



## **BIBLE SCRIPTURES THAT CREATE SIGNIFICANT OBSTACLES TO DARBY'S DISPENSATIONALISM**

### **WHAT IS DISPENSATIONALISM?**

Dispensationalism is a form of premillennialism originating among the Plymouth Brethren in the early 1830's. The father of dispensationalism, John Nelson Darby, educated as a lawyer and ordained Anglican priest, was one of the chief founders of the Plymouth Brethren movement, which arose in reaction against the perceived empty formalism of the Church of England. To the Brethren, the true "invisible" church was to come out of the apostate "visible" church, rejecting such forms as priesthood and sacraments.

The new doctrine was widely accepted in America, due to popular prophetic meetings such as the Niagara Bible Conferences. C.I. Scofield promulgated dispensational thought in his Scofield Reference Bible. Dispensational Bible institutes by the hundreds have sprung up across the continent - notably Moody Bible Institute and Dallas Theological Seminary. Media evangelists such as Jerry Fallwell, Pat Robertson, Jack Van Impe, and Hal Lindsey popularize dispensational eschatology today.

The church, according to dispensational doctrine, was unforeseen in the Old Testament and constitutes a "parenthesis" in God's plan for Israel. In the future, the distinction between Jew and Gentile will be reestablished and will continue throughout all eternity. The "parenthesis", or church age, will end at the rapture when Christ comes invisibly and secretly to take all believers (excepting OT saints) to heaven to celebrate the "marriage feast of the Lamb" with Christ for a period of seven years. Dispensationalists teach the rapture is by necessity different from the second coming, otherwise Christ would appear three times. They acknowledge that Christ would appear three times is taught nowhere in the Bible Scriptures.

Dispensational theology centers upon the concept of God's dealings with mankind being divided into (usually) seven distinct economies or "dispensations", in which man is tested as to his obedience to the will of God as revealed under each dispensation. Dispensationalists see God as pursuing two distinct purposes throughout history, one related to an earthly goal and an earthly people (the Jews), the other to heavenly goals and a heaven (the church).

Dispensationalism sees Israel as an earthly people with earthly promises, and the church as a heavenly people with heavenly promises. Membership in Israel is by natural birth. One enters the church by supernatural birth through Christ. Dispensationalists view Israel and the church as having distinct eternal destinies. Israel will receive an eternal earthly Kingdom, and the church an eternal heavenly Kingdom.

This concept also teaches the rapture and second coming are separate events, and there is a separate plan of salvation for Israel. There are at least ten Scriptural concepts that are severe obstacles for dispensationalism. This paper will examine all ten obstacles.

## 1. THE RAPTURE AND SECOND COMING ARE SIMULTANEOUS EVENTS

By necessity, dispensationalism teaches the rapture and Second Coming are two different events, generally separated by at least seven years. Since there is no Bible Scripture that teaches Jesus will appear three times, the separate rapture teaching also requires that the rapture must be secret, and Jesus cannot be visible.

There is no sound Scriptural basis for the position that the Second Coming of Christ must be divided into these two phases. Among the primary reason why the view of Christ's twofold Second Coming must be rejected is that no argument for the two-stage coming can be derived from the use of the New Testament words for the Second Coming. These words are *parousia* (physical presence), *apokalypsis* (revelation), and *epiphaneia* (appearance).

To understand how this two-phase idea is conflict with many Bible passages, it is important to know the meaning of three key New Testament words: *parousia*, *apokalypsis*, and *epiphaneia*. Paul calls both the rapture and the Second Coming by the same term---the "*parousia*."

"*parousia*" (par-oo-see'-ah) = "the physical presence of a person, arrival, or official visit"

"*apokalypsis*" (ə-pŏk'ə-lĭps) = "revelation"

"*epiphaneia*" (ep-if-an'-i-ah) = "appearance", "brightness"

Of these three, the most important is *parousia*. It means physical presence. The word *parousia* is used 24 times in the New Testament. *Parousia* is a fairly common word in Greek, with the meaning "physical presence" (2 Corinthians 10:10; Philippians 2:12). More especially it may mean "presence after absence," "arrival" (but not "return," unless this is given by the context), as in 1 Corinthians 16:17; 2 Corinthians 7:6,7; Philippians 1:26.

And still more particularly it is applied to the Second Coming of Christ in 1 Corinthians 15:23; 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 2:1,8; James 5:7,8; 2 Peter 1:16; 3:4,12; 1 John 2:28--in all 13 times, besides 2 Thessalonians 2:9, where it denotes the coming of the Man of Lawlessness.

We look first at the uses of the word "*parousia*." In 1 Thessalonians 4:15, Paul uses *parousia* to describe what pretribulationists would call the "rapture." But in 1 Thessalonians 3:13 the same word is used to describe the "coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints"—the second phase of Christ's return, according to pretribulationists. And in 2 Thessalonians 2:7-8 Paul uses the term *parousia* to refer to the coming at which Christ shall destroy the man of lawlessness—which is not supposed to happen, according to pretribulationists, until the second phase. Remember *parousia* means "the physical presence of a person, arrival, or official visit."

