally* and *physically*: "that is, that Isaiah is here looking forward to the physical restoration of Jerusalem and reign of the Messiah on earth in the 'last days.' "[74]

These indicators are: 1) The literary genre. Although Isaiah 2:2-4 is for the most part a poetic text, it is much less poetic than its duplicate in Micah 4:1-3. Ostensible poetic features of the vision have become narration in Isaiah, leading to the conclusion that the passage within its context should be understood more as narrative than poetry; hence, from the standpoint of genre, it is more realistic than figurative, and should be read as referring to Jerusalem's future literal restoration. 2) The literary context. The passage's description is to be understood as a literal reference to the actual temple in Jerusalem for two reasons. First, Micah 4 refers literally to the temple's reestablishment in Jerusalem. Second, a similar

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[72] See J. Randall Price's discussion of the "latter days" in Old Testament usage, in "Old Testament Tribulation Terms," in *The Return* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999), 34-36.

[73] John H. Sailhamer, "Evidence from Isaiah 2," in *The Coming Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1997), 85-86.

[74] Ibid., 95.

context is found in Isaiah's vision. Isaiah 1 refers to the literal city of Jerusalem in its visions of destruction. Therefore, "There is no reason to suppose that the prophets' description of Israel's future restoration was any less concrete than their description of Israel's destruction."[75] 3) The literary type. Though the form of the Micah and Isaiah visions are poetic, the above noted observations show that they refer literally to historical entities. In fact, Micah's poetic words in 3:12 ("Zion will be plowed as a field"), as quoted in Jeremiah 26:18-19, and their application "show that they referred literally to the city of Jerusalem."[76] Though figurative language is used in Isaiah 2:2-5, this does not permit the interpreter to give a figurative *explanation* to the vision and apply it to the church in this age (contra Gentry). The exegetical stance that reads New Testament content back into Isaiah's words is unacceptable. Rather, the original intention of the prophet as expressed in the book of Isaiah itself must be the starting point.

Tellingly, Sailhamer concludes:

> Taking such a starting point, we have attempted to show that Isaiah's visions of the future looked to a time when the Davidic kingship would be restored in Jerusalem and the Messiah would reign over that kingdom and rule all the nations of the world. In other words, they look to a time that fits remarkably well with John's vision of the earthly reign of Christ in Revelation 20. Taken at face value Isaiah's visions appear to speak of a literal fulfillment in Jerusalem itself and thus are not easily pressed into a reference to the establishment of the church.[77]

In light of the above, Gentry's replacement theology is misguided in its interpretation of this passage, offering little more than bold dogmatism and argumentation by assertion. Rather, Isaiah 2 refers to the Messiah's future Davidic reign in Jerusalem over all the nations, with a

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[75] Ibid., 97.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Ibid., 101.

unique role for Israel (not the church) as the vehicle through which socio-political transformation and salvation will occur. The time frame comports best with the millennial period as a precursor to the eternal state.[78]

Matthew 13

Having considered Gentry's alleged Old Testament exegetical support for postmillennialism, his New Testament evidence may now be considered. As is typical for postmillennialists, Gentry claims support for his eschatological understanding from Matthew 13's kingdom parables. He badly misinterprets the parable of the sower, since, contrary to his exposition, it is not the seed but the soils which represent people in their responses to the gospel; the seed represents "the word of the kingdom" (13:18-23). Cranfield writes, in this regard:

> The feature which is emphasized is the fact of the differences of soil. This is the point at which the hearers are challenged to take action: they are summoned to ask themselves which sort of ground they are. The parable indicates the situation of the hearers in the face of the message of the kingdom of God and challenges them to hear the message aright. It is a parable about hearing the Word of God. That is why it is given such prominence—put first in the collection of parables and framed by appeals to attentive hearing. It is in a sense basic to all the other parables, as v. 13 hints.[79]

The bountiful harvest does not represent a great number of people becoming Christians, but rather is the fruitbearing of those converted by the word.[80] Further, "if the parable of the

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[78] Ibid., 100-02.

[79] C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 151.

[80] See D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Gospel of Mark* (Greenville, S.C.: Bob Jones University Press, 1994), 114.

soils represents how gospel preaching will be received in this age, then it shows that only about one in four truly respond—not good news for a postmillennialist."[81]

As noted above, Gentry gives very little attention to the parables of the weeds (Matt 13:24-30, 36-43) and the net (13:47-50). Therefore, a brief response will suffice. The parable of the wheat and the weeds does not support postmillennialism, for Jesus speaks of both wheat and weeds growing together until the harvest.[82] So with the parable of the net—no hint is given of a disproportionately larger righteous element in the world; rather, an admixture of righteous and unrighteous is clear.[83] Neither parable offers any support to Gentry's "optimistic gradualism."[84]

Gentry does devote relatively more space to the parable of the leaven (Matt 13:33-15). He understands this parable to speak of the "intensive penetration" of the kingdom, which will thoroughly suffuse itself in the whole world, a complement to the parable of the mustard seed which teaches the kingdom's "extensive expansion."[85] Several points must be offered in response. First, Gentry errs when he states that yeast symbolizes the kingdom of

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[81] Blaising, "A Premillennial Response to Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr.," 77.

[82] Blaising writes, "We must note that in the parable of the wheat and the weeds, the Lord speaks of transition between two phases of the kingdom at his coming. In Matthew 13:41, tares are gathered out of his kingdom at the coming of the Lord. Then, in 13:43, the wheat goes on to shine forth in the kingdom of their Father. The first phase of kingdom speaks of interadvent conditions—both good and evil will be present. There will be no new phase of the kingdom, certainly not one in which the devil's activity of sowing tares has ceased, until Christ returns." (Blaising, 77).

[83] See Charles L. Feinberg, *Millennialism: The Two Major Views* (Winona Lake, Ind.: BMH Books, 1980), 136-37.

[84] Gentry, "Postmillennialism," 39.

[85] Gentry, "Postmillennialism," 40-41.

heaven. It is important to note that in the kingdom parables, the kingdom is not being compared to the first object in each story. Instead, the *whole story* illustrates some new aspect of the kingdom.[86]

Hence, in the parable of the weeds, the object that "the kingdom of heaven is like" (or, "may be compared to") is "a man who sowed good seed" (Matt 13:24). But Jesus explains later that He Himself is the man (13:37; "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man"). In the parable of the merchant seeking fine pearls (Matt 13:45-46), the kingdom certainly must not be equated with the merchant. Nor should it be equated with the dragnet in the parable of the net (Matt 13:47). So with the parable of the leaven: the entire story of the woman hiding leaven in three measures of meal until it was all leavened serves to teach some new aspect of the kingdom. Jesus is not teaching that the kingdom is symbolized by the yeast.

Because Gentry equates the kingdom with yeast, he cannot allow for the possibility that yeast represents evil in the parable. He correctly notes that yeast does not always represent evil in Scripture, for it is found in God-ordained offerings in Leviticus 7:13, 23:17, and Amos 4:5. But that is not the total picture. It is more accurate to state that in the Old Testament "leaven" is never used in a symbolic way, but in the New Testament, leaven becomes a symbol for pervading evil influence.[87] This is seen in a number of passages: Matthew 16:6-12; Mark 8:14-21; Luke 12:1; 1 Corinthians 5:6-8; and Galatians 5:7-10.

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[86] See Frank Pass, "Mysteries of the Kingdom: A Study of Four Uninterpreted Parables in Matthew 13" (Master of Theology thesis, The Master's Seminary, 2001), 86.

[87] Ibid., 87-88.

In the absence of even one New Testament passage that uses leaven symbolically to represent moral good, the leaven in Matthew 13:33 should be understood as a symbol for *moral evil* which diffuses itself throughout its host from within. Further, in Luke 13:20-21, Jesus gives the parable in a context of opposition by a synagogue leader (Luke 13:14), following a rebuke of the Pharisees for their hypocrisy in Luke 11, and a warning against the "leaven of the Pharisees" in Luke 12:1. Such a context would naturally lead to the understanding of the leaven in the meal as an evil, diffusing influence.

It must be concluded, then, that the parable of the leaven teaches that evil will initially be of small proportion in the kingdom, but will eventually grow to permeate it entirely. The parable emphasizes the growth and pervasiveness of that evil, whether it takes the form of false doctrine, hypocrisy, or some other apostasy.[88] The parables of the wheat and tares, and the net described the presence of evil in the kingdom until its separation at the end. The parable of the leaven comports well with these other two, but expands their teaching by depicting evil as a penetrative force which increasingly diffuses itself throughout the whole kingdom.

