

Realized Millennialism

2002 | By William Kilgore <http://www.ukapologetics.net/realized.html>

The interpretation of the apocalyptic prophecies contained in Scripture hold a special place of fascination for many modern believers. Probably most modern believers across the denominational spectrum would be classified as premillennialists along "dispensational" lines (either classic dispensationalism or today's "progressive" variety).

Like most evangelicals, I was taught this particular view early in my Christian growth. As should be obvious from the title of this article, I no longer adhere to the premillennial scheme of interpretation, and much less dispensationalism.

As the title states, this is written as a description of my view. I wish no ill will toward those holding other eschatological positions. It is my personal opinion that, perhaps more than any other area of doctrine, eschatological views are open to debate.

Therefore, it is not my intention to "defend" my position against other positions (though some of this will no doubt be inevitable). My purpose here is to present the reader with the Biblical reasons why I hold the position that I do, and to show where I am coming from as an "amillennialist."

This being stated, many statements in this article will question points of dispensationalism specifically simply because it is the most widely held position today.

One final disclaimer: not every detail of my viewpoint would necessarily be held by every individual amillennialist. For instance, there is some disagreement among amillennialists concerning what "the first resurrection" of Rev. 20 is and also what part is played, if any, in eschatological events by natural Israel.

However, the general framework set forth here, I believe, is a faithful representation of what most who call themselves "amillennialists" believe regarding end-time prophecy. In any case, an amillennial reading list is provided at the end of the article.

It has not been my purpose here to author yet another book on eschatology. Therefore, I have not cited many of the Scripture passages referenced herein. I would urge all of my readers to be responsible students and check these passages for themselves. So get out your Bible and let us begin.

AN OVERVIEW

It will be helpful to first give a brief overview of the various eschatological positions held by believers throughout history. For the reader's information, the "millennium" refers to the "thousand years" mentioned in Revelation 20:4-7.

Premillennialism is the teaching that Christ will return before the millennium, interpreted literally as a 1,000 year personal reign of Christ on earth. This reign is set up at the Second Coming but precedes both the Final Judgment and the eternal state. Historically, premillennialism has not

taught the various distinctive of dispensationalism (discussed next). Therefore, this view (actually the original premill. position) is today called "historic premillennialism" and is held only by a minority.

Dispensational Premillennialism is the predominant view among modern evangelicals. This position was set forth systematically by J.N. Darby and the early Plymouth Brethren, popularized by the Scofield Reference Bible, and further promoted in recent times by such diverse sources as the Ryrie Study Bible, Dallas Theological Seminary, the Dake Study Bible, Hal Lindsey, Dave Hunt, Tim LaHaye, Jack Van Impe, etc. A simplified statement of its unique teachings is as follows: there are two distinct "peoples of God" (natural Israel and the Church) and seven distinct plans/ages (dispensations) in which God deals with each; this "dispensation" (the sixth) from Pentecost to the "rapture" is "the Church Age" -- a "parenthesis" unforeseen by the OT prophets; once the Church is removed (i.e., "the rapture") it is generally taught that there will be a 7 year "tribulation" (based on various Bible passages); God will then resume His dealings with natural Israel, fulfilling all the OT promises, restoring their temple, etc.; finally, Christ returns and sets up a literal 1,000 year kingdom before the eternal state (as with "historic premill.").

It should be noted here that as this teaching has enjoyed popularity, factions have evolved which set forth a "mid-trib." rapture (called "pre-wrath") and also a "post-trib." rapture (which basically returns to the ancient view that the "catching away" of the saints happens at the Second Coming). It should further be noted that Dallas Theological Seminary is now the stomping ground of teachers describing themselves as "progressive dispensationalists," a position that downplays many of the distinctives of "classical" dispensationalism and seeks more moderate ground.