### "PAROUSIA" DESCRIBES THE RAPTURE—WITH A LOUD COMMAND

1 Thessalonians 4:15-18 (NIV) According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up

together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

#### **“PAROUSIA” DESCRIBES THE SECOND COMING**

1 Thessalonians 3:13 (NIV) May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus **comes with all his holy ones**.

#### **“PAROUSIA” DESCRIBES THE SECOND COMING TO DEFEAT MAN OF LAWLESSNESS**

2 Thessalonians 2:8 (NIV) And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his **coming**.

#### **“APOKALYPSIS” IS USED TO DESCRIBE BOTH THE RAPTURE AND THE SECOND COMING**

Paul also uses the word “apokalypsis” for both the rapture and Second Coming. In 1 Corinthians 1:7 Paul uses “apokalypsis” to describe what dispensationalists call the rapture: *“Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ **to be revealed**.”* But in 2 Thessalonians 1:7 the same word is used to describe what they call the second phase of the Second Coming: *“This will happen when the Lord Jesus is **revealed from heaven** in blazing fire with his powerful angels.”*

#### **“EPIPHANEIA” IS USED FOR THE SECOND COMING DEFEATING THE MAN OF LAWLESSNESS AND RAPTURE**

The same thing is true of the use of the word “epiphaneia.” In 1 Timothy 6:14 Paul uses it to refer to what pretribulationists call the rapture: *“I charge you to keep this command without spot or blame until the **appearing** of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* But in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 Paul uses the word “epiphaneia to describe the coming of Christ at which he will overthrow the Man of Lawlessness: *“And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the **splendor** of his coming.”*

In the simplest of terms---these words Paul used mean Jesus must be loud and visible at the time of the rapture. The rapture cannot be secret.

## **2. IF THE CHURCH CAN BE SHOWN TO BE FULFILLING PROMISES MADE TO ISRAEL**

### **DISPENSATIONALISM IS NOT BIBLICALLY CORRECT**

John Darby, the father of dispensationalism, stated the distinction in the clearest of terms ***“The Jewish nation is never to enter the church.”*** Dr. Ryrie of the Dallas Theological Seminary said this is the most important dispensational distinction, and approves the statement that the ***“basic promise of Dispensationalism is two purposes of God expressed in the formation of two peoples who maintain their distinction throughout eternity.”***

Dr. Ryrie wrote in 1947 that ***“If the church can be shown to fulfill promises made to Israel the idea of dispensationalism is a failure.”*** (Ryrie, *The Relationship of the New Covenant to Premillennialism*, Master's thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary 1947, p. 31)

In contrast, historical Christian theology back to the Apostles has always maintained the essential continuity of Israel and the church. The **elect** of all the ages are viewed as one people, with one Savior, one destiny. This continuity can be shown by examining a few Old Testament prophecies with their fulfillment.

There are many Bible passages that show the church has received blessings first promised to Israel.

#### **PROMISE TO ISRAEL**

Hosea 1:10 (NIV) *“Yet the Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore, which cannot be measured or counted. In the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ they will be called ‘children of the living God.’”*

#### **FULFILLMENT IN THE CHURCH**

Romans 9:22-26 (NIV) *What if God, although choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory— even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? As he says in Hosea: “I will call them ‘my people’ who are not my people; and I will call her ‘my loved one’ who is not my loved one,” and, “In the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘children of the living God.’”*

#### **PROMISE TO ISRAEL**

Hosea 2:23 (NIV) *I will plant her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called ‘Not my loved one.’ I will say to those called ‘Not my people,’ ‘You are my people’; and they will say, ‘You are my God.’”*

#### **FULFILLMENT IN THE CHURCH**

1 Peter 2:9-10 (NIV) *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

#### **PROMISE TO ISRAEL**

Amos 9:11-12 (NIV) *“In that day “I will restore David’s fallen shelter—I will repair its broken walls and restore its ruins—and will rebuild it as it used to be, so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations that bear my name,” declares the Lord, who will do these things.*

#### **FULFILLMENT IN THE CHURCH**

Acts 15:14-18 (NIV) *Simon has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: “After this I will return and rebuild David’s fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things’— things known from long ago.*

### 3. THE CHURCH WILL EXPERIENCE THE TRIBULATION

Virtually all the early church fathers taught that the church would experience the tribulation, while pretribulation millennialists insist that will not happen. “Tribulation” refers to the persecution of believers. It is from Satan, and not the Wrath of God. By thinking “the tribulation” is still in the future, many Christians ignore the plight of persecuted Christians today.