This kingdom teaching is consonant with the end-time scenario painted by the rest of the New Testament. The Olivet Discourse describes events at the end of the kingdom age as marked by false teachers, apostasy, hatred and treachery (Matt 24:1-13). The epistles also teach that as the present age progresses, conditions will spiritually deteriorate, not improve (1 Tim 4:1-3; 2 Tim 3:1-13; Jude; 2 Pet 3:3-5). "This growing evil influence will culminate in

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[88] Ibid., 85.

the false religious system of Revelation 13, a worldwide system led by the counterfeit trinity of Satan, the false Christ, and the beast."[89]

The correct understanding of the parable of the leaven is disastrous to Gentry's postmillennial system. This parable does not teach that "evil will be reduced to negligible proportions,"[90] but just the opposite. The visible kingdom, which will include "stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness" (Matt 13:41) until the Second Advent, will also be marked by the increasing penetration of evil. Only Christ's return in judgment will bring in the eschatological kingdom in its glorious millennial form.

Matthew 28:18-20

Gentry next turns to Matthew 28:18-20, which does proclaim Christ's post-resurrection "all authority," and His Great Commission to the church to disciple the nations under His universal authority. But though Christ promises to be with His church until the end of the age, He does not promise that the nations will be thoroughly discipled before His return.[91] Gentry merely asserts (and inserts) his postmillennialism in discussing this passage, without proving his case exegetically.

1 Corinthians 15:20-28

Gentry's handling of 1 Corinthians 15:20-28 represents more of a sustained exegetical argument for his position, and his confidence is higher here, stating this passage

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[89] Ibid., 89.

[90] Gentry, "Postmillennialism," 44.

[91] See the critique of Reconstructionists' understanding of the Great Commission (including Kenneth Gentry's) by H. Wayne House and Thomas Ice, in *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1988), 150-61.

"virtually demands a postmillennial interpretation," as was noted earlier. Unfortunately for Gentry's position, Saucy argues more persuasively that this passage best fits, rather, within a premillennial eschatological framework, and demonstrates the specious nature of argumentation like Gentry's on this passage. [92]

Saucy notes first that the passage describes the resurrection according to a sequence of events with intervals of time between them. Paul writes that "in Christ all shall be made alive" (v. 22), but then clarifies that they come to life "each in his own order: Christ. . . after that [ἔπειτα, the next stage in the sequence] those who are Christ's at His coming, then [εἶτα, the next stage in the sequence] comes the end" (vv. 23-24a). These closely related Greek words (ἔπειτα, εἶτα) both introduce events that are sequential in time, as seen in their earlier use in the chapter. In verses 5-7, Paul writes that Christ "appeared to Cephas, then [εἶτα] to the twelve. After that [ἔπειτα] He appeared to more than five hundred. . . then [ἔπειτα] He appeared to James, then [εἶτα] to all the apostles." Saucy summarizes: "Although the durations vary, in each instance there is an interval of time expressed by these adverbs"[93]

This means that Gentry makes a significant exegetical mistake when he writes that "according to Paul, Christ's coming marks 'the end.' "[94] Paul's language instead reveals that the end, when Christ delivers the kingdom to the Father, is separated from the coming of Christ by an interval of time just as His coming is separated from His resurrection in the beginning of the sequential order. Had Paul wanted to say that the end occurred at the

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[92] Saucy, 280-85. See the ἔπειτα/εἶτα discussion also in D. Edmund Hiebert's "Evidence from 1 Corinthians 15," in *The Coming Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1997), 230.

[93] Ibid., 281.

[94] Gentry, "Postmillennialism," 48.

coming of Christ, he could have easily used another adverb (τότε, meaning "at that time").[95] How long a time will pass between the second and third stages is unknown, but nearly two thousand years have already occurred between the first and second stages. Thus, an interval of time between the coming of Christ and the end, though not proving a millennium, hints in that direction, and certainly does not exclude such a millennial period.[96]

But there is additional evidence for a millennium. It can be agreed with Gentry that Christ "must reign until he has put all His enemies under His feet" (v. 25), with that goal being accomplished by the time of "the end" (v. 24), at which time Christ "delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father" (v. 24) and is Himself made subject to the Father, "that God may be all in all" (v. 28). This reign of Christ and its transfer to the Father at the end marks the completion of the Messiah's work of redemption.

But since this is so, the "end" marking the completion of Christ's reign cannot be simultaneous with His second coming for the following reasons, as argued by Saucy:[97]

1. This would mean not only that Christ's kingdom is established now and He is presently reigning, but that this is also the *only* age in which He will reign over His "messianic kingdom."

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[95] F. L. Godet writes, "The εἶτα, *then,* does not allow us to identify the time of the τέλος, *the end,* with that of the Advent. Paul would have required to say in that sense τότε, *at that time,* not εἶτα, *then* or *thereafter.* The εἶτα implies, in the mind of the apostle, a longer or shorter interval between the Advent and what he calls *the end.*" See F. L. Godet, *Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1977), 785.

[96] See Blaising, "The Kingdom of God in the New Testament," 273.

[97] Saucy, 282-84.

2. But the New Testament nowhere else teaches that Christ is presently exercising messianic kingship in actually "reigning" over His enemies. In fact, the New Testament argues for a future kingdom with Christ commencing the actual exercising of His kingship at the parousia, not during the present age.[98]

3. Further, the Scriptures promise that the saints will reign with Christ in His kingdom (cf. Dan 7:27; 2 Tim 2:12; Rev 3:21; 5:10; 20:4-5; cf. also Matt 19:28; Luke 22:30; 1 Cor 6:1-3). Yet this reign is always seen as future in the New Testament, with this age excluded as the time of their reign (cf. 1 Cor 4:8). If Christ hands over the kingdom to the Father at His second coming, the co-reign of believers would have to be confined to either the eternal state, or to a brief role in the final judgment. Both of these options do not do justice to God's purpose for mankind to rule the earth in righteousness for Him.

4. "When we apply this to Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 15, we reach the conclusion that the only possible place for this reign is during an interval between the coming of Christ and the 'end.' "[99] This interval argues for a millennium. To conclude, 1 Corinthians 15, contrary to Gentry's exposition, provides positive proof for the dispensational position, and makes room for a future special role for national Israel to be distinguished from the current role of the church.

Revelation 20

The last passage Gentry covers in making his exegetical case in his essay is Revelation 20. The great importance of this passage for eschatology is only matched by the

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[98] See Saucy's fourth chapter for a fuller discussion and argumentation for the futurity of the kingdom, which is beyond the scope of this paper.

[99] Ibid., 284.

bareness of understanding evidenced by Gentry. Blaising speaks for others when he writes, "I find Gentry's treatment of Revelation 20 the most disappointing part of his article."[100] Traditionally postmillennialists have built their primary case from this chapter,[101] yet Gentry would rather leave it out of his discussion entirely, and addresses it only "reluctantly." He faults the premillennial system for oddly only being able to point to this one passage for the thousand years of the millennium. But Robert B. Strimple is surely right on target when he responds, "I would suggest that it is even more odd that the postmillennialist Millennium does not appear even in that one millennial passage!"[102] As Blaising notes,

> Gentry has a "Millennium," but he doesn't call it a millennium, nor does he relate it to John's millennial vision. He follows a traditional Amillennial interpretation of relating Revelation 20:1-6 to the interadvent age. However, this leaves him without any textual basis for *a period in the future of the interadvent age in which kingdom conditions will attain to a systemic and universal level not yet seen.* As will be noted below, none of the texts he advances unequivocally supports this view, and by taking an Amillennial interpretation of Revelation 20, he has eliminated what older postmillennialists believed was their anchor text.[103]

A dispensational response can be satisfactorily made to each of the seven points listed earlier to summarize Gentry's position on Revelation 20.

1) First, that Revelation is "highly symbolic" does not give justification for rejecting what it teaches when that teaching can be discovered through normal grammatical-historical

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[100] Blaising, "A Premillennial Response to Kenneth L. Gentry Jr.," 79.

[101] See Grenz, 72.

[102] Robert B. Strimple, "An Amillennial Response to Kenneth L. Gentry Jr.," in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 70.

[103] Blaising, 73. Emphasis his.

exegesis. Further, Charles L. Feinberg responds to those writers (including Gentry) who seek to attribute obscurity to this book and passage:

> First, the part of Revelation 20:1-10 in the book of Revelation is only an obscure one when it is so treated by those who do not understand its true meaning. Interpretations of the passage, erroneous and groundless, render it obscure, but it is not so in itself. Furthermore, it must be stated emphatically that the book of Revelation is not an obscure book. On the contrary, the book is distinctly declared to be a revelation, an unveiling, a disclosure.[104]

2) Finding non-literal elements in this passage is no justification for taking the thousand years as symbolic. In fact, as Robert L. Thomas argues, "no number in Revelation is verifiably a symbolic number. On the other hand, non-symbolic usage of number is the rule."[105] Thomas explains:

> It requires multiplication of a literal 12,000 by a literal twelve to come up with 144,000 in 7:4-8. The churches, seals, trumpets, and bowls are all literally seven in number. The three unclean spirits of 16:13 are actually three in number. The three angels connected with the three last woes (8:13) add up to a total of three. The seven last plagues amount to exactly seven. The equivalency of 1,260 days and three and a half years necessitate a nonsymbolic understanding of both numbers. The twelve apostles and the twelve tribes of Israel are literally twelve (21:12-14). The seven churches are in seven literal cities. Yet confirmation of a single number in Revelation as symbolic is impossible.[106]

The number one thousand appears six times in Revelation 20, with no contextual evidence present to indicate that it is not literal. Thomas adds, "It is doubtful that any symbolic number, if there be such, is ever repeated that many times."[107] Harold W. Hoehner

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[104] Charles L. Feinberg, 312.

