



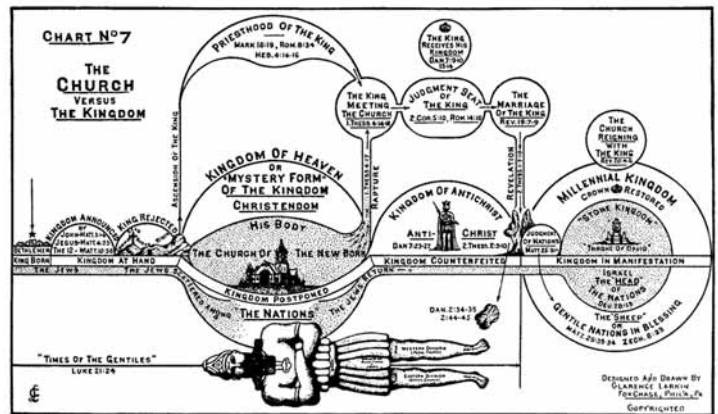
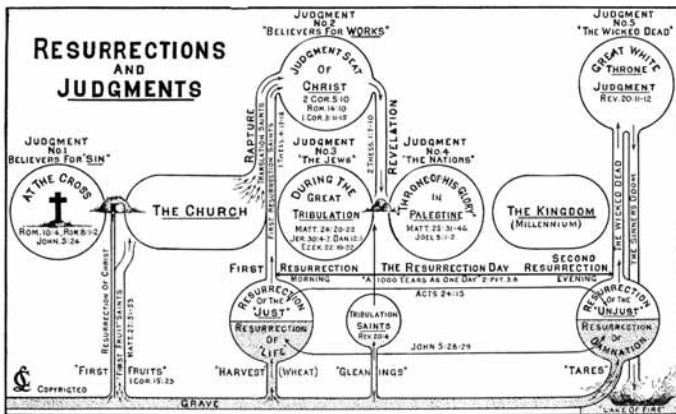
# THE LAST DAYS 10

RETHINKING BIBLE PROPHECY IN THE LIGHT OF SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY

‘Eschatology’ is the study of last things. Christians should never fear having their eschatological ‘system’ scrutinised by the plain teaching of the Bible. If you subscribe to the currently popular “Left Behind” system of eschatology, prepare to be challenged by Scripture and history. Moreover, prepare to gain a greater respect for the integrity of the Bible.

# PREMILLENNIAL ERROR

OR, ‘THE RAPTURE AND THE REVELATION’ BY D. H. KUIPER



How one views the events which surround the return of Jesus Christ in glory is determined largely by the interpretation given to the term millennium (thousand years—see Rev. 20:1-7). Considering premillennialism, the first clue one receives that this view cannot be the teaching of the Word of God is the astounding lack of agreement between the premillennialists themselves. If Scripture presented the last things as this view insists, should there not be unanimity on all but a few minor points perhaps? But this is not the case. The definition which we offer is, therefore, not representative of all premillennialists, but is general enough to cover most: historic premillennialism is the view of the last things which holds that the second coming of Christ will be followed by a period of peace (an exact one thousand years) during which

time Christ will reign on this earth in an earthly kingdom; then shall come the end. A more radical form of this view is dispensationalism. The dispensationalist divides the history of mankind into seven distinct periods or dispensations, and teaches that God deals with the human race during each period according to a different principle: innocence, conscience, human government, promise, law, grace, kingdom. Also, this view insists that the Church will be removed from the earth before the great tribulation (see Matt. 24:29). This latter view, espoused by John N. Darby in England about 1830, and disseminated widely in this country by the Scofield Reference Bible, is really the unique phenomenon called American Premillennialism. It is not taught in the Bible but in the Scofield Reference Bible. Do not confuse the two. The Bible is

## Premillennialism Teaches an Impotent Saviour

The New Testament declares Christ’s victory in binding the devil, the “strong man” [Matthew 12:29, Mark 3:27] who, with the exception of God’s elect, held all humanity captive to the love of evil in this world, throughout the Old Testament period. The gospel proclaims the establishment of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ—spiritual, holy, and pure—within the hearts of the elect people of God. This is the tragedy of contemporary Christianity, whose future hope insists—as did the Jews who crucified the Lord Jesus Christ—that the Messiah will establish (contrary to his own words) an *earthly* kingdom. **Philip Livingstone**