Postmillennialism is the idea that Christ will return after the millennium. In this view, the millennium is interpreted literally as an earthly reign -- however, this reign is "ushered in" as the Church subdues the world. Thus, the world becomes more and more Christianized, bringing about a "golden age" in which Christ exercises dominion through the Church -- then the Second Coming takes place. This view is still prominent in many Reformed circles, promoted by teachers like R.J. Rushdoony, Gary DeMar, Gary North, David Chilton, etc. It also enjoyed a brief revival among many Charismatic groups under the modified form of "Dominion" or "Kingdom Now" theology. However, this Charismatic trend seems to have waned considerably as teachers like Hal Lindsey have become popular again.

The final view to consider here is Amillennialism, actually meaning "no millennium." This is a deceptive term, as we do believe Revelation 20 -- just not after the same fashion as the views described above. Some prefer "Gospel Age Millennialism" or (as in my title) **Realized Millennialism.**

The basic idea here is that the "thousand years" described in Revelation 20 is figurative of Christ's spiritual reign in this Gospel Age -- i.e., now.

All the OT promises were fulfilled in Christ; Satan was "bound" at the cross and resurrection of Christ; there is now only one "Israel" -- the Church made up of both Jews and Gentiles; Satan will be "loosed" just before the Second Coming; the "rapture" of the saints, the resurrection, and Christ's Second Coming are all a simultaneous event, followed immediately by the one general Judgment and then the eternal state (the "new heavens and new earth").

The amillennial view was that of Augustine and also of the Protestant Reformers.

Among those holding it in more recent times are the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, Malcolm Smith, Jay Adams, William Cox, the late Philip Mauro, the Church of Christ, the Church of God (Anderson, Indiana), William Hendrikson, etc. Adams, a Presbyterian author, has suggested replacing "amillennialism" with the more accurate "realized millennialism."

The above should serve as a simple introduction to the various views. Of course other strains of teaching overlap these (such as whether one is a "preterist" or not, etc.), but the overview should serve to help the reader compare and contrast the general schemes.

THE INTERPRETATION OF BIBLE PROPHECY

The popularity of "dispensational premill." is largely due to the idea that to interpret the Bible "literally" must always mean we interpret it naturally. I must reject this notion.

The inspired Scriptures contain various forms of literature that must be interpreted appropriately -- that is, the way in which God meant them to be interpreted. There is poetic language, anthropomorphisms, parables, symbols, etc.

Furthermore, such an approach tends toward an unbiblical dualism, giving the material priority over the spiritual. This is backwards thinking -- if anything, it is the spiritual that is "more real" (1 Cor. 15:46 -- cf. Heb. 9:9,24).

The Apocalyptic literature contained in Scripture is no exception. The inspired prophecies of both Old and New Testaments are written in signs and symbols. Consider the following:

"I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes, by the ministry of the prophets." -- HOSEA 12:10

The prophets spoke in "parables" (Ps. 78:2; Eze. 17:2; 20:49; 24:3) and used "dark speech" (Num. 12:6-8). Jesus Himself, the Prophet "like Moses" (Deut. 18:15,18-19 - see John 1:45; Acts 3:22), did the same (Mt. 13; Mark 4; Luke 8:10). The Revelation to John is no different.

The Book of Revelation is a series of visions given to John to "signify" the events of the end-time (Rev. 1:1); it is a summary of all that the prophets have foretold -- John bears record of "the Word of God" -- there is nothing "new" here. Revelation is the clarified summation and corresponds to the Old Testament Prophets.

Further, the focal point of all prophecy is Jesus Christ Himself (Rev. 1:2).

The OT is fulfilled in the New (Mt. 13:17; Luke 1:70; 24:25-27,44-45; Acts 3:24; 13:32; 26:22-23; Rom. 16:26; Heb. 1:1-3; 1 Peter 1:10-12) -- that is, in the Person of Jesus Christ.

It is His testimony that is "the spirit of prophecy" (Rev. 19:10).

Finally, when we look at how OT prophecy was fulfilled as recorded in the NT, the "literalist" hermeneutic just does not stand up. Almost all OT prophecies were given as pertaining to our "natural" realm -- but are these prophecies fulfilled in the natural?

Certainly not!