[105] Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8-22* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 408.

[106] Ibid., 408-09.

[107] Ibid., 409.

gives other reasons to take the thousand years literally.[108] First, every other reference to a time period in Revelation is to be taken literally, like days (1:10; 2:10, 13; 4:8; 6:17; 7:15; 8:12; 9:6, 15; 10:7; 11:3, 6, 9, 11; 12:6, 10; 14:11; 16:14; 18:8; 20:10; 21:25) or months (9:5, 10, 15; 11:2; 13:5; 22:2). There is no reason to not make the same application for years. Second, the thousand years contextually denote a *definite* period of time, since John describes Satan's release from the abyss by the indefinite phrase "a short time" (20:3). Therefore, "John uses in the same verse definite terms for a definite period of time and indefinite terms for an indefinite period of time. Therefore, the 1,000 years are to be taken literally."[109]

But what of the standard objection to a literal thousand years in Revelation 20 based on 2 Peter 3:8, where one thousand years is equated with one day? "But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." Two points must be made in response. a) There is no connection between this passage and Revelation 20. b) The reference in 2 Peter 3 "depends on the literal meaning of 1,000 years in that 1,000 years with men is like one day from God's eternal viewpoint."[110]

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[108] See Harold W. Hoehner, "Evidence from Revelation 20," in *The Coming Millennial Kingdom* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 249-50.

[109] Ibid., 249. Walvoord also notes that wherever the term "thousand" is used in combination with numbers elsewhere in the New Testament, "there is no proof whatever that other than the literal sense is intended." See John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), 285.

[110] Hoehner, 249.

3) Saucy[111] gives three arguments to show that the thousand years refer to a *future* millennial phase of the kingdom after the second coming of Christ (which rules out Gentry's view that it refers to the kingdom that Christ established with His first coming). First, the passage teaches two *physical* resurrections (based on contextual factors, and the overwhelming use of the Greek terms for "resurrection"). The mention of two resurrections with a thousand years in between, together with the reference to the participants in the first resurrection as reigning with Christ, teaches a millennial period after Christ's second coming, when the first resurrection occurs. Second, the binding of Satan for a thousand years cannot be harmonized with the New Testament teaching on his current activity, and the language of this passage argues for his complete removal from the earth, all pointing to a future millennial period. Third, the reign of the saints with Christ for a thousand years also argues for a future millennium since there is no biblical evidence for the saints reigning anywhere at present.

4) Gentry argues that the angel who binds Satan is Christ Himself, but Revelation presents Christ rather as the Lord who communicates *by* His angel, and never calls Him an angel.[112]

5) The passage says nothing about the "increasing" nature of Satan's binding, taking place throughout this age, but of his total removal from the earth until the millennium ends.[113]

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[111] Saucy, 274-80.

[112] See Thomas, 405-06.

[113] Ibid., 405.

6) The first resurrection is physical, and does not refer to spiritual regeneration, as Saucy rightly argues. Against Gentry, Blaising adds: "His claim that the word "resurrection" means spiritual rebirth is without contextual support in the Bible and leaves the book of Revelation without any clear statement on the actual resurrection of believers."[114]

7) The saints do *not* presently reign with Christ, as noted above, and in the discussion of 1 Corinthians 15.

Overall, Gentry's exegetical case has completely failed to prove postmillennialism. The third section of Gentry's essay, "Exegetical Evidence for Postmillennialism," suffers from the fact that all he gives is implication and inference that "provides for the postmillennial hope," or which "undergirds and illustrates this glorious expectation," but not hard evidence. Such is the case with his books as well. His argumentation is deeply flawed in that it does not demonstrate how the Scriptures *directly* teach and prove postmillennialism itself. Premillennialist Samuel Henry Kellogg gave a devastating critique along this line of the postmillennialism of his day in the late 1800s. Writing against postmillennial optimism, he states:

> We wish to inquire,--what light do the Scriptures give on this question? In the first place, and, negatively, we cannot find in the Bible a single declaration that the predicted age of Gospel triumph will come *before* the advent. The assertion of this doctrine rests, at the best, only on human inference from the Scriptures, and on no direct teaching of the word to that effect.[115]

Simply stated, Scriptural proof of postmillennialism is non-existent. Other flaws in Gentry's postmillennialism could also be mentioned:

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[114] Blaising, 80.

[115] Samuel Henry Kellogg, *Are Premillennialists Right?* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1923), 54.

1. Gentry's postmillennialism offers a misdirected hope. He looks ahead to a golden era of peace on earth, in which evil is "reduced to negligible proportions." But the New Testament expectation calls us to fix our hope completely on the return of Christ (e.g., 1 Pet 1:13).

2. Given Gentry's emphasis on the glorious provisions of God for the church, guaranteeing her evangelistic success, one is justified in asking for evidence of that success over the last 2000 years of church history. But Gentry argues that the Christian ought not use past historical factors to prejudge the prospects for future gospel success. Yet, is Christ not reigning now, according to Gentry, powerfully enabling His church? Has He not been doing so for 2000 years? Then, should we not be able to see evidence of the gradual advance of the kingdom which, Gentry assures us, will continue to progress until it reaches worldwide conditions?

3. Picking up on this last point, given the gradual growth of the kingdom that Gentry espouses, should we not be able to examine areas where the gospel has gone and see over time greater Christlikeness, greater cultural, societal, economic and political progress? In fact, those countries that first received the gospel should be nearly Christianized by now, given the nature of Gentry's theory of the growth of the interadvent kingdom.

Conclusion

This chapter first critiqued Gentry's failure to comprehend adequately Israel in her fully orbed past and future roles. His replacement theology was rejected, and the proper distinctions between Israel and the church were maintained. A few disputed passages to which non-dispensationalists appeal in identifying the church as the "New Israel" were evaluated and found to offer no support to covenant theology. Next, Gentry's mishandling of

the major covenants was revealed, and the Abrahamic Covenant in particular was re-examined. This covenant requires a significant future role for Israel, as do the Davidic and New Covenants. Their material blessings to Israel cannot be reinterpreted or reapplied to the church.

The major part of this chapter concerned an examination of Gentry's exegetical evidence offered in support of postmillennialism. Psalm 2, as an amplification of the Davidic Covenant, cannot properly be fit into the church age. Rather, it offers strong evidence for the millennial reign of Christ. Isaiah 2:2-4 refers to the Messiah's future reign in Jerusalem over all the nations of the world, comporting best with a millennial period as a precursor to the eternal state. Further, this passage upholds a special role for Israel (not the church) as the unique nation through which socio-political transformation will occur.

Regarding New Testament passages cited by Gentry, Matthew 13 received attention with its kingdom parables. Gentry missed the point of the parable of the sower, and the parables of the wheat and the weeds, and the net, offered no support to theonomic postmillennialism. The parable of the leaven actually provided one of the most damaging pieces of New Testament evidence against Gentry's misplaced eschatological hope, in teaching the increasing pervasiveness and eventual diffusion of evil throughout the entire visible kingdom. Matthew 28:18-20, provided little more than a pretext for Gentry to assert his postmillennialism where it could not be exegetically substantiated.

Concerning 1 Corinthians 15:20-28, Gentry missed the passage's evidence for an interval of time between the Second Advent and the eternal state. Additional evidence was demonstrated for a millennium from this text. Finally, Gentry handled Revelation 20 in an especially poor manner. The exegetical evidence irrefutably argues for a literal thousand-

year millennium, contrary to Gentry's postmillennial position. Overall, Scriptural proof of postmillennialism is sorely lacking in Gentry's writings. For this reason, his eschatological formulation must be rejected as a misplaced, unbiblical optimism.

CHAPTER V

A CRITIQUE OF THEONOMIC ETHICS

Introduction

Chapter III noted that theonomic postmillennialism may be distinguished from general postmillennialism by its commitment to theonomic ethics. Gentry affirms that the postmillennial advance of the kingdom includes the transformation of culture through the application of biblical law, and the return to biblical norms of civil justice. In particular, that involves the application of the judicial aspects of the Mosaic Law to contemporary society. In general, the moral and civil aspects of the Mosaic Law are considered to be binding upon Christians and all the nations today.

This chapter will critique theonomic ethics. This will involve a rejection of the tripartite division of the Mosaic Law so commonly employed today by Reformed scholars (including Gentry). Then, New Testament teaching on the abrogation of the Mosaic Law will be presented. Finally, the Mosaic Law will be seen to be inapplicable and unfulfillable by the church. Nonetheless, the Law should be understood to fill a revelatory and pedagogical role for the Christian.