Hermas (?? 90-140 AD) wrote in The Sheperd of Hermas, pages 31-32:

*“But the sun now shone out a little, and, lo! I see a mighty beast like a whale, and out of its mouth fiery locusts proceeded.”.....*

*“You have escaped from great tribulation on account of your faith, and because you did not doubt in the presence of such a beast. Go, therefore, and tell the elect of the Lord His mighty deeds, and say to them that this beast is a type of **the great tribulation that is coming.**”*

The Didache (?? 90 AD) teaching of the 12 Apostles references the tribulation for Christians:

16:8 And then the world-deceiver shall appear as a son of God;

16:9 and shall work signs and wonders, and the earth shall be delivered into his hands;

16:10 and he shall do unholy things, which have never been since the world began.

16:11 Then **all created mankind shall come to the fire of testing**, and many shall be offended and perish;

16:12 but those who endure in their faith shall be saved through the Curse itself.

### DISPENSATIONALISTS TEACH THE CHURCH WILL NOT EXPERIENCE THE TRIBULATION

Based on their interpretation of Daniel 9:24–27, dispensationalists and some others think that there will be a seven-year tribulation, primarily directed against the nation of Israel, just before the parousia. Most teach the rapture will occur before the tribulation begins, and Jesus will appear again seven years later.

Daniel’s final seven is seen as a special seven-year time period of tribulation after the secret rapture. Yet the final seven of Daniel is better understood as a “seven multiple.” Thus, the best explanation is that Daniel's 70th seven is seven years of 360 days of Old Testament years. It is different from the first two sevens--but still a seven multiple!

Daniel's 70th Seven

7 Years x 360 days per year = 2,520 days/years

(Old Testament days/years)

$2,520 \times 360/365.24 = 2,483.85$  days/years (modern New Testament days/years)

This time period stretches exactly from the first day of return from the Babylonian exile with the decree of Cyrus of Persia in 536 BC, to when Israel was reborn in 1948. Israel was continuously occupied by foreign powers over this long time expanse. Exactly in the midpoint of this seven multiple is the year 706 with the construction of the abomination on the wing of the Temple Mount with the Islamic Al-Aqsa Mosque. Islam attempted to take away the sacrifice of Christ—the only sacrifice that matters.

The “great tribulation” is thought to be a time of even more intense persecution in the last half of the tribulation. Most historic premillennialists, amillennialists, and postmillennialists, disagree with dispensationalist ideas concerning the specifics of any future tribulation. They see tribulation as one of the things that characterizes the entire period between Christ’s first and second comings, although the intensity of persecution may increase shortly before Christ returns. If you look up the word “tribulation” in various New Testament translations, **almost every reference applies to what true Christians go through, rather than what they escape from.**

John 16:33 – Jesus Christ said to His followers, “In the world YOU shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

Acts 14:22 – Paul told Christians, “WE through much tribulation must enter the kingdom of God.”

Matthew 24:21,22 – Jesus said there would be “great tribulation” which His followers (the “elect”) must endure. Yet for “the elect’s sake, those days shall be shortened.”

Romans 5:3 – True Christians are to “glory in tribulations” because “tribulation works patience” and develops Christian character.

2 Thessalonians 1:4 – Paul wrote of the many “persecutions and tribulations” which “the churches of God” were enduring in the first century (Christians were thrown to the lions in the coliseum, eaten by wild dogs, burned at the stake and lit up as torches in Nero’s garden).

Revelation 1:9 – John was our “companion in tribulation.” Revelation 2:9 – To His church, Jesus said, “I know your works and tribulation...”, Revelation 2:10 – Again to His church, Jesus said, “YOU shall have tribulation...”

Revelation 7:14 – God’s final people “came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” They did not escape it, but endured through it, being purified.

New Testament passages describing the great tribulation do not indicate that the church will be removed from the earth before the tribulation begins. Jesus speaks about the great tribulation in his Olivet Discourse, found in Matthew 24. But there is no indication here that the church will no longer be on the earth when this tribulation occurs. Jesus, in fact, says that the days of that tribulation will be shortened for the sake of the elect (v. 22), and there is no basis for believing that these are only Jewish elect. One could counter that Matthew’s Gospel was written especially for the Jews, but similar words are found in Mark 13:20, in a Gospel which is not directed specifically to the Jews.

Jesus said it clearly! The trumpet will sound and the elect will be gathered immediately after the tribulation. Jesus clearly taught a Post-Tribulation rapture in Matthew 24:29-31 (& Mark 13:24-27). “Immediately after the Tribulation of those days .... he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other”(cf. Mark 13:27).

The event in this passage being the rapture easily harmonizes with the other “rapture” passages:

**Jesus coming in the clouds of heaven** - 1 Thessalonians 4:17, Daniel 7:13

**Heralded by sound of a great trumpet** - 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 1 Corinth. 15:52, Revelation 11:15-18

**Accompanied by the angels** - 1 Thessalonians 4:16 (voice of archangel); 2 Thessalonians 1:4-10

**Gathering the elect from heaven and earth** - Mark 13:27, 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17; 2 Thessalonians 2:1 (note use of the word "gathering" in each passage)

#### 4. THE WRATH OF THE LAMB AND TRIBULATION FROM SATAN ARE DIFFERENT EVENTS

Dispensationalism teaches the tribulation is the Wrath of God. In order to understand the differences between the tribulation and the day of God’s Wrath, we must understand that the day of His wrath is the beginning of “the Day of the Lord”. The Day of the Lord is when Jesus returns.