Some are fulfilled in the natural realm just as given (Gen. 15:13-16 = Exodus; Num. 14:34 = Dt. 8:2; etc.),

-- but most are not (e.g., Gen. 17:5 = Rom. 4:17; Gen. 22:17 = Mt. 16:18; Ex. 19:5-6 = 1 Pe. 2:9; Dt. 32:21 = Rom. 10:19; 2 Sam. 22:50 = Rom. 15:9; Ps. 22:22 = Heb. 2:12; Ps. 68:18 = Eph. 4:8; Ps. 118:22-23 = Mt. 21:42; Isa. 8:17-18 = Heb. 2:13; Isa. 29:10 = Rom. 11:8; Isa. 54:1 = Gal. 4:27; Isa. 65:1 = Rom. 10:20; Jer. 31:33ff. = Heb. 8:8-13; Eze. 37:26-27 = 2 Cor. 6:16; Joel 2:28 = Acts 2:16-21; Amos 9:11-12 = Acts 15:15-16; Hab. 2:4 = Rom. 1:17; Hag. 2:6 = Heb. 12:26-29; Zech. 6:12 = Acts 4:11/Eph. 2:20/Heb. 3:3; Mal. 4:5 = Mt. 11:13-15; etc.; etc.; etc.).

I would strongly urge the reader to look at each prophecy (= fulfillment) that I have listed -- none of them were fulfilled in a strict "literal" sense.

Furthermore, these equal but a small percentage of the total number!

The Book of Revelation uses symbols from the OT in great abundance. To interpret many of these symbols "literally" leads to ridiculous and fanciful interpretations ("souls under the altar"; "hell" following "death"; the "woman riding the beast"; etc.; etc.). This is further proven by the fact that some of the symbols are actually interpreted in the text itself and so identified as such (e.g., "seven lamps" = "seven spirits"; etc.).

Thus, the Biblical evidence suggests that we look for a spiritual interpretation of both the OT prophets and Revelation, allowing the plain teaching of the rest of Scripture to guide us. This will become even more obvious in relation to the "millennium" as we consider the nature of the Kingdom of God.

A SPIRITUAL KINGDOM

The precise nature of the Kingdom of God is of great importance here. Is it a natural Kingdom, or is it a spiritual Kingdom?

The premillennial scheme proposes a natural Kingdom which precedes the eternal state.

Postmillennialism proposes a natural Kingdom where Jesus rules from heaven via the Church taking dominion over the earth.

What does Scripture teach?

The first point to be recognized and acknowledged is that whenever Scripture speaks of "the Kingdom of God," "the Kingdom of Heaven," or "the Kingdom of Christ," it is the same Kingdom.

These are not different "kingdoms," but synonyms for the same reality (despite claims made by some dispensationalists).

A comparison of the synoptic Gospels reveals quite clearly that whether referred to as "of heaven" or as "of God," one Kingdom is in view (e.g., Mt. 4:17/Mark 1:14-15; Mt. 5:3/Luke 6:20).

Further, it is this same Kingdom that is given to the Messiah in Daniel 7:13-14 (cf. Mt. 12:28; cp. Luke 22:16 with 22:30) -- "the kingdom of Christ" (Eph. 5:5).

Daniel interprets Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the great statue in Daniel 2. The statue represents his own kingdom and some that would follow. Then, in verse 44, we read:

"And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever." (NKJV)

That this description does not square with the dispensationalists' "kingdom" should be obvious.

The kingdom spoken of by Daniel is set up before the Second Coming of Christ ("in the days of these kings") - that is, during His first coming!

Furthermore, this kingdom will plainly last far longer than a mere 1,000 years. So what gives?

Psalms 110:1-2 is the foundational passage for the New Testament picture of the Kingdom.

The Messiah sits at God's right hand - this was fulfilled in Christ's resurrection, exaltation, and ascension (Acts 2:29-36).

This is to be "until I (the Father) make Thine enemies Thy footstool" - this is Christ's present reign (1 Cor. 15:24-28).