Mosaic Law and the Christian

Douglas J. Moo is certainly correct in noting that Christians disagree about the place of the Mosaic Law in the life of the believer because the New Testament itself contains

statements that appear to undergird opposing conclusions.[1] Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. notes "the fact that there is a certain ambivalence and apparent conflict in the New Testament towards the law."[2] On the one hand are those apparent assertions of the Law's continuing validity, including the following:

Matthew 5:17-19 states: "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." In Romans Paul states, for example, that "we establish the Law" (3:31); "the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good" (7:12); the Law is fulfilled in Christians who walk according to the Spirit (8:4); and that "he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law" (13:8). On the other hand are those statements that imply the Law's complete abrogation for the believer: "Christ is the end of the law" (Rom 10:4); "you are not under law, but under grace" (Rom 6:14); "And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law, though not being myself under the Law" (1 Cor 9:20)[3]; "For when the priesthood is

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[1] See Douglas J. Moo, "The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses: A Modified Lutheran View," in *The Law, the Gospel, and the Modern Christian,* ed. Wayne G. Strickland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), 319.

[2] Walter C. Kaiser, J., "Response to Greg L. Bahnsen," in *The Law, the Gospel, and the Modern Christian,* ed. Wayne G. Strickland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), 150.

[3] Carl B. Hoch, Jr. notes that "the problem of Paul and the law is acute because Paul held a seemingly ambivalent position about the law" (*All Things New,* 128). As such, Hoch

changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also" (Heb 7:12).

Traditionally, covenant theology has sought to resolve the tension noted above by positing a tripartite division of the Mosaic Law. They divide it into the categories of "moral," "civil," and "ceremonial," and argue that only the "moral" laws continue to be authoritative for the new covenant community. As noted earlier in discussing Gentry's (and other Reconstructionists') view of the Law, theonomy departs from the Reformed camp by affirming the continued binding nature of the "civil" (or "judicial") laws upon not only Christians, but also all governments and all nations at all times. They insist that those laws should be instituted and enforced by the civil magistrates of every land even in their penal aspects. Indeed, it is Waltke's contention that Greg Bahnsen (the authoritative voice on theonomy among Reconstructionists, as noted earlier) has the specific agenda of bringing back "the penal sanctions of the Older Testament."[4]

In at least three places in his writings, Bahnsen gives a twelve-point summary of Reconstructionism's theonomic position. Given the prominence he places on this summary, and his role as Reconstructionism's most prominent voice on theonomy, it will serve the purposes of this chapter to reproduce the list below.

> SUMMARY OF THE THEONOMIC APPROACH TO GOD'S LAW
>
> **1.** The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are, in part and in whole, a verbal revelation from God through human words, being infallibly true regarding all that they teach on any subject.
>
> **2.** Since the Fall it has always been unlawful to use the law of God in hopes of establishing one's own personal merit and justification. Salvation comes by way

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lists off fifteen positive statements about the law by Paul, side by side with twenty-seven negative statements made by him about it (ibid., 129-30).

[4] See Bruce K. Waltke, "Theonomy in Relation to Dispensational and Covenant Theologies," in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, eds. William S. Barker and W. Robert Godfrey (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), 75.

of promise and faith; commitment to obedience is the lifestyle of faith, a token of gratitude for God's redeeming grace.

3. The Word of the Lord is the sole, supreme, and unchallengeable standard for the actions and attitudes of everyone in all areas of life; this Word naturally includes God's moral directives (law).

4. Our obligation to keep the law of God cannot be judged by any extrascriptural standard, such as whether its specific requirements are congenial to past traditions or modern feelings and practices.

5. We should presume that Old Testament standing laws continue to be morally binding in the New Testament, unless they are rescinded or modified by further revelation.

6. In regard to the Old Testament law, the new covenant surpasses the old covenant in glory, power, and finality, thus reinforcing former duties. The new covenant also supersedes the old covenant shadows, thereby changing the application of sacrificial, purity, and "separation" principles, redefining the people of God, and altering the significance of the promised land.

7. God's revealed standing laws are a reflection of his immutable moral character and are absolute in the sense of being non-arbitrary, objective, universal, and established in advance of particular circumstances; thus they are applicable to general types of moral situations.

8. Christian involvement in politics calls for recognition of God's transcendent, absolute, revealed law as a standard by which to judge all social codes.

9. Civil magistrates in all ages and places are obligated to conduct their offices as servants of God, as agents of divine wrath against criminals, and as those who must give an account on the Final Day of their service before the King of kings, their Creator and Judge.

10. The general continuity that we presume with respect to the moral standards of the Old Testament applies equally to matters of socio-political ethics as it does to personal, family, or ecclesiastical ethics.

11. The civil precepts of the Old Testament (standing "judicial" laws) are a model of perfect social justice for all cultures, even in the punishment of criminals. Outside of those areas where God's law prescribes their intervention and application of penal redress, civil rulers are not authorized to legislate or use coercion (e.g., in the economic marketplace).

12. The morally proper way for Christians to correct social evils that are not under the lawful jurisdiction of the state is by means of voluntary and charitable enterprises or the censures of the home, church, and marketplace, even as the appropriate method for changing the political order of civil law is not through violent revolution, but through dependence on regeneration, reeducation, and gradual legal reform.[5]

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[5] This summary can be found in the three following writings of Bahnsen's: *By This Standard,* 345-347; *No Other Standard,* 11-13; "The Theonomic Reformed Approach to Law and Gospel," in *The Law, the Gospel, and the Modern Christian,* 141-43.

Several aspects of the above list may be briefly highlighted. First, Bahnsen means by "standing laws" those policy directives applicable over time to classes of individuals (e.g., do not kill), in contrast to particular directives for an individual (e.g., the order for Samuel to anoint David at a particular time and place), or positive commands for distinct incidents (e.g., God's order for Israel to exterminate certain Canaanite tribes at a certain point in history).[6] Point five shows theonomists' presumption of continuity with regard to the Mosaic Law. Point six affirms a discontinuity with regard to "ceremonial" (not Bahnsen's term) aspects of the Law, which are not binding on the Christian. The above-noted prominence given to the "civil" or "judicial" laws is seen in points 9, 10 and 11.

What is one to make of theonomy's claim for the continuity of the "civil" and "moral" aspects of Mosaic Law, but not its "ceremonial" features? First, scholars have criticized the internal contradiction of such a position, since Bahnsen argues fervently for the comprehensive, binding nature of the Mosaic Law:

> Central to the theory and practice of Christian ethics, whether personal or social, is every jot and tittle of God's law as laid down in the revelation of the Older and New Testaments. The Christian is obligated to keep the whole law of God as a pattern of sanctification, and in the realm of human society the civil magistrate is responsible to enforce God's law against public crime.[7]

Later, Bahnsen asks rhetorically whether or not Scripture limits the law that is binding upon Christians to the Ten Commandments. His answer: "Our Lord definitely did not; according to His word, *every jot* and *every tittle* has abiding validity (Matt 5:17)."[8]

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[6] *No Other Standard,* 12.

[7] Greg Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1984), xiii.

[8] Ibid., 34.

Yet, as Bruce K. Waltke has convincingly argued, theonomists cannot carry through the theonomic ethic consistently. "Jesus cannot be establishing every jot and tittle of the law, as Bahnsen's thesis declares, and at the same time abrogate some of the laws."[9] Waltke contends that Bahnsen contradicts himself with regard to Matthew 5:17, "the Golden Text of theonomy," for he must admit that in the following cases Christ does abrogate the law: 1. He replaces the older teaching of "eye for eye, and tooth for tooth," with His own authoritative teaching, "Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matt 5:38-42). 2. He negates dietary laws (Mark 7:19; cf. Acts 15:19-20), and certain provisions for divorce (Matt 19:3-9). Waltke concludes, "The many specific changes of the law in the New Testament seriously undermine the thesis that the burden of proof rests on the interpreter to show that the law is not in force."[10] Further, the many differences among theonomists demonstrate that Bahnsen's "attempts to define ceremonial law and what is situationally conditioned" fail, argues Waltke. Bahnsen himself damagingly admits that he could not affirm fellow Reconstructionists R. J. Rushdoony's view of the dietary laws, Gary North's view of home mortgages, and David Chilton's attitudes toward bribery and "ripping off" the unbeliever.[11]

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[9] Waltke, 81.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid., 80. This internal contradiction within theonomy is also critiqued by Wayne G. Strickland, "Response to Greg L. Bahnsen," in *The Law, the Gospel, and the Modern Christian,* 160-61, and Moo, "Response to Greg L. Bahnsen," in *The Law, the Gospel, and the Modern Christian,* 165-66.