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the infallible Word of God; the Scofield Reference Bible is a deceiving commentary that contains “explanatory notes” on the same page with the text of Scripture. Premillennialism has never been incorporated into any of the creeds, but is the private interpretations of individuals within many denominations. It has never been maintained by outstanding theologians not taught in seminaries where scholarship and exegesis are prominent, but by various Pentecostal and Holiness groups, and Bible institutes. Today this seems to be changing a bit. Premillennialism seems to be making little inroads also into the Reformed community. It is to counteract this trend, and to afford God’s people some Scriptural guidelines for judgment that we briefly examine this erroneous view.

Let us get it clearly in mind. Its main tenets are: 1. The Jews are God’s originally intended people, they are His Kingdom people. To them God spoke the entire Old Testament and to them He promised the Messiah. 2. When Christ came, He was not recognized nor believed on by the majority of the Jews. This contingency was not foreseen by the prophets, nor was it in the original plan of God. However, since Israel, the twelve tribes, rejected the Christ, as an expedient He resorts to the Gentiles, which people constitute the Church in distinction from the Kingdom. Thus the Church is a parenthesis in history. It began at the cross and shall end at the beginning of the millennium. Also, this implies that Scripture has been written for two distinct recipients. Part is for the Jews—the entire Old Testament, most of the gospels and especially the Sermon on the Mount, and parts of Revelation. The epistles plus other parts of the book of Revelation are for the Church. 3. At any moment, without signs or announcement, there shall be a Rapture. See I Thess. 4:13-17, Matt. 24:40-41, and Matt. 25:13. By the rapture is meant the sudden and secret coming of Christ to take to Himself in the air the bodies of the resurrected and living saints. The wicked dead remain in the grave. This is Christ’s coming for His saints and is known as the first resurrection. 4. Next is a seven year period called the Tribulation (the seventh week of Dan. 9:24-27). During this time all the events of Rev. 4:9 and Matt. 24 take place. The Church, however, is not under tribulation but is with her Lord in the air. 5. Then Christ comes with His saints to

this earth again in the Revelation. At this time there is a second resurrection of those saints who died during the tribulation. The second coming of Christ ushers in the Millennium. 6. With the advent of the Millennium, prophetic time resumes, for God returns to His favored people, the Jews. Christ comes to this earth and reigns in an earthly kingdom of peace and prosperity, a kingdom which has its center in Jerusalem. The Jews are restored to Palestine, and at the sight of Messiah are turned to Him in a great national conversion. At the beginning of this period Satan is bound, and Christ destroys the Antichrist in the battle of Armageddon. The curse is removed from nature: deserts bloom and wild animals are tame. Great numbers of Gentiles are also converted and incorporated into this Kingdom. 7. At the end of the Millennium Satan is loosed for a short time. 8. Then is the third resurrection, that of the wicked at the end of the world. They are judged with the Devil and his angels, found wanting and assigned forever to feel the sting of hell. 9. Finally, the eternal state with all the fullness of heaven and emptiness of hell is ushered in. Some say all the redeemed mingle in a new heaven and a new earth. Others keep the Kingdom and the Church separate forever, the one in earthly Palestine, the other in heaven.

The above is a highly condensed, greatly streamlined presentation of the matter. Some authors list as many as 22 separate events. Many premillennialist preachers must resort to a complicated chart spread across the front of the church building to make sure they are being followed. A brief catalog of the important premillennial points is as follows: seven dispensations, eight covenants, two second comings, three or four resurrections, and at least four judgments. It is difficult to conceive this as the teaching of the Bible, which was written in simple language for the simple, yea for babes. To the refreshing, uncomplicated, clear Word of God we now turn for light on these matters.