Note that Christ's reign is parallel with His priesthood - i.e., He reigns as Priest (Ps. 110:4); this is further proof for a present reign of Christ (cf. Heb. 7-9).

Note especially Psalm 110:2 -- Christ's reign is described as being "in the midst of (His) enemies." This is true because Christ's Kingdom is a spiritual reality.

The New Testament expressly teaches that this Kingdom is not a natural Kingdom, but a spiritual one.

Please read the following key passages: Luke 17:20-21; John 3:3,5-7; 18:36; Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 4:20; 15:50; Col. 1:13; 1 Thes. 2:12; 2 Tim. 4:18; Heb. 12:28; 2 Peter 1:11. In summary these passages teach that the Kingdom:

1. does not come "with observation" (lit., 'with outward show').
2. is "within" believers.
3. cannot be entered, nor even seen, apart from spiritual rebirth.
4. is not of this world.
5. has nothing to do with substances like "food and drink," but rather is manifested in the changed character of individual Christians.

6. is not simply a message, but a demonstration of spiritual power.
7. is an incorruptible Kingdom that cannot be inherited by corruption - our mere "flesh and blood."
8. is the present reality where we are "translated" when we are delivered from the powers of darkness.
9. is where God has "called" us in saving us.
10. is not earthly, but "heavenly."
11. "cannot be moved" - i.e., is of a spiritual nature.
12. is "everlasting" even in its final manifestation.

In my estimation, then, the Scriptures are quite clear as to the precise nature of the Kingdom.

Survey the popular prophecy teachings of our day. All manner of make-shift explanations are put forth to offset this clear fact.

But the fact remains: the Kingdom of God and of His Christ is a present spiritual reality that is being extended in this age. This is the Kingdom that is the focus of the faith of Abraham -- Heb. 11:8-10.

"THE MILLENNIUM"

This discussion would not be complete without a brief discussion on the "millennium" itself. When the word "millennium" is used, the reference is to the "thousand years" of Rev. 20. Are we to take this "literally" -- i.e., does Rev. 20 describe a literal, natural kingdom that lasts for a literal duration of 1,000 years?

As a premillennialist, I saw "the millennium" all over the Scriptures as I read and studied. However, as my eschatological views began to change, I realized that all those passages from the OT prophets that I took as descriptions of "the millennium" were arbitrarily jammed together. I had never stepped back and taken a look at this jigsaw puzzle that I had put together in my mind. Rather than presenting a clear picture, premillennialism had put together a jumbled mess!

First, let us consider some hard questions that must be asked if the "thousand years" are literal.

Why is Rev. 20 the only passage in all of Scripture that specifically mentions a millennial kingdom?

Think about this fact carefully, because it only gets worse. It's not as if the OT prophets and the NT Apostles simply "didn't mention" the millennial kingdom, but rather in several places it is positively excluded from the entire end-times scenario! Consider the following :

1. All of the OT passages normally linked with the "thousand years" of Rev. 20 to produce "the millennium" are interpreted for us under inspiration within the NT itself!

These passages are - Isa. 2; 9:6-7; 11; 25-27; 49; 65; Jer. 23; 30-31; Eze. 34-37; Joel 2-3; Amos 9; Zech. 12-14; and Mal. 3-4.

Furthermore, none of the imagery used in these passages ("lambs w/ lions," "beating swords into plowshares," etc.) is even mentioned in Rev. 20, the only passage speaking of the "thousand years"!

The nation of Israel is not in view, nor is an earthly reign or a rebuilt temple! To cram all these passages together and then arbitrarily interpret them within the context of Rev. 20 is nothing short of textual masochism.

2. 2 Peter 3 without question mentions absolutely nothing about a millennial kingdom. In fact, such a notion is ruled out by placing the destruction of this earth and the creation of the new earth within the same time-frame as the Second Coming. This reforming of the planet occurs just before the eternal state per Rev. 6-7.

3. Paul sets forth one coming, one resurrection, and then the end -- 1 Cor. 15. The only reign of Christ mentioned is the present one.