The Tripartite Division Rejected

But Theonomy has a deeper problem. As David A. Dorsey (among many others) argues, "*The scheme of a tripartite division* [of the Mosaic Law] *is unknown both in the Bible and in early rabbinic literature.*"[12] Instead, argues Dorsey, it is a formulation traceable to modern Christian theology. William D. Barrick also rejects this tripartite division, arguing, "The essential unity of the Law of Moses is clear in the Scriptures (Jas 2:10; Gal 5:3). Dividing the Law into moral, civil/social, and ceremonial/religious is really an artificiality unsupported by the overwhelming evidence of Scripture."[13] Barrick argues that the division into three categories of law is unmasked as a fallacy by the testimony of the book of Deuteronomy alone. He demonstrates how Moses' second exposition (4:44-26:19) presents the Decalogue, then illustrates each of the Ten Commandments through various legal stipulations. He concludes that such an arrangement "demonstrates that the so-called civil and ceremonial stipulations are inextricably interwoven with what are considered to be the moral laws. Violation of any of the stipulations is a breach of the Decalogue."[14]

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[12] David A. Dorsey, "The Law of Moses and the Christian: A Compromise," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34/3 (September 1991): 329. G. J. Wenham calls the threefold division "arbitrary and artificial." He lists three main difficulties: 1. The New Testament does not seem to distinguish between the different types of law in this way. 2. It is difficult to draw the line between moral precepts and other law: for example, is the Sabbath a moral law or a ceremonial one? 3. Much of the civil legislation is grounded on moral judgments, often expressed in the ten commandments (cp. William D. Barrick's point below). See G. J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus,* NICOT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 32.

[13] William D. Barrick, "The Mosaic Covenant," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 10 (Fall, 1999):228.

[14] Ibid.

Dorsey marshals New Testament evidence against the threefold division, noting that the New Testament speaks of the Law in "quite monolithic terms," nowhere suggesting that legal obligation is to only a portion of the corpus.[15] Rather, if one is legally bound to the Law, he is bound to the entire Law, including every "minor" stipulation. He convincingly offers several passages for support (two passages have already been noted by Barrick), Paul writes in Galatians 5:3, "I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obliged to obey the whole law." Further, James states that the violation of one law makes one guilty of the whole law (2:10). Jesus taught that "the one who breaks the least of these commandments...will be called least in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5:19). Finally, in Galatians 3:24-25, Paul declares that "the Law"—not just one category of laws—was a schoolmaster "to lead us to Christ," and now that it has fulfilled its task, we are no longer under the Law." Dorsey rightly concludes: "In none of these or similar passages is there any statement regarding categories of laws."[16]

Recently, Kaiser has argued that the Law is not an individual unity, nor a monolithic whole, and he points to Christ's distinction between the "weightier" and "lighter" matters of the Law in Matthew 23:23.[17] In arguing for a ranking or weighing of the Law, he asserts the priority and the precedent-setting nature of the moral law, which "stems from the character

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[15] Dorsey, 330.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Law as God's Gracious Guidance for the Promotion of Holiness," in *The Law, the Gospel, and the Modern Christian,* 188-99. See also his *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), 44-48.

and nature of God."[18] The remaining aspects of the Mosaic laws, whether civil or ceremonial laws, "are but illustrations, applications, or situationally-specific implementations of that same permanent moral law," and are therefore temporary in nature, not binding for the Christian.

Strickland rightly takes Kaiser to task by pointing out that even Matthew 23:23 does not make the case for a tripartite distinction in the Law. Further, Christ does not abrogate the "lighter" matters of the Law, but expects that, like the "weightier" matters, they not be neglected. "If anything, Matthew 23:23 would seem to argue that the entire law must be kept. It does not allow for any abrogation at this point."[19] Additionally, nowhere does Kaiser scripturally justify a termination of the Law's "civil" or "ceremonial" aspects. Lastly, Bahnsen objects to Kaiser's claim that the "moral" laws are especially based on God's character, in contradistinction to the rest of Mosaic Law (especially of interest to him, the "civil" laws).[20] All of Mosaic Law reflects God's character, he argues (Heb 2:2; Deut 4:5-8; Pss 111:7; 119:160; Deut 12:28).[21]

It must be concluded, then, that the tripartite division of Mosaic Law is unknown in the Bible, and that both Old and New Testaments treat the Law as a unity. Therefore, theonomists cannot divide up the Law, insisting that only its "civil" and "moral" aspects are binding on the Christian, unlike its "ceremonial" features. To repeat, as Barrick has noted,

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[18] Ibid., 197.

[19] Strickland, 215.

[20] Greg L. Bahnsen, "Response to Walter C. Kaiser, Jr.," in *The Law, the Gospel, and the Modern Christian,* 207-08.

[21] Ibid., 207.

the moral, civil, and ceremonial aspects are inextricably interwoven. Hence, theonomists must contend with a monolithic whole in confronting the Mosaic Law, a truth which is devastating to their artificial construct.

New Testament Teaching on the Abrogation of Mosaic Law

New Testament evidence will now be briefly examined that teaches that Christians are not bound by the stipulations of the old covenant. In light of the evidence presented above, this means that Mosaic Law *en toto* is not the Christian's God-given legal authority. Rather, Christian behavior is guided directly by "the law of Christ."

1. Matthew 5:17-19. Moo's especially helpful treatment of this passage will now be summarized.[22] Jesus defends Himself against the charge that He is teaching the abrogation of the Law by claiming the contrary: namely, that He has come to fulfill the Law and the Prophets. Building on this claim of continuity with the Old Testament, He asserts the continued validity of the Law (v. 18), and urges the teaching of its commands (v. 19). In 5:21–48 Jesus gives six comparisons ("antitheses") between traditional teaching and His teaching. In some cases, Christ is arguably expounding the Law, or showing its deeper significance, but overall, what emerges is Jesus' radical insistence that what He says is binding on His followers. "This independence from both Jewish tradition and from the Mosaic law itself gives us an important indicator for our interpretation of vv. 17-19."[23]

Matthean usage shows that "the Law and the prophets" in verse 17 refers to the commanding aspect of the Old Testament (cf. 7:12; 22:40), not the Old Testament generally.

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[22] See Moo, "The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses," 347-53.

[23] Ibid., 350.

How does Jesus "fulfill" both? Matthew uses πληρόω sixteen times, ten of which occur in the introductions to Matthew's distinctive "formula quotations" (1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 27:9). Notes Moo, "In these quotations Matthew shows how Jesus has 'filled up' the entire Old Testament, not only by accomplishing what it predicted but also by reenacting climactically Old Testament historical events (e.g., 2:15)."[24] Moo especially calls attention to 11:13 as being particularly suggestive of Matthew's understanding: "all the Prophets *and the Law* prophesied until John" (emphasis his). Moo concludes: "Integral to Matthew's gospel, then, is a scheme of salvation history that pictures the entire Old Testament as anticipating and pointing forward to Jesus."[25]

The message, then, of 5:17-48 is that Christ is claiming that His teaching brings the eschatological fulness of God's will to which the Mosaic law looked ahead. He accomplishes this as He "fulfills" the Old Testament Law by making demands to which the Law pointed forward. Hence, He fulfills the Law by proclaiming the standards of kingdom righteousness that the Law anticipated.[26] Thus, followers of Christ are to look to Him as the fulfiller of the Law for guidance in the way they are to live. The Christian is not bound to the Mosaic Law, since Christ has fulfilled it, but the Christian is bound to Christ's law, since he is bound to Christ the fulfiller of the Law. The Christian is still to read and profit from the Mosaic Law, but its commanding role has been abrogated. Moo notes that following His resurrection, Jesus urges His disciples to teach "all that *I* have commanded you" (Matt 28:19-

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[24] Ibid., 351.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid., 352.

20, italics his). "What emerges from Jesus' teaching is a shift of focus from the law to Jesus himself as the criterion for what it means to be obedient to God."[27]

Moving on to the Pauline teaching on the Law, Moo argues that Paul too asserts that Christians are not bound to the Law of Moses, but rather are "bound to those principles established by Christ in His life and teaching—principles mediated and motivated by the Spirit and focused on love; this constitutes 'the law of Christ.' "[28] Two additional passages will be considered:

2. 1 Corinthians 9:20-21. "And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law, though not being myself under the Law, that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, thought not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, that I might win those who are without law." These verses offer a strong argument for discontinuity. The phrase "under the Law" (ὑπὸ νόμον) occurs four times in verse 20. Contextually, Paul states that for the sake of his gospel enterprise of winning others to Christ, he is willing to forego his right to be compensated financially. Rather, he offers the gospel "without charge," making himself a slave to all "that I might win the more" (v. 19). In becoming all things to all men (v. 22), to the Jews he became as a Jew, which meant living "as under the Law." What does this phrase mean? It cannot refer to being subject to the curse of the Law, or to a legalistic perversion of the Law, because the phrase is contrasted to the situation of the Gentiles in

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[27] Ibid., 357.