Underlying all Premillennial thought is the separation made between Old dispensation Israel and the New dispensation Church. The question is, is Israel God’s Kingdom people and are the Gentiles His Church? Or is Israel a spiritual concept, so that Israel is the Church and the Church is Israel? If the

basic unity of the covenant of grace can be established; if Abraham, for example, and the New Testament Gentiles are one in the eyes of God; if God deals with His people in every age according to the same principle—faith, then Premillennialism falls, and can only be called an ingenious misuse of Scripture. With that man of faith Abraham, to whom all Jews proudly traced their ancestry, God established His everlasting covenant of grace. Gen. 17:7. That covenant was established also with Abraham’s progeny. Gen. 22:17. The Lord makes clear that in His seed (Christ) all the nations of the earth shall be blessed. Gen. 22:18. In the book of Galatians, Paul (the apostle to the Gentiles) takes up the example of Abraham as he rebukes the foolish Galatians for their attempted work of righteousness. In making clear that God accounts faith in Christ for righteousness, the apostle speaks these amazing words: “Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.” Gal. 3:7. Later he writes “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree: that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ.” He concludes this chapter with the words: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” Can anyone miss the unity of God’s work of redemption? Abraham’s seed, true spiritual Israel, is composed of all those who have been given faith in His dear Son. In close connection with the above is the fact that Paul also stresses the unity of the Church of all ages in such passages as Rom. 9:6-9, Eph. 2:19-22, Eph. 4:4-6, and Col. 1:16-20. Jesus Himself as the Good Shepherd was intensely conscious of the unity of those given Him of God to redeem; He said to the Jews on Solomon’s porch: “And other sheep have I which are not of this fold; them also I must bring and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold and one shepherd.” John 10:16.

Secondly, the text most referred to by the Premillennialists, I Thess. 4:13-17, simply does not prove a sudden, silent “rapture”, and a separate resurrection of the righteous and wicked. Rather it teaches: a visible, noticeable (shout,



voice, trump) return of Christ; the resurrection of the bodies of dead saints followed immediately by the translation of those saints who are alive at Christ's coming, without saying anything about the wicked; that the saints shall forever remain with their Lord, suggesting not that they return to this mundane earth again in their glorified, spiritual, incorruptible bodies, but that they remain with Christ in heavenly glory! Further, Christ Himself makes clear there is but one resurrection: "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming in which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation" John 5:28, 29. **The Scriptures reveal one second coming of Christ, one resurrection at His coming, and one judgment.**

At fault is the method of interpretation followed by adherents of this system. A sound rule is that difficult passages of the Word, which Rev. 20 certainly is, must be explained in the light of simpler texts. One cannot escape the feeling, however, that with this view a preconceived theory is brought to Scripture, difficult passages are appealed to as proof, and then the attempt is made to bring many simpler passages into line with the theory. The result is a violent splitting asunder of the Word, and thus of the redemptive work of God! But God is one. His Word is one (presented in two testaments, prophecy and fulfillment), and redemption in Jesus Christ is one! Positively, we live in what Rev. 20 calls the "thousand years". This millennium began at Pentecost and will end when time and history end. Christ shall return personally and visibly, shall call forth the dead from the graves and the seas, shall judge all men according to their works, and shall bring His sheep into one fold, the heavenly house of many mansions! Let the Reformed truth continue to be sounded "that the Son of God from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves to Himself by His Spirit and Word out of the whole human race, a Church chosen to everlasting life, agreeing in true faith" (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day XXI) Blessed are all those who are living members thereof!

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# BACK TO THE FUTURE

## *The Preterist Perspective*

KENNETH L. GENTRY, JR., TH.D.

**W**ith a recent flurry of books and conferences, the preterist perspective is beginning to make its presence felt in current prophecy discussions. Unfortunately, dispensational eschatology, which arose in the 1830s and is built on the futurist system, thoroughly dominates evangelical preaching, education, publishing, and broadcasting today. Consequently, evangelical Christians are largely unfamiliar with preterism, making it seem to be the "new kid on the block." Preterism, however, is as hoary with age as is futurism. And despite its overshadowing in this century, it has been well represented by leading Bible-believing scholars through the centuries into our current day.

One of the best known and most accessible of the ancient preterists is Eusebius (A.D. 260-340), the "father of church history." In his classic *Ecclesiastical History* he details Jerusalem's woes in A.D. 70. After a lengthy citation from Josephus's *Wars of the Jews*, Eusebius writes that "it is fitting to add to his accounts the true prediction of our Saviour in which he foretold these very events" (3:7:1-2.) He then refers to the Olivet Discourse, citing Matthew 24:19-21 as his lead-in reference and later Luke 21:20, 23, 24. He concludes: "If any one compares the words of our Saviour with the other accounts of the historian concerning the whole war, how can one fail to wonder, and to admit that the foreknowledge and the prophecy of our Saviour were truly divine and marvelously strange" (3:7:7).