How do we know that? Revelation 6:15-17 tells us so: *Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and everyone else, both slave and free, hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the **wrath of the Lamb!** For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?”*

In other words, the kings of the earth will know that the day of God’s wrath had come because they will see the cosmic signs spoken of in this passage. They may not know the Scriptures, but they obviously will know that these signs were from God, which is proved by their statement “the great day of their wrath is come”.

Let us consider the cosmic disturbances of the sun becoming black and the moon as blood and the stars falling to the earth. We read of these same cosmic events in Joel 2:31, *“The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.”* So these cosmic signs will appear before the day of the Lord and those of Revelation 6:18-17 will understand that they were the signs from God of the day of His wrath. Obviously, these signs will occur only once. That means that the day of God’s wrath begins the Day of the Lord.

Paul makes clear that believing Christians will not face God’s wrath, even though they face the tribulation. 1 Thessalonians 5:9-11 (NIV) *For God **did not appoint us to suffer wrath** but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.*

John says the same in his Gospel: John 3:34-36 (NIV) *For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit. The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, **but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on them.***

## 5. THE DAY OF THE LORD WILL BE A COMPLETE SURPRISE TO MOST, AND BE SEEN BY ALL

Dispensationalism teaches the Second Coming of Jesus will be exactly seven years after the secret rapture. To keep Jesus from having to return three times (which is non-Scriptural), they teach the rapture return is a secret one and Jesus will not be seen. Thus, it does not count as a “return.” So, it will be possible to accurately know the future date of Day of the Lord with the visible return of Jesus by knowing when the rapture occurred as people suddenly go missing. But this is not what Scripture teaches.

**The exact time of return of Jesus is unknown—but will not be a secret.** It will be sudden, LOUD and every eye will know it. Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, *“For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord.”*

Matthew 24:30-32 (NIV) *“Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.*

Yes, Jesus is returning soon. But it will be sudden, noisy and VISIBLE. Many events will occur on this special day the Bible calls “The Day of the Lord.” Most of the world is distracted today, but Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-4 (NIV) to be prepared for the Day of the Lord. The prophet Zechariah in chapter 14:6-7 (NIV) tells us it will be a unique day without sunlight, but still some twilight.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-4 (NIV) *Now, brothers and sisters...you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, “Peace and safety,” destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief.*

Zechariah 14:6-7 (NIV) *On that day there will be neither sunlight nor cold, frosty darkness. It will be a unique day—a day known only to the Lord—with no distinction between day and night. When evening comes, there will be light.*

2 Peter 3:10 (NIV) *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.*

Jesus said it will be as sudden as in the days of Noah. Matthew 24: 36-42 (NIV) *“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away.*

*That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. **"Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come."***

## **6. THE CHURCH AND ISRAEL ARE UNDER THE SAME NEW COVENANT**

There is a striking difference between the teaching of the early church fathers and dispensationalism as taught by Darby. This concerns the relationship between Israel and the church. We read the Old Testament, and it is evident that most of it concerns the story of Israel. For example, Ezekiel in chapters 36 and 37 promises a restoration of Israel in the latter days so that the Israelites will *"know that I am the Lord."*

Ezekiel 37:12-14 (NIV) *"Therefore prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord.'"*

In order to understand the relationship between Israel and the church as described in the New Testament, we will need to look at the question in the context of the different answers Christians have given over the years. The traditional dispensationalist view maintains that God has not replaced Israel with the church but that God has two programs in history, one for the church and one for Israel. Traditional dispensationalism also maintains that the church consists only of believers saved between Pentecost and the rapture. The church as the body of Christ does not include Old Testament believers.

Progressive dispensationalism has modified some of these views, but the traditional dispensationalist view remains very popular. Some covenant theologians have adopted a view that many dispensationalists describe as "replacement theology." This is the idea that the church has completely replaced Israel. Jews may still be saved on an individual basis by coming to Christ, but the nation of Israel and the Jews as a people no longer have any part to play in redemptive history.

When we turn to the New Testament, the same story continues, and Israel is still in the picture. Jesus is described as the one who will be given "the throne of his father David" and the one who "will reign over the house of Jacob [Israel] forever" (Luke 1:32–33). He is presented as the One the prophets foresaw.

The first to believe that Jesus is the promised Messiah are Israelites— Andrew, Peter, James, John. But in the Gospels, we also hear Jesus speak of building His church, and we see growing hostility between the leaders of Israel and Jesus. We hear Jesus speak of destroying the tenants of the vineyard and giving it to others (Luke 20:9–18). In the book of Acts, the spread of the gospel to the Samaritans and Gentiles leads to even more conflict with the religious leaders of Israel. So, is Israel cast aside and replaced by this new entity known as the "church"?