4. Scripture teaches one resurrection of both saved and unsaved at the last day (John 5:29; 11:24; Heb. 9:27 w/ Rev. 20:11-12).

5. The "rapture" (i.e., our gathering together to Him) occurs at His coming per John 6:39,54; 1 Cor. 15:23; Col. 3:4; 1 Thes. 4:14-17; 2 Thes. 2:1; 1 Peter 1:13; 5:4.

Further, there is nothing "secret" about it (cf. Matt. 24:27 and Luke 17:24)!

6. The righteous and the wicked are separated at His coming per Matt. 13; 24:37-40; 25:31-46; Luke 17:29-35.

Note especially the word "then" in Matt. 25:31. It is at this time that saint & sinner alike are judged -- not after 1,000 years! See Ecc. 12:14; Dan. 12:2; Matt. 16:27; 24:41-46; Romans 2:5-6; 1 Cor. 3:13; Col. 3:4; 1 Thes. 5:1-10; 2 Thes. 1:1-10; 2 Tim. 2:4; 4:1; Heb. 9:28; 1 Peter 5:4; 1 John 2:28; 3:2.

Thus the Second Coming is the same day as "the day of judgment" (2 Peter 2:9) -- the same day that this earth is destroyed per 2 Peter 3:7-12!

Where is this "thousand year" earthly kingdom in all of this? It is this day that is pictured in Rev. 6:16-17 and 11:15-18.

Note the parallel between Rev. 11:15 and 1 Cor. 15:24-28, where Paul describes "the end" immediately following His coming. This is why the next conscious moment after death is the Judgment (not the millennium) -- Heb. 9:27.

7. If God's people are reigning with Christ on the earth during a literal 1,000 year kingdom, then how can the Kingdom be descending from heaven in Rev.21:2?

Looking at Rev. 20 itself we find more problems for the idea of a literal millennial kingdom. First, although earthly events are mentioned (v. 3 and 9), no earthly reign is mentioned.

Christ is not here pictured on a literal throne reigning in a literal earthly kingdom. Furthermore, we see nothing about national Israel, a rebuilt temple, restored sacrifices, etc., etc.

While it is obvious that the "thousand years" is mentioned in the text, the picture presented of such in no way matches the dispensational picture.

Further, the Judgment occurs in verses 11-15, after the "thousand years"! This fact alone destroys pre-millennialism, as the passages above clearly show that the Judgment occurs at His coming with no mention of an intervening 1,000 year kingdom.

Now it is not enough to prove that others' conception of a literal millennium is false; there is still the matter of the "thousand years" in Rev. 20. Is it possible that this is not meant to signify a literal length of time, but is figurative? Most certainly.

Revelation uses many numbers in its text, and I seriously doubt that any of them are to be taken literally.

The number of the angels in Rev. 5:11 is "ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands." Are we to do the math and literally expect that this is the literal sum of angels?

No, the number is symbolic; for we know that the number of angels is actually "innumerable" (Heb. 12:22). Other symbolic numerical representations include "ten days" of tribulation (2:10), "144,000" (7:4), "200,000,000" (9:16), and the time scale of Rev. 9:15.

To go even further, we see "thousand" and "thousands" used symbolically all over Scripture -- Gen. 24:60; Ex. 20:6; 34:7; Lev. 26:8; Deut. 1:11; 5:10; 7:9; 32:30; 33:2; Joshua 23:10; 1 Sam. 18:7-8; 1 Chron. 16:15; Job 9:3; 33:23; Psalms 3:6; 50:10; 68:17; 84:10; 90:4; 91:7; 105:8; Ecc. 6:6; 7:28; Song 5:10; Isa. 30:17; 60:22; Jer. 32:18; Eze. 48; Dan. 7:10; 11:12; Micah 6:7; 1 Cor. 4:15; 14:19; 2 Peter 3:8; Jude 14.

I might also remind the reader that we use similar non-literal numerical expressions today. A dear pre-millennial sister that I discussed eschatology with via e-mail made an interesting comment at the end of a letter in which she dismissed the idea of a symbolic "1000 years." She wrote something to the effect that she had no desire to "print out a thousand e-mails." I couldn't help smiling as I read this!