[28] Ibid., 360-61.

verse 21, those "who are without law."[29] Therefore, it must refer to what is unique to the Jewish people, namely their subjection to the authority of the Mosaic Law. In a strong disavowal, then, Paul taught that as a Christian he is "not subject to the authority of the Mosaic Law, but he willingly gives up that freedom and conforms to that law when evangelizing Jews."[30]

Verse 21 "is perhaps the clearest Pauline statement of the situation of the Christian with respect to God's law."[31] It is important to note a crucial contrast between verse 20 and verse 21. In verse 20, Paul states that he is not under the Law, referring to Mosaic Law. However, in verse 21, he is under the law of God. Hence, he distinguishes between the Mosaic Law and the law of God. Not to be under the Mosaic Law does not mean being without the law of God. Instead, the Law of Moses is present in the Scriptures as "a specific codification of God's will for a specific situation: Israel under the Sinaitic covenant."[32] Christians are free from that Law, living under the new covenant initiated by Christ. But they are not free from law, since they are now subject to the law of God in another of its instantiations: the law of Christ. It may now be asked, what is the law of Christ? Moo answers in the context of Galatians 6:2.

3. Galatians 6:2. "Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ." Moo's insightful understanding of the law of Christ may be summarized under four points.

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[29] Ibid., 364.

[30] Ibid., 364-65.

[31] Ibid., 368.

[32] Ibid.

First, the demand for love is a central component of the law of Christ. That is evident in the context, because only a few verses earlier love is highlighted as the fulfillment of the law. Secondly, the law cannot be confined to this demand alone, because the fruit-producing ministry of the Holy Spirit is also prominent in the context (5:16-26). Therefore, the law of Christ, Moo argues, involves the directing influence of the Holy Spirit. Third, it is composed of the teachings of Christ (see the discussion of Matt 28:20 above) and of the apostles (as here in Gal 6:2, in which Paul the apostle directs the Galatians). Finally, there is strong continuity with the Law of Moses, "for many specifically Mosaic commandments are taken up and included within this 'law of Christ' " since they reflect God's "eternal moral will."[33]

Mosaic Law: Inapplicable to and Unfulfillable by the Church

A final argument may be made against theonomy's view of the continuity of the Mosaic Law. Namely, as Dorsey exhaustively argues, the Mosaic Law cannot be intended to legally govern the church because "[t]he vast majority of the laws are simply nonapplicable to and unfulfillable by the NT Christian."[34] Dorsey offers five points in support of this, each of which is extensively illustrated and supported. His points bear repeating, but only a few of his many examples will be reproduced.[35]

1. "*The corpus was designed to regulate the lives of a people living in the distinctive geographical and climatic conditions found in the southern Levant, and many of the regulations are inapplicable, unintelligible, or even nonsensical outside that regime.*"

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[33] Ibid., 368, 370.

[34] Dorsey, 325.

[35] See ibid., 325-29.

Examples: 1) Exodus 29:22—the law regulating the offering of the "fat tail" of the ram. The fat-tailed sheep ruling is unfulfillable for many peoples of the world who live in regions where this animal is unknown. 2) The cultivation of the Mediterranean olive tree and the use of its fruit, and the eating of various and sundry animals listed in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14, many of which are found only in the Levant or in the Mediterranean world (and nearly half of which have not even been identified by modern scholars).

2. "*The corpus was designed by God to regulate the lives of a people whose cultural milieu was that of the ancient Near East.*" Examples: 1) the style of slavery found in the Near East (Exod 20:8-10; 21:1-11, 20-21, 26-27, 32); 2) polygamy and the custom of levirate marriage (Deut 17:17; 21:15-17); 3) ancient Near Eastern siege practices (Deut 20:10-15, 19-20).

3. "*The Mosaic corpus was intended to regulate the lives of people whose religious milieu was that of the ancient Near Eastern world (particularly Canaan) and would be more or less inapplicable outside that world.*" Examples: 1) the laws concerning the priestly ephod (Exod 25:7; 28:4 ft); 2) the institution of the Nazirite (Num 6).

4. "*The code of laws was issued by God to lay the detailed groundwork for and regulate the various affairs of an actual politically and geographically-defined nation.*" Examples: the corpus regulates Israel's national and internal boundaries, its system of government, its judicial system, and its foreign and domestic policy.

> A corpus such as this could not possibly be legally pertinent to the Church, since the latter is not a politically-and geographically-defined nation but is composed of pockets of believers living as minorities throughout virtually all the (pagan) nations of the earth, believers who have been instructed in their new covenant (e.g. Romans 13) to comply with the established forms of government and legal systems of their respective nations.[36]

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[36] Ibid., 328.

5. "*The corpus was formulated to establish and maintain a cultic regime that has been discontinued with the Church* (cf. Heb. 8:18; etc.)." Examples: laws regulating the tabernacle (Exod 25-40), the Levitical/Aaronic priesthood (Exod 28-30), and the sacrificial system (Lev 1-7).

Dorsey aptly concludes:

> In sum, the Sinaitic law code was very specifically designed by God to regulate the lives of the West Semitic inhabitants of the southern Levant. Nearly all the regulations of the corpus—over ninety-five percent—are so culturally specific, geographically limited, and so forth that they would be completely inapplicable, and in fact unfulfillable, to Christians living throughout the world today. This fact alone should suggest that the corpus is not legally binding upon Christians and that it cannot possibly represent the marching orders of the Church.[37]

This is a telling critique against any continuity position with regard to Mosaic Law, especially theonomy.

Mosaic Law as Revelatory and Pedagogical for the Christian

Though the Mosaic Law is not legally binding upon the Christian, nonetheless it serves a revelatory and pedagogical role for the church. Both Dorsey and Moo uphold such a role for the Mosaic Law.

Moo notes the continuing function of the Mosaic Law in "filling out" and explaining certain basic concepts found within both old and new covenant law. He gives the example of how a Christian reading the laws about personal injury in Exodus 21 might conclude (rightly,

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[37] Ibid., 329.

he believes) that the killing of an unborn baby falls into the category of murder, and is hence prohibited by both the Decalogue and New Testament. Secondly, Moo notes, "the Christian should read the law as a witness to the fulfillment of God's plan in Christ."[38]

Dorsey points out the revelatory and pedagogical role of the Law implied in 2 Timothy 3:16-17: "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." This assertion refers directly to the Old Testament (though not excluding the New), including all its laws. Further, Dorsey affirms that the Law is "a treasure of insights and information regarding the very mind and ways of God."[39] This revelatory and pedagogical role of the Law can and must be wholeheartedly affirmed by every Christian. It is in this function that it is binding upon the church of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Among postmillennial systems, theonomic postmillennialism is unique in its commitment to theonomic ethics, by which socio-political and cultural transformation is expected through the church. Since theonomy affirms the continuing validity of Mosaic Law in its civil and moral aspects for Christians, it must uphold a tripartite division of the Law. Such a division is artificial and cannot be sustained, as noted above.

Further, the New Testament teaches that the Mosaic Law in its entirety has been abrogated as the Christian's legal authority. Christians are instead under the law of Christ.

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[38] Moo, 376.

[39] Dorsey, 332.

Further, the Mosaic Law in general is inapplicable to and unfulfillable by the church. Rather, it occupies an important revelatory and pedagogical role, but does not carry binding legal authority. Hence, the key distinctive of theonomic ethics rests upon a wholesale misunderstanding of the role of the Mosaic Law today. Just as postmillennialism offers a misplaced eschatological optimism, so too do theonomic ethics promulgate a faulty locus of authority for the church.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The contemporary resurgence of postmillennialism is best seen in its militant and scholarly manifestation as the eschatology of Christian Reconstructionism. Demonstrating vibrancy and optimism, theonomic postmillennialism is a vigorous eschatological system worthy of notice and study. Its foremost proponent, Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., has produced an enviable corpus of literature articulating the position's vision of redemption history, and the church's role in it.

In order to understand more adequately theonomic postmillennialism, the system was placed within the wider historical framework of postmillennialism in general. Postmillennialism was traced through its ancient, middle ages, reformation, and modern phases, with developments to the eschatology being successively noted. Further, since theonomic postmillennialism is the eschatological perspective of Dominion Theology, Christian Reconstructionism was also explored. Its history as a movement, as well as its broad emphases, were duly noted. Within the constellation of Reconstructionist authors, Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., was identified as its foremost eschatologian. As the chief advocate of theonomic postmillennialism, his eschatological system received attention.

Theonomic postmillennialism was noted in its similarity to general postmillennialism. This was found principally with regard to the shared optimism regarding the future conversion of the world in this age through the church's evangelism, after which Christ will

return. Theonomic postmillennialism was then distinguished by its expectation of the successful impact of Christ's kingdom on the societies and cultures of the world, transforming them through the application of biblical law. The role of the Mosaic Law for Gentry's system was then explored. This was followed by an examination of the theological foundations of postmillennialism, as well as its redemptive-historical flow, as articulated by Gentry. Lastly, exegetical evidence proffered by Gentry in defense of his eschatological construct was examined.