Has Israel been replaced? There are those who would say yes, but the answer is not that simple, for we also run across hints that God is not finished with the nation of Israel. At the end of His declaration of woes on the

scribes and Pharisees, Jesus says, “You will not see me again, until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord’” (Matt. 23:39).

In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus speaks of Jerusalem being trampled underfoot “until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:24). Jerusalem was freed from the trampling of the Gentiles in 1967. In Acts, Peter says to a Jewish audience: “Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago” (Acts 3:19—21). Finally, Paul says things about Israel that seem to preclude total rejection. Speaking of Israel, he writes, **“I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means!”** (Romans 11:1).

The relationship between the people of God in the Old Testament and the people of God in the New Testament is better described in terms of an organic development rather than either a completely separate program or replacement. It is the single olive tree with mixed branches.

During most of the Old Testament era, there were essentially three groups of people: the Gentile nations, national Israel, and true Israel (the faithful remnant). Although the nation of Israel was often involved in idolatry, apostasy, and rebellion, God always kept for Himself a faithful remnant—those who trusted in Him and who would not bow the knee to Baal (1 Kings 19:18). This remnant, this true Israel, included men such as David, Joash, Isaiah, and Daniel, as well as women such as Sarah, Deborah, and Hannah. There were those who were circumcised in the flesh and a smaller number who had their hearts circumcised as well. So, even in the Old Testament, not all were Israel who were descended from Israel (Romans. 9:6).

Romans 9:6-8 (NIV) *It is not as though God’s word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham’s children. On the contrary, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.”* **In other words, it is not the children by physical descent who are God’s children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring.**

On the day of Pentecost, the true Israel, Jewish believers in Jesus, was taken by the Holy Spirit and formed into the nucleus of the New Testament church (Acts 2). The Holy Spirit was poured out on the true Israel, and the same men and women who were part of this true Israel were now the true new covenant church. Soon after, Gentiles began to become a part of this small group.

This is an extremely important point to grasp because it explains why there is so much confusion regarding the relationship between the church and Israel. The answer depends on whether we are talking about national Israel or true Israel. The church is distinct from national Israel, just as the true Israel in the Old Testament was distinct from national Israel even while being part of national Israel. The remnant group was part of the whole but could also be distinguished from the whole by its faith.

However, if we are talking about true Israel, there really is no distinction. **The true Israel of the Old Testament became the nucleus of the true church on the day of Pentecost.** Here the analogy of the olive tree that Paul uses in Romans 11 is instructive. The tree represents the covenant people of God—Israel.

Paul compares unbelieving Israel to branches that have been broken off from the olive tree. Believing Gentiles are compared to branches from a wild olive tree that have been grafted in to the cultivated olive tree.

***The important point to notice is that God does not cut the old tree down and plant a new one (replacement theology). Likewise God does not plant a second new tree alongside the old tree and then graft branches from the old tree into the new tree (traditional dispensationalism).***

The same tree exists across the Old and New Testaments. That which remains after the dead branches are removed is the true Israel. Gentile believers are now grafted into this already existing old tree (true Israel/the true church). **There is only one good olive tree, and the same olive tree exists across the covenantal divide.**

### **ROMANS 11 AND THE FUTURE OF ISRAEL**

So, what does this mean for national Israel, the branches that have been broken off from the true Israel because of unbelief? Is God finished with this people as a covenantal entity? In order to answer this question, we must turn to Paul's argument in Romans chapters 9–11.

In Romans 1–8, Paul denied that Jews were guaranteed salvation on the basis of their distinctive privileges as Jews. Faith was the key, not ethnicity or any kind of works. Paul argued that all who believe in Jesus are children of Abraham. He also argued that none of God's promises would fail. All of this would raise serious questions in the minds of his readers. What about Israel? What has become of God's promises to her in light of her rejection of the Messiah? Has the faithlessness of Israel negated God's promises? Has Israel been disinherited? Has the plan of God revealed throughout the Old Testament been derailed or set aside? Paul answers these questions in Romans 9–11.

Paul begins Romans 9 with a lament for Israel—his “kinsmen according to the flesh” (v. 3). He then recounts all the privileges that still belong to Israel—including the adoption, the covenants, and the promises (vv. 4–5). In verses 6–29, Paul defends the proposition he states in verse 6a, namely, that the promise of God has not failed. In verses 6–13, he explains that the corporate election of Israel never meant the salvation of every biological descendant of Abraham: “not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel” (v. 6b). In verses 14–23, Paul expands on this, explaining that salvation was never a birthright based on biological descent. It has always been a gift based on God's sovereign election.

In Romans 9:30–10:21, Paul elaborates on the turn that redemptive history has taken, namely, that while Israel has stumbled over Jesus, Gentiles are now streaming into the kingdom. It is important to observe that in Romans 10:1, Paul writes, “Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.” He's talking about Israel. The very fact that Paul can continue to pray for the salvation of unbelieving Israel indicates that he believes salvation is possible for them.