So then, what exactly does the "thousand years" of Rev. 20 refer to? ANSWER: the present reign of Jesus Christ at the right hand of God! The Apostle John certainly believed in a present kingdom (Rev. 1:9).

Revelation 20 has believers reigning as "kings and priests" (verse 6) - a future reality? Not according to the same book! John clearly sees this reality coming to be in the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ (Rev. 5:10).

Being "kings" and "priests" to God is something that is comprehended in our redemption in Jesus Christ, which is why John speaks of this very thing as a present reality (Rev. 1:6).

Paul clearly taught the same in 1 Cor. 15:24-28. In fact, Paul teaches that Christ's second coming will signal the end, not the beginning, of His reign as Messiah.

Let's be realistic. Jesus stated that He now possesses "all power" in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18). I challenge the reader to consider this important statement carefully. What can be added to "all"? Does our Lord have "all power" now, or doesn't He?

In an effort to address certain details, as well as provide a unified presentation, I provide a summation of the various major eschatological events below. This should simplify things for the reader.

AN ESCHATOLOGICAL CHAIN OF EVENTS

The following numbered items will take the reader from the first coming of the Messiah to the eternal state. I have provided Scripture references that demonstrate each point.

1. God became man in the Person of Jesus Christ (John 1:14; 1 Tim. 3:16). [1] Jesus spent three and a half years preaching that "the Kingdom of God is at hand" (Matt. 4:17,23; 9:35; 10:7; 12:28; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:43; 8:1; 9:2,60; 10:9,11; 11:20; 16:16),

then gave His life as a sacrifice for sin (Rom. 3:25; 5:6,8,11; 14:9; 1 Cor. 5:7; 15:3; Eph. 5:2; Heb. 9:26; 10:12,26; 1 Jn. 2:2; 4:10).

After three days and three nights in the grave (Matt. 12:40; 27:63; Jn. 2:19), Jesus was raised from the dead (Acts 2:24,32; 3:15,26; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; 13:30-34; Rom. 4:25; 1 Cor. 15:15).

All of this was in precise fulfillment of the "seventy weeks" prophecy of Daniel (cf. Dan. 9:23-27; 12). [2]

2. Satan was "bound" during this time (Matt. 12:22-29; 13:24-30,47-50; Luke 10:17-19; John 12:31-32; Eph. 4:8; Col. 2:15; Heb. 2:14; 1 John 3:8) - implicitly foretold in Gen. 3:15. This is apocalyptically represented in Rev. 12:7-12 and 20:3.

This is why Christ is so often presented as, quite literally, enlightenment for the entire world - i.e., all peoples/nations (John 1:9; 3:19; 6:14,33; 8:12; 9:5,39; 12:46; 14:31 - cf. Isa. 25:7 and 1 John 2:8).

Before Christ's resurrection, Satan still had reign over the minds & hearts of the nations (Psalm 147:20; Matt. 4:8; Acts 14:16; 17:30; Eph. 2:11-12).

Much of this influence was achieved through the widespread reality of idolatry (2 Kings 17:29; 1 Chron. 16:26; Ps. 96:5; Acts 19:27), which allowed the powers of darkness to enjoy great control over men's hearts (Lev. 17:7; Deut. 32:17; Ps. 106:37; 1 Cor. 10:19-20).

This is the reason for the otherwise perplexing narratives of Matt. 10:5-6 and 15:22-28. Confusion reigned from Babel (Gen. 11:9) to Pentecost (Acts 2:4-7) - but now God requires all to respond to Him.

Although Satan does roam about on a long leash - "seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pe. 5:8) - he is restricted ("bound") during this present Gospel Age so that he is unable to "deceive the nations" (John 16:8-11; Acts 14:15-16; 17:30; Rev. 20:3) and the Gospel may progress (Matt. 24:14; 28:18-19; Mark 14:9; 16:15; John 4:35-38; 17:18-23; Rom. 16:25-26).