Another ancient document applying Matthew 24 to A.D. 70 is the *Clementine Homilies* (2d c.): "Prophesying concerning the temple, He said: 'See ye these buildings? Verily I say to you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another which shall not be taken away Matt. 24:3; and this generation shall not pass until the destruction begin Matt. 24:34...' And in like manner

He spoke in plain words the things that were straightway to happen, which we can now see with our eyes, in order that the accomplishment might be among those to whom the word was spoken" (CH 3:15).

Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150-215) discusses Daniel's seventieth week as a past event: "The half of the week Nero held sway, and in the holy city Jerusalem placed the abomination; and in the half of the week he was taken away, and Otho, and Galba, and Vitellius. And Vespasian rose to the supreme power, and destroyed Jerusalem, and desolated the holy place" (*Miscellanies* 1:21). The famed premillennialist Tertullian (A.D. 160-225) writes of the Roman conquest: "And thus, in the day of their storming, the Jews fulfilled the seventy hebdomads predicted in Daniel" (*An Answer to the Jews*, 8).

Even the Book of Revelation is applied to A.D. 70 by many in antiquity. In his *Interpretation of the Revelation* Andreas of Cappadocia (5th c.) noted that "there are not wanting those who apply this passage to the siege and destruction of Jerusalem by Titus" (Rev. 6:12). Later he commented: "These things are referred by some to those sufferings which were inflicted by the Romans upon the Jews" (Rev. 7:1). According to noted church historian Henry Wace, Andreas's commentary is "the earliest systematic exposition of the book in the Greek church." Andreas himself informs us that he wrote it in order "to unfold the meaning of the Apocalypse, and to make the suitable application of its predictions to the times that followed it."

Arethas of Cappadocia (6th c.) also provides us a commentary on Revelation which, according to Wace "professes to be a compilation" though "no mere reproduction of the work of his predecessor, although it incorporates a large portion of the contents of that work." Arethas specifically applies various pas-

sages in Revelation to A.D. 70 (Rev. 6-7). Jumping ahead in history, we find the Spanish Jesuit Alcasar (1614) who greatly systematized the preterist approach to Revelation. About this same time great reformed preterists flourished, such as Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) and Jean LeClerc (1657-1736). In fact, one of the finest intellects of the Westminster Assembly was a strong preterist: John Lightfoot (1601-1675). In his *Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica* (1674; rep. 1989) Lightfoot offered a fine preterist exposition of Matthew 24 (2:308-321), with allusions to 2 Thessalonians 2. Of the Thessalonian passage he argued that the “restrainer” therein “is to be understood of the emperor Claudius enraged at and curbing in the Jews” (2:312).

Lightfoot even adopted the view that Revelation 1:7 speaks of “Christ’s taking vengeance on that exceeding wicked nation” of Israel (2:319 and 422). There he interpreted Christ’s coming as a providential judgment upon “those who pierced him” (the Jews) from among “all the tribes of the land literally” (Israel). This committed Lightfoot so strongly to preterism that he suggested Revelation’s overall theme is Israel’s judgment: “I may further add, that perhaps this observation might not a little help (if my eyes fail me not) in discovering the method of the author of the Book of the Revelation” (3:210). This led him to conclude that the “judiciary scene set up in Rev. 4 and 5, and those thrones Rev. 20:1” speak of “the throne of glory” and “is to be understood of the judgment of Christ to be brought upon the treacherous, rebellious, wicked, Jewish people. We meet with very frequent mention of the coming of Christ in his glory in this sense” (2:266).

Moving even closer to our own day, the great hermeneutics scholar Milton S. Terry (1840-1914) published much on the preterist scheme. His preterist convictions abundantly appear both in his classic text *Biblical Hermeneutics* (1885; rep. 1974) and in a separate work *Biblical Apocalyptic* (1898; rep. 1988). The renowned Swiss-American church historian Philip Schaff (1819-1893) also published a preterist view of Revelation in his classic *History of the Christian Church* (1:825-852).