What Paul has said thus far raises the big question, which he now states: “I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means!” (11:1a). This is the basic theme of chapter 11. In verses 1–10, Paul demonstrates that

God has not rejected Israel by distinguishing between the “remnant” and the “hardened.” Building on what he has already said in 9:6–13 and 9:27, Paul indicates that just as in the days of Elijah, there is also now a believing remnant (11:2–5). In contrast with the remnant, chosen by grace (v. 5), is “the rest,” the nation of Israel as a whole, which has been “hardened” (v. 7). God has dulled the spiritual senses of Israel (v. 8), and they have stumbled (vv. 9–10).

Paul then asks, “Did they stumble in order that they might fall?” (11:11). What is his answer? “By no means! Rather through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous.” What is the present significance of Israel’s stumbling? Paul explains that it has happened as a means to bring a multitude of Gentiles into the kingdom. The hardening of Israel is serving God’s purpose. Their trespass has served as the occasion for the granting of salvation to the Gentiles. Paul states, “Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!”

### **THE WEDDING FEAST PARABLE**

We learn more about this joint evangelism effort from the parable of the wedding feast in Matthew 22.

Matthew 22: 1-14 (NIV) *Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.*

*“Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’  
“But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.*

*“Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.*

*“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. He asked, ‘How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?’ The man was speechless. “Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ **“For many are invited, but few are chosen.”***

To summarize the point of the Parable of the Wedding Feast, God sent His Son into the world, and the very people who should have celebrated His coming rejected Him, bringing judgment upon themselves. As a result, the kingdom of heaven was opened up to anyone who will set aside his own righteousness and by faith accept the righteousness God provides in Christ—the New Covenant. Those who spurn the gift of salvation and cling instead to their own “good” works will spend eternity in hell separated from God. **Their race or nationality will not save them.**

## 7. THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS BOTH IN THE PRESENT AND IN THE FUTURE

The Second Coming of Jesus is the fulfillment of all promises—both Old Testament and New Testament. Jesus is not coming to begin a process to partially fulfill promises—the return of Jesus is the complete fulfillment of all the promises!

A word should be said at this point about the distinction between kingdom of God and kingdom of heaven. Only Matthew uses the “kingdom of heaven” expression; everywhere else in the New Testament we find kingdom of God (with occasional variants like kingdom of Christ or kingdom of our Lord). Though some have attempted to find a difference of meaning between these two expressions, it must be maintained that kingdom of heaven and kingdom of God are synonymous in meaning.

What is of greatest interest in the area of eschatology as regards the kingdom is the question of whether the kingdom of God in the teachings of Jesus and the apostles was considered to be a present or a future reality, or both. This question has been the subject of much debate. It will be remembered that some scholars see the kingdom as exclusively future, others see it as exclusively present, and still others understand it to be both present and future. We shall do full justice to all the Biblical Scriptures only when we see the kingdom of God as both present and future.

Jesus clearly taught that the kingdom of God was already present in his ministry. Matthew 12:28 proves this point: *“If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”*

The Greek verb used here, *ephthasen*, means has arrived or has come, not is about to come. The point is that Jesus’ casting out of demons is proof that the kingdom has come, since one cannot plunder a strong man’s goods unless he has first bound the strong man (here meaning the devil). Another passage clearly teaching the presence of the kingdom in Jesus’ day is Luke 17:20-21. The Pharisees had just asked Jesus when the kingdom of God was coming—meaning, we may suppose, a dramatic demonstration of the mighty power of God which would crush the Romans and establish God’s reign over

Luke 17:20-21 (NIV) *Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is in your midst.”*

One who is a believer in Jesus Christ, therefore, is in the kingdom of God at the present time, enjoying its blessings and sharing its responsibilities. At the same time, he realizes that the kingdom is present now only in a provisional and incomplete state, and therefore he looks forward to its final consummation at the end of the age. Because the kingdom is both present and future, we may say that the kingdom is now hidden to all except those who have faith in Christ, but that some day it shall be suddenly revealed, so that all its enemies will finally have to recognize its presence and bow before its rule.

Second Timothy 2:12 presents the kingdom as future. Paul does not mention the term, “kingdom,” but he does indicate that faithful endurance by Christians now will lead to a future “reign” in Jesus’ kingdom—“If we endure, we will also reign with Him.” This present age is characterized by tribulations, but for those who

endure the kingdom is their reward. The future tense used here shows that a kingdom reign was not the current experience of his readers but, instead, will be a reward for enduring. This present age is one of enduring hardship for the sake of Jesus. If this occurs, then reigning with Jesus will result when His kingdom begins.