I am convinced that by "nations" is meant "people groups" -- specifically 70 (as set forth in Genesis 10 and symbolized in Ex. 15:27; Num. 33:9; and Luke 10:1,17).

The binding of Satan has opened all nations to the Gospel, thereby fulfilling the promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; Acts 3:25 - see esp. Gal. 3:8).

This is the actual meaning of the "world" passages (John 1:29; 3:16-17; 4:42; 6:51; 12:47; 1 Jn. 2:2; 4:14). [3] God deals with "the world" - i.e., all peoples/ nations - through Jesus Christ.

The situation of Matt. 4:8 has changed to that of Rev. 11:15. Now the Spirit convicts the world (John 16:18), and the Church is the "light of the world" (Phil'p. 2:15) - Satan is now "bound" so that we live the reality of John 4:4.

The end result will be the beautiful scene revealed in Rev. 5:9 and 14:6 - the vast multi-ethnic One Body of Christ.

3. The resurrected Christ ascends into heaven (Luke 24:51; John 6:62; 16:28; 17:11; 20:17; Acts 1:9; Eph. 4:8-10; Rev. 12:5), being exalted by the Father (Acts 4:11; 5:31; Phil'p. 2:9; Heb. 1:4-6).

This moment of exaltation is pictured for us in Dan. 7:13-27 and Rev. 5. In this He reclaims the glory that was eternally His (John 1:1; 17:5,24), a glory "set aside" to become our Redeemer (2 Cor. 8:9; Phil'p. 2:5-8; Heb. 2:9-18; 10:20).

He now sits "at the right hand of God" (Ps. 110:1; Matt. 26:24; Mark 14:62; 16:19; Luke 22:69; Acts 2:33-34; 7:55-56; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3,8-13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2), the Biblical fulfillment of "the throne of David" (Acts 2:30-36).

This is the present reign of Christ (Matt. 28:18; 1 Cor. 15:24-28; Eph. 1:20-23; Phil'p. 2:9-11; 1 Pe. 3:22) -- a spiritual reality (see above).

This is the great Messianic Kingdom depicted in Psalm 110:1, perhaps the key OT passage concerning Messiah (cf. Matt. 22:42-44) and embodied in Peter's confession of Jesus as "the Christ" (i.e., "Messiah" - Matt. 16:16-18).

Jesus did not simply ascend to God, but to His throne -- Rev. 12:5 (i.e., He rules "all nations with a rod of iron" since His ascension).

Christ's Kingdom is the heart of His message -- "the Gospel of the Kingdom" - the Messianic rule of Isaiah 9:6-7 and Dan. 2:44 is now a reality (Rev. 1:5). This spiritual rule is the "glory" that was set before Christ -- Luke 24:26; John 12:23; 1 Peter 1:11.

4. In A.D. 70, Titus and the Roman armies destroyed the temple in Jerusalem in direct fulfillment of Christ's words (Matt. 21:43; 23:38; Luke 11:17; 20:16; 21:7-24).

This fulfilled Daniel's prophecy (Dan. 9:26-27; 12:7,11), being the historical demonstration of what had already occurred spiritually when the temple veil was torn in two (Matt. 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45) -- the official Divine rejection of natural Israel (cf. Matt. 8:12; 21:43; Luke 13:28; 14:24; Rom. 11; 1 Thes. 2:14-16).

The "times of the Gentiles" (Matt. 8:11-12; Luke 21:24; Rom. 11:25; cf. Rev. 11:2) had begun. This is in fulfillment of passages like Isa. 66:18-19 and Mal. 1:11.

There was now a "great gulf fixed" between "natural" Israel and the true "Israel of God," symbolized as being in "Abraham's bosom" (see the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man in Luke 16).

John the Baptist had foreshadowed this very reality in Matthew 3:9-10/Luke 3:8 (note the correlation between Matt. 3:10 and Rom. 11:16-22).

This "casting away" of Israel is the spiritual reality symbolized by Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:29-30 and Rev. 20:4.