One of the finest preterist commentaries on Revelation ever published was *Commentary on the Apocalypse* by the

noted American Congregationalist, Moses Stuart (1780-1852). The still popular commentary on Revelation by Methodist scholar Adam Clarke (1762-1832) follows much of Lightfoot’s commitment to an A.D. 70 focus, as does that found in *The Early Days of Christianity* by renowned Anglican historian, F. W. Farrar (1831-1903). Baker Book House recently republished *The Message from Patmos* (1921, rep. 1989) by David S. Clark, father of Presbyterian apologist Gordon S. Clark.

Entering our own generation, several reformed expositions have helped fuel the current revival of preterism. J. Marcellus Kik’s *The Eschatology of Victory* (1971) developed the Olivet Discourse in great detail for us. Even more recent works include: David Chilton’s *The Great Tribulation* (1987), Gary DeMar’s *Last Days Madness* (1991), and my *Perilous Times* (1998).

The first phase of the current revival of preterist commentaries on Revelation include *The Time Is At Hand* (1966) by Jay E. Adams and *Search the Scriptures: Hebrews to Revelation* (1978) by Cornelis Vanderwaal. More recently still we have *The Days of Vengeance* (1987) by David Chilton, *Revelation: Four Views* (1996) by Steve Gregg, and my contribution to Marvin Pate’s *Four Views on the Book of Revelation* and my forthcoming *A Tale of Two Cities* (1999). R. C. Sproul’s *The Last Days According to Jesus* (1998) employs preterism as an apologetic tool in defense of the integrity of the prophecies of Jesus (Olivet) and John (Revelation).

As we consider the history of preterism we should be aware of its various branches. Just as premillennialism has cultic (e.g., Mormonism and Jehovah’s Witnesses), dispensational (e.g., Scofield and Ryrie), and historic (e.g., Ladd and Kromminga) expressions, so preterism has three main divisions today.

Liberal preterists (e.g., James Moffatt, *Expositor’s Greek Testament* 1940) generally view prophecies of A.D. 70 as eventual pronouncements, that is, as “after the event” pseudo-prophecies. Revelation especially is deemed an editorialized compound of various Jewish and Christian oracles generated from historical responses to Jerusalem’s destruction. Liberal preterists correctly recognize the A.D. 70 focus of many judgment prophecies, but wrongly deny the predictive nature of inspired prophe-

cy. Their works often contain valuable historical and grammatical gems that may be sifted from the rubble of critical exegesis.

Hyper-preterists (e.g., J. S. Russell’s, *The Parousia*, 1887, rep. 1983, 1997) provide many fine insights into preteristic passages. Unfortunately, they go too far by extending valid observations gathered from temporally-confined judgment passages (texts including such delimitations as “soon” and “at hand”) to passages that are not temporally constrained and that actually prophesy the future Second Advent of Christ. This school of preterism tends to focus all eschatological pronouncements on A.D. 70, including the resurrection of the dead, the great judgment, and the second advent of Christ. Consequently, they leave the stream of historic orthodoxy by denying a future return of Christ and are even pressed by system requirements to deny the bodily resurrection of Christ. This view has developed a cult-like following of narrowly focused and combative adherents.

Evangelical (and reformed) preterists (e.g., R. C. Sproul) take seriously the time texts of Scripture and apply those prophecies to A.D. 70, a redemptive-historical event of enormous consequence. They argue that there God finally and conclusively broadened his redemptive focus from the Jews to all races (Matt. 28:19), from the land of Israel to all the world (Acts 1:8), and from the temple-based worship to a simpler spiritual-based worship (John 4:21-24). Where such time markers are absent from eschatological texts, though, evangelical preterists apply the prophecies to the Second Advent at the end of history. The judgments in A.D. 70 are similar to those associated with the Second Advent (and to the Babylonian conquest in the Old Testament) and are actually adumbrations of the Second Advent.

So, the preterist urges the Christian interested in biblical prophecy to go “back to the future.” That is, in many cases we must go back to the original audience and look to the near future. And to understand the historical nature of preterism itself, we must look beyond the current debate to the stream of interpretation running throughout Christian history.