Then, in 2 Timothy 4:1, Paul says, *"I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom."* (Paul used the word "epiphaneia" here.) Paul links the "kingdom" with Jesus' "appearing." Since Jesus' "appearing" is future, "His kingdom" is future as well. This is soon followed by: *"The Lord will rescue me from every evil work and will bring me safely into His heavenly kingdom. To Him be the glory forever and ever! Amen"* (2 Timothy 4:18).

Paul explains much of this in 1 Corinthians 15:20-28. Paul begins by saying that Christ's resurrection is *"the first fruits of those who are asleep"* (15:20). Since Jesus is raised from the dead, so too will those who are in Him. Then in 1 Corinthians 15:22-24 Paul declares: *"For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power."*

Here Paul gives a timeline of the "order" of the resurrection by pointing out three events and their relation to the kingdom. First, he says that Christ is "the first fruits." This is a reference to the bodily resurrection of Christ. Christ's resurrection is the pattern and the guarantee that the resurrection of others will occur. Second, *"after that" there is a resurrection of "those who are Christ's at His coming"*. This second stage is future.

When Jesus returns those who belong to Him will be resurrected. Third, Paul states, *"Then comes the end," when Jesus "hands over the kingdom to the God the Father."* This period of "the end" appears to be another stage, a third phase in the resurrection program. The timing of the third stage is relation to the second stage is important.

While there is not much debate concerning the first two stages, there is considerable disagreement concerning the "end" and whether this is a third stage of resurrection or not. Those who hold that there is an intermediate kingdom (dispensational millennialists) after the return of Jesus but before the eternal state believe that Paul's words ("then comes the end") indicate a significant period of time between events 2 and 3. They believe an era exists between the resurrection of those at Christ's coming and the "end" when Jesus hands the kingdom over God the Father. The "end" does not occur immediately after Jesus returns but occurs after the kingdom reign of Jesus.

But the Scriptures indicate that "the end" follows immediately after Jesus' coming. "The end" occurs as a result of the second coming of Christ. There is no third stage of the resurrection program. And, thus, there is no room for an intermediate kingdom or earthly millennium after the return of Christ. When Jesus returns and His people are resurrected, the end comes at that time and the eternal state begins.

## WHEN IS THE DEATH OF DEATH?

In summary, “the end” marks the close of Christ’s reign, or at least that phase of it with which Paul is concerned. It is brought to its climax by the complete and final overthrow of death. The point of dispute is the time of the “end.” The premillennialist argues that the “end” is the after the millennial age, 1,000 years after Christ has returned to earth. The amillennialist argues that the “end” is the end or close of the present church age, signaled and brought to fruition by Christ’s second coming.

It seems clear that all one need do is demonstrate which of these two options is correct and the millennial debate would come to a close. This isn’t as difficult as one might think. **Since both eschatological schools agree that Christ’s reign consummates with the destruction of death, and since the destruction of death signals the end, we need only ascertain the time of “death’s death”!**

Does Paul tell us when death dies? In the text of 1 Corinthians 15: 50-58, the defeat of death occurs at the second coming of Christ. Therefore, we must understand the reign of Christ, consisting of his progressive abolishing of all rule, authority, and power, as presently occurring. The last of these enemies is death, which is abolished or swallowed up at our Lord’s second coming when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father.

**The premillennialist does not believe that Christ will abolish death at his second coming.** He believes that death will continue on into the 1,000-year earthly reign of Christ and will in fact assume massive proportions at its close (see Rev. 20: 9-10). But how can this be when Paul places the destruction of death at Christ’s second coming? The end of death at that time precludes the millennium of the premillennialist, for according to the latter death still prevails.

There is strong evidence in 1 Corinthians 1:7-9 for seeing “the end” with the parousia. Paul clearly writes the “end” to be coterminous with the second coming: “as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”  
1 Corinthians 1:7-9 (NIV) *Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

For Paul the “day of the Lord” is clearly the day of the second coming, as may be seen from 1 Thessalonians 5: 1-3 (NIV) *Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, “Peace and safety,” destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.*

The point is that the “end” does not come, say, a thousand years after the second coming; for Paul, the second coming is the “end.” It is difficult to conclude otherwise than that the parousia itself and the resurrection taking place with it signify the end of the power of death. And inasmuch as death is the last enemy, the destruction of the remaining powers (“when he shall have destroyed all rule and authority and power”) will have to be understood not as a final struggle beginning after the parousia, but as the definite victory of Christ that has already begun in his cross and resurrection!

## 8. JESUS MUST REIGN IN HEAVEN UNTIL HE DEFEATS ALL HIS ENEMIES—INCLUDING DEATH

When we understand that the rapture and Second Coming are the same visible event (parousia) it is clear that when Jesus returns death must be eliminated completely. There can be no death in the millennial kingdom—despite what dispensationalists teach.

***The Lord says to my lord: “Sit at my right hand  
until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”***

***For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.  
The last enemy to be destroyed is death.***

The fact is that Jesus does now reign; that is in Paul’s text. It says, “He must reign, **until** he has put all enemies under His feet.” Jesus is reigning even now in heaven. There, no shame can approach him, and no scorn can even be whispered at his feet. He reigns there with undisputed glory as he sits at the right hand of the Father. The psalmist David saw the same event.