The critique of Gentry's eschatology noted his failure to comprehend adequately Israel in her fully orbed past and future roles. His replacement theology was rejected, and the proper distinctions between Israel and the church were maintained. A few disputed passages to which non-dispensationalists appeal in identifying the church as the "New Israel" were evaluated and found to offer no support to covenant theology. Next, Gentry's mishandling of the major covenants was revealed, and the Abrahamic Covenant in particular was re-examined. This covenant requires a significant future role for Israel, as do the Davidic and New Covenants. Their material blessings to Israel cannot be reinterpreted or reapplied to the church.

The major part of this study's critique concerned the rejection of Gentry's exegetical evidence offered in support of postmillennialism. Psalm 2, as an amplification of the Davidic Covenant, cannot properly be fit into the church age, and instead provides strong evidence for the millennial reign of Christ. Isaiah 2:2-4 refers to the Messiah's future reign in Jerusalem over all the nations of the world, comporting best with a millennial period as a precursor to the eternal state. Further, this passage upholds a special role for Israel (not the church) as the unique nation through which socio-political transformation will occur.

Regarding New Testament passages cited by Gentry, Matthew 13 received attention with its kingdom parables. Gentry missed the point of the parable of the sower. The parables of the wheat and the weeds, and the net, offered no support to theonomic postmillennialism. The parable of the leaven actually provided one of the most damaging pieces of New Testament evidence against Gentry's misplaced eschatological hope, in teaching the increasing pervasiveness and eventual diffusion of evil throughout the entire visible kingdom. Matthew 28:18-20 provided little more than a pretext for Gentry to assert his postmillennialism where it could not be exegetically substantiated.

Concerning 1 Corinthians 15:20-28, Gentry missed the passage's evidence for an interval of time between the Second Advent and the eternal state. Additional evidence was demonstrated for a millennium from this text. Finally, Gentry handled Revelation 20 in an especially poor manner. The exegetical evidence irrefutably argues for a literal thousand-year millennium, contrary to Gentry's postmillennial position. Overall, Scriptural proof of postmillennialism is sorely lacking in Gentry's writings. For this reason, his eschatological formulation was rejected as a misplaced, unbiblical optimism.

Among postmillennial systems, theonomic postmillennialism is unique in its commitment to theonomic ethics, by which socio-political and cultural transformation is expected through the church. Since theonomy affirms the continuing validity of Mosaic Law in its civil and moral aspects for Christians, it must uphold a tripartite division of the Law. Such a division is artificial and cannot be sustained, as noted above. Further, the New Testament teaches that the Mosaic Law in its entirety has been abrogated as the Christian's legal authority. Christians are instead under the law of Christ.

Further, the Mosaic Law in general is inapplicable to and unfulfillable by the church. Rather, it occupies an important revelatory and pedagogical role, but does not carry binding legal authority. Hence, the key distinctive of theonomic ethics rests upon a wholesale misunderstanding of the role of the Mosaic Law today. Just as postmillennialism offers a misplaced eschatological optimism, so too do theonomic ethics promulgate a faulty locus of authority for the church.

Will the church triumphantly Christianize the world? No it will not. But Christ the Lord will Himself govern this planet one day, and in that millennial age, the nations will gladly swear allegiance to His glorious name. In the meantime, believers long for the return of Christ (Phil 3:20-21), and labor to make disciples of all the nations, appearing as lights in the world (Phil 2:15). Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

APPENDIX I

A SYNOPSIS OF THE CHURCH

The Church:

- Came into existence on the day of Pentecost (cf. 1 Cor 12:13 with Acts 1:5 and Acts 2:1-21, 38-47; Eph 1:19-23; 2:20; Eph 4:11-12) and will exist until the coming of Christ for His redeemed at the Rapture (1 Cor 15:51-52; 1 Thess 4:13-18). The church did not therefore exist in any form in the Old Testament era, nor was it then known even prophetically, but was a mystery not revealed until this age (Eph 3:1-6; 5:32).
- As a spiritual organism is distinct from national, ethnic Israel. It is the lack of national characteristics that distinguishes the church from Israel. Israel, formed and chosen as a nation among nations, stands in contrast to the church, a community or people called out of all nations, and composed of both Jews and Gentiles (Eph 2:11-22) in which neither race nor nationality nor ethnic identity has any bearing on status or function (Gal 3:28). The church is never to be identified as the "New Israel" or as "Spiritual Israel," but is distinctively different from Israel. Further, though the church partakes of some of the covenant promises made to Israel, the church has not replaced Israel as the full beneficiary of all such covenant promises. God will unconditionally fulfill His covenants (and their attendant promises) to Israel in all their spiritual and material (including social, political and economic) aspects.

- Is not identical to the kingdom in the present age, since the church began at Pentecost and is taken out of the world by the Rapture before Christ returns in judgment, whereas the present kingdom began during the ministry of Christ following His rejection by Israel (Matt 13) and extends until Christ returns in judgment (Matt 13:39-40, 49-50). The present kingdom then encompasses the church, though the two are not coterminous.
- Is restricted to human beings alone, as there is no salvation help given by Christ to angels (Heb 2:16). The church is composed of all those who place their faith in Jesus Christ, dependent upon the antecedent activity of God the Father in foreknowing, predestining, and calling the elect unto salvation (Rom 8:29-30; 9:16; Eph 1:4-5). The redeemed are immediately placed by the Holy Spirit at salvation into one united spiritual body, the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12-13), also called the bride of Christ (2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:23-32; Rev 19:7-8), of which Christ is the head (Eph 1:22; 4:15; Col 1:18).
- Is a spiritual building founded upon the historical person and work of Jesus Christ, who serves as the foundation and cornerstone of the church (in addition to the foundation of the apostles and prophets) (1 Cor 3:10-11; Eph 2:19-22; 1 Pet 2:6-7). The redeemed, as living stones, are being added to the edifice (1 Pet 2:5). Christ has promised to build His church (Matt 16:18), and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.
- Refers to both the *local* church, consisting of local assemblies of all those who profess faith and allegiance to Christ (e.g., 1 Thess 1:1; 1 Cor 4:17; Gal 1:22), as well as the *universal* church, encompassing the spiritual unity of all believers in Christ

(e.g., Eph 1:22-23; Col 1:18). The one universal church is manifested in particular localities, yet each individual assembly is the church in that place (e.g., 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1). The establishment and continuity of local churches is clearly taught and defined in the New Testament Scriptures (Acts 14:23,27; 20:17,28; Gal 1:2; Phil 1:1; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1) and the members of the one spiritual body are directed to associate themselves together in local assemblies (1 Cor 11:18-20; Heb 10:25).

- Has one supreme authority, which is Christ (1 Cor 11:3; Eph 1:22; Col 1:18), necessitating that church leadership, gifts, order, discipline, and worship are all appointed through His sovereignty as found in the Scriptures. The biblically designated officers serving under Christ and over the assembly are elders (also called bishops, pastors, shepherds and overseers; Acts 20:28; Eph 4:11) and deacons, both of whom must meet biblical qualifications (1 Tim 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Pet 5:1-5). These leaders lead or rule as servants of Christ (1 Tim 5:17-22) and have His authority in directing the church. The congregation is to submit to their leadership (Heb 13:7,17).
- Possesses spiritual gifts, bestowed by the Lord for the building up of the body. Christ gives men chosen for the purpose of equipping the saints for the work of the ministry (Eph 4:7-12), and He also gives unique and special spiritual abilities to each member of the body (Rom 12:5-8; 1 Cor 12:4-31; 1 Pet 4:10-11).
- Has two ordinances that have been committed to it: baptism and the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:38-42). Christian baptism by immersion (Acts 8:36-39) is the solemn testimony of a believer showing forth his faith in the crucified, buried, and risen Savior, and his union with Him as His disciple in death to sin and resurrection to a

new life (Matt 28:19-20; Rom 6:1-11). It is also a sign of fellowship and identification with the visible body of Christ (Acts 2:41-42). The Lord's Supper is the commemoration and proclamation of His death until He comes (1 Cor 11:28-32).

- Has as its ultimate purpose to glorify God (Eph 3:21), which it does by building itself up in the faith (Eph 4:13-16), by the instruction of the Word (2 Tim 2:2,15; 3:16-17), by fellowship (Acts 2:47; 1 John 1:3), by keeping the ordinances (Luke 22:19; Acts 2:38-42) and by advancing and communicating the gospel to the entire world (Matt 28:19; Acts 1:8; 2:42).

APPENDIX II

A SYNOPSIS OF ISRAEL

Israel:

- Refers to the physical descendants of Abraham (Rom 11:1) through Isaac (Gen 21:12) and Jacob (Gen 35:9-12).
- As a term first appears in Scripture as a name of honor divinely bestowed on Jacob following his struggle with God at Peniel (Gen 32:38), and is used as an alternate name for Jacob during his life and after his death (e.g., Gen 35:21; Exod 32:13). His twelve sons are called "the sons of Israel" (Gen 42:5), and eventually the term "Israel" referred to all his descendants in general (Exod 1:7), and then to the nation formed from them (Exod 19:5).
- Owes her existence as a people to God's election and calling (Rom 9:6-13), to God's actions (Deut 4:7-8, 32-37; 7:6-8; 14:2; Ezek 16) and to God's creation (Ps 100:3; Isa 64:8).
- As a term is not finally applied to all God's people irrespective of nationality. Rather, it retains its meaning for a particular national people in accordance with the early covenants and promises of Scripture, which are irrevocable. Of crucial importance is the recognition that the community of Israel constituted a *nation*. God had promised Abraham that his physical descendants would become "a great nation" (Gen 12:2; 17:5; 18:18), which they did become (Deut 26:5). Their national status was formally

ratified at Sinai following the Exodus (Exod 19). This status belongs to the very concept of Israel in the Old Testament and cannot be separated from its religious meaning of "the people of God."