Psalm 110:1 (NIV) *The Lord says to my lord: “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”*

I Corinthians 15:24-27 (NIV) *Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he “has put everything under his feet.”*

Death is an enemy, but it is the last one; and it is an enemy that shall be destroyed; but it shall be destroyed last. John tells us in Revelation chapter 21 that Jesus will completely destroy death in the new heavens and earth.

***There will be no more death, or mourning, or crying or pain,  
for the old order of things has passed away.***

Revelation 21:1-4 (NIV) *Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”*

Jesus is now reigning—but not as a servant. He is no servant there; He washes no disciples’ feet there; He goes not from there to Pilate’s Hall to be judged. Absolute and supreme is He—King of kings, for they are all kings whom He has redeemed—and Lord of lords, for they are all lordly ones over whom He reigns, and He

occupies the highest seat amidst the splendors of the celestial realm.

Revelation 19:6-8 (NIV) *Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.*

Revelation 19:15-16 (NIV) *Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: **King of Kings and Lord of Lords.***

## 9. FLESH AND BLOOD CANNOT INHERIT THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Dispensationalism teaches there will be two distinct groups occupying the Earth during the millennial kingdom—those with glorified bodies, and those with earthly bodies who lived through the tribulation and on into the millennial kingdom. Those with glorified bodies consist of the Church, receiving glorified bodies at the rapture, and those who are resurrected after Christ returns to earth. Those who have earthly bodies can be subdivided into two groups: believing Gentiles and believing Jews ("Israel"). They also teach children will be born during this time. They teach people will die during the millennium. They teach nonbelievers can be saved after Jesus returns. But all of this goes against clear Bible Scriptures.

One of the most commonly held beliefs about the millennium is that there will be flesh children born during this period. However, this is clearly inconsistent with the idea of a purely spiritual millennium, in which the intangible things replace the tangible things of the world. Jesus makes clear marriage will not take place.

Luke 20:27-38 (NIV) *Some of the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus with a question. "Teacher," they said, "Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. The first one married a woman and died childless. The second and then the third married her, and in the same way the seven died, leaving no children. Finally, the woman died too. Now then, at the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?"*

*Jesus replied, "The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. **But those who are considered worthy of taking part in the age to come and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels.** They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection. But in the account of the burning bush, even Moses showed that the dead rise, for he calls the Lord 'the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive."*

Jesus makes clear no one can be saved after he returns and the door is shut: Matthew 25:10-13 (NIV) "But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. "Later the others also came. 'Lord, Lord,' they said, 'open the door for us!' **But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I don't know you.'** "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour."

Likewise, Paul makes clear ordinary living flesh and blood do not inherit the kingdom:

1 Corinthians 15:42-58 (NIV) *So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.*

*If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.*

*I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."*

*"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.*

## **10. ARE THERE ONE, TWO OR FOUR RESURRECTIONS?**

Though Bible believers acknowledge that both the righteous and unrighteous dead will be raised, there is no agreement as to the time when they occur. There are those who believe that everyone is resurrected at once, while others believe the different resurrections are spaced out over a period of time.

### **ALL AT ONCE SINGLE GENERAL RESURRECTION**

There are several Bible passages that seem to teach that the righteous and unrighteous dead are all raised at once. To many people, these passages clearly speak of one general resurrection of both the saved and lost.

Daniel 12:2 (NIV) *Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.*

John 5:24-30 (NIV) *"Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.*

*“Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned. By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.*

2 Timothy 4:1-2 (NV) *In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction*

This passage gives rise to the Nicene Creed: "He shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead: whose kingdom shall have no end."

### **SEPARATE RESURRECTIONS**

Although some Christians believe there will be only one general resurrection at the end of time, other Scriptures seem to speak of more than one resurrection. The first resurrection will be that of believers while the second resurrection will be that of unbelievers. Revelation 20 seems to call for a separate resurrection of believers and is heavily cited by millennialists.

Revelation 20:4-6 (NIV) *I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.*

1 Thessalonians 4:16, reads in part, "And the dead in Christ will rise first." Some premillennialists hold that the expression "will rise first" implies that believers will be raised before unbelievers. But even a cursory perusal of this passage will reveal that the contrast here is not between the resurrection of believers and unbelievers, but between the resurrection of the dead in Christ and the rapture of believers who are still living when Christ returns. Paul is telling the Thessalonians that the resurrection of deceased believers will precede the transformation and rapture of living believers at the time of the Parousia.

The premillennialists are right to distinguish the resurrection of the righteous from the resurrection of the wicked. But they are the two concurrent parts of one general resurrection, not two stages of resurrection separated by a 1,000 year earthly millennium. They differ in character, not in earth time. There are indeed two stages of "the resurrection" (of the righteous), but they are the resurrection of Jesus and the coming resurrection of those who belong to him.