- Is to be distinguished from the church, with the recognition that the two are *never* equated anywhere in Scripture. The ethnic people alone are in view in Romans 9:6, 2:28-29, and Galatians 6:16. It is the lack of national characteristics that distinguishes the church from Israel. Israel, formed and chosen as a nation among nations, stands in contrast to the church, a community or people called out of all nations, and composed of both Jews and Gentiles (Eph 2:11-22) in which neither race nor nationality nor ethnic identity has any bearing of any kind on status or function (Gal 3:28). The church is never to be identified as the "New Israel" or as "Spiritual Israel," but instead is distinctively different from Israel.
- Is indestructible as God's chosen people (Jer 30:11), a nation forever (Jer 31:35-37), with irrevocable covenants and promises made to her (Lev 26:44-45; Jer 33:19-20; cf. Rom 11:29).
- Has a special heritage as a nation (Rom 9:4-5). This includes: 1) Adoption as sons; 2) The glory (the Shekinah of God's presence in the temple; 3) The covenants: a. Abrahamic (promising land, seed, and blessing, with personal, national, and universal consequences for Abraham, for Israel, and for the nations). b. Palestinian (promising land for the nation). c. Davidic (promising to David a house, kingdom, and throne, all forever). d. New (promising a new heart and nature, forgiveness of sin, and the giving of the Holy Spirit). All of these covenants are unilateral (or unconditional); 4) The giving of the Law (the bilateral, Mosaic Covenant, conditional in nature, made by

God with Israel at Sinai); 5) Temple service (the temple worship and entire priestly and sacrificial system); 6) Promises (covering the future Messianic kingdom, not merely the first advent).

- Has both a paradigmatic and mediatorial role in Scripture. First, as a holy nation, a kingdom of priests (Exod 19:6), she must model God's holy and righteous character and reveal His glory to the nations (Ps 72:19 and Isa 43:7; 35:2; 40:5; 42:12; 66:18-19; 1 Kgs 8:41-43; Ps 96). Second, Israel must mediate the saving blessings of the Lord to the nations, both as a channel of special revelation (the Scriptures: Ps 147:19-20; Rom 3:2), and also as the vehicle through whom the messianic King would come to reign over all creation (Gen 49:10; Rom 9:5). Further, God's future activity with Israel will manifest to all the nations His self-revelation through both the judgment and restoration of His people (Ezek 5:13; 6:14; 7:9; 12:15ff; 15:7; 39:21-24; 36:22-36; 39:7,27; Ps 102:13-16).
- Is currently partially hardened (Rom 11:7, 25) and under the chastening of God due to the rejection of her Messiah in unbelief and disobedience (Matt 23:37-39; Luke 19:41-44; 21:20-24; Rom 11). Her scattering among the nations is in fulfillment of prophecy (Deut 28:64-67). An unparalleled period of suffering awaits the apostate nation in the future, Jacob's Great Trouble (Jer 30:5-7; Dan 12:1; Zech 13:8-9; Matt 24:15-22). In the meantime, the fulness of the Gentiles has come in, bringing the salvation of Gentiles through the Gospel which, as a result of the transgression and failure of Israel, will make her jealous (Rom 11).
- Will be saved in the future (Rom 11:26), grafted back into "their own olive tree" (11:24), which is called "their fulfillment" (11:12) and "acceptance" which will be

"life from the dead" (11:15). The return of the Messiah, the deliverer from Zion, will put an end to their spiritual blindness (cf. Zech 12:10) as He removes ungodliness from Jacob and takes away their sins (Rom 11:26-27).

- Will be regathered from exile and restored to her promised land, reconstituted as a nation under the Davidic king, with Jerusalem and Israel becoming the glorified center of a universal kingdom, which will also lead to the salvation of the nations of the world (Isa 2; 11:11-12; Jer 23:5-8; Ezek 36-37; 39; Zech 14; Rom 11:12).

APPENDIX III

A SYNOPSIS OF THE KINGDOM

The Kingdom:

- Is, in its widest sense, the eternal, universal rule of God over all that exists in space and time and beyond time, with His sovereignty generally exercised providentially, though at times supernaturally, yet always efficaciously (1 Chr 29:11-12; Pss 29:10; 74:12; 103:19; 115:3; 135:6; 145:13; Dan 4:34-35).
- Has, as the rule of God, been opposed by both evil spirits (fallen angels) and human beings since the entrance of sin into God's good creation through the fall of Satan and his angels and of man (Gen 3; Rev 12:7). The focal point of this conflict is the earth. It is God's purpose to end this rebellion and its sinful effects, not only in human history, but also in all creation. Thus God's kingdom, which is *over* the earth, will one day be fully established *on* the earth (Isa 2:2-4; Zech 14; Rev 11:15-16).
- In its mediatorial or theocratic aspect, then, is that program through which God effects His lordship on the earth in a comprehensive salvation within history. This mediatorial/theocratic kingdom can be traced from the Garden of Eden through the period of human government initiated by Noah, the period of the patriarchs initiated by Abraham, the kingdom under the judges, the kingdom under the kings, and finally the kingdom under the prophets.

- As prophesied in its future mediatorial/theocratic manifestation, was clearly portrayed by the Old Testament prophets (together with the Psalms), and is characterized by the following features. It will be: an earthly kingdom, ruled by the Messiah, the Lord, who will be King over *all* the earth, bodily reigning in Jerusalem its capital, over a regathered and regenerated Israel, as well as all the Gentile nations (all of whom will know the Lord and will serve Him), a kingdom marked by righteousness, justice, and peace, the power of the Holy Spirit, socio-political transformation, and an earth at least partially relieved from the curse and displaying Edenic splendor (Pss 2; 24:7-10; 72; 89; 96; 110; Isa 2:2-4; 9:6-7; 11:1-9; 24; 33:20; 35; 40:1-5; 42; 52:7-10; 60; 61:4-7; 65:17-25; Jer 23:5-8; 30:4-11; 31:31-37; 33:14-22; Ezek 34:23-31; 36—37; 39:25-29; 40—48; Dan 2:35, 44-45; 7:13-14; Hos 3:4-5; Amos 9:11-15; Mic 4:1—5:5; Zech 2:10-12; 8:1-8; 9:9-10; 14). This pervasive mediatorial/theocratic kingdom program is ultimately fulfilled through the reign of Christ, and the coming of this kingdom involves a comprehensive redemption of creation by God on three fronts: the personal salvation of individuals, the socio-political salvation of the nations, and the salvation of the earth and heavens through re-creation.
- Was "at hand" during Christ's earthly ministry (Matt 10:7; Mark 1:14-15; cf. Luke 17:21) in the sense that the King had come, though the eschatological kingdom itself had not been inaugurated.
- Is currently the mystery form of the kingdom (Matt 13) which refers to the spiritual form of the kingdom that exists in the present age. The details of the kingdom are designated as "mysteries" because this form of the kingdom was not predicted in the Old Testament.

- In the present age is not identical to the church, since the church began at Pentecost (Acts 2) and is taken out of the world by the Rapture (1 Thess 4:13-18) before Christ returns in judgment, whereas the present kingdom began during the ministry of Christ (Matt 13) and extends until Christ returns in judgment (Matt 13:39-40, 49-50). The present kingdom then encompasses the church, though the two are not coterminous.
- In its present form is marked by "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom 14:17) and by power (1 Cor 4:20). It is composed of those who place faith in Jesus Christ (the church), who God "delivers from the domain of darkness" and transfers "to the kingdom of His beloved Son" (Col 1:13). The church is not currently reigning with Christ, but will do so during the Millennium (1 Cor 4:8-9; 2 Tim 2:12; Rev 2; 3; 20)
- In its eschatological or millennial form will see Christ ruling for a thousand years (Rev 20:1-7) on the throne of His father David, over the house of Jacob (Isa 9:6-7; cf. Matt 19:28; Luke 1:31-33). This kingdom will be a literal, earthly, political kingdom, encompassing all the nations (see references above). It will have spiritual characteristics, and one can be rightly related to the King and enter His kingdom only by new birth (John 3:3-5).
- At the end of the millennium, will be delivered to God the Father by Christ (1 Cor 15:24), after all His enemies are subjected to Him (1 Cor 15:24-28). In the new heavens and the new earth all forms of the kingdom will merge in the universal rule of the Father (15:28).

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