5. The period we are in now is variously described in Scripture as:

"the last days" (Acts 2:17; 2 Tim. 3:1; Heb. 1:2; James 5:3; 1 Pe. 1:20; 1 Jn. 2:18; Jude 8); "the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:19; 2 Cor. 6:2); "the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2; Heb. 3:7; 4:7); etc.

In this age, the Kingdom is extended (Matt. 11:12; 13:33; 24:14; Acts 14:22; 1 Cor. 4:20; Col. 4:11)

-- as the elect are gathered (John 11:52; Rom. 9:22-23; Eph. 1:10; 2 Peter 3:9,15-16)

-- from all people-groups/nations (Matt. 24:14; 28:19; Mark 13:10; 16:15; Luke 24:27; John 4:22-23; Acts 1:9; 14:27; 17:30; 26:20,23; 28:28; Rom. 1:5,16; 2:9-10; 9:24-26,30; 10:12-13; 11:25,30; 16:26; 1 Cor. 1:24; 12:13; Gal. 3:13-14,28; Eph. 2:11-22; Col. 3:11; 1 Tim. 3:16; 2 Tim. 4:17).

To this the OT Prophets, unknowingly (Eph. 3:2-11; Col. 1:25-28), gave abundant witness - Ps. 72:11,17; 86:9; Isa. 2:2; 11:10; 42:6; 49:6; 54:3; 60:3; 61:9; 62:2; 66:12,18-19; Jer. 3:17; 4:2; 16:19; Dan. 7:13-14; Micah 5:8; Hag. 2:7; Zech. 2:11; 8:22-23; Mal. 1:11; Matt. 8:11; Mark 11:17; Luke 2:32; Rom. 15:8-12; Gal. 3:8.

Indeed, such is the purpose behind the casting away of natural Israel (Romans 11:11-12,15).

Ironically, Israel had fulfilled the words of their own prophets by condemning Jesus -- Acts 13:27!

This same motif is represented in Rev. 22:2 -- the "tree of life," whose leaves are for "the healing of the nations."

6. It is this present age that is symbolized in Rev. 20 - this "day of salvation" is represented by "the thousand years" (cf. 2 Pe. 3:8)

- the "today" of Heb. 3:13. The exalted Jesus Christ reigns now on "the throne of David" (Acts 2:30-36),

-- on the true "Mt. Zion" (Ps. 2:6; Heb. 12:22; 1 Pe. 2:6; Rev. 14:1),

-- in the heavenly "Jerusalem" (Gal. 4:26; Heb. 11:10,16; 12:22; 13:14; Rev. 3:12; 21:2,10),

-- over the true "Israel of God" (Rom. 2:28-29; 9:6; 11; 1 Cor. 10:18; Gal.6:16 - contrast Rev. 2:9 and 3:9).

Furthermore, we reign "with Him" and "in Him" now, in this present life (Matt. 16:19; 24:45-47; Luke 22:29; Rom. 5:17; 1 Cor. 4:8; Eph.1:3; 2:5-6; Col. 1:13; Rev. 1:6,9; 5:10)

- having partaken of "the first resurrection" (John 5:24-29; Rom. 6:6,11; Eph. 2:1,5-6; Col. 2:12-13; 3:1-3; Rev. 20:5-6)

- i.e., entering His Kingdom by being "born again" (John 3:3,5; Col. 1:13; 1 Thes. 2:12; 2 Pe. 1:11).

Note that Peter specifically tells us that in condemning Christ, Israel has fulfilled the prophets which were continually read in the synagogues -- Acts 13:27;

-- this one overlooked verse contains overwhelming significance for eschatology!

Later, the Apostle Peter would say specifically that the Apostles were "eyewitnesses of His Majesty" -- 2 Peter 1:16.

7. This Gospel Age will continue for a long, though fixed and determined, period of time -- again, symbolized by "a thousand years."

At some point, Satan's restraint will be removed (2 Thes. 2:6-7); he will be "loosed" for "a little season" (Rev. 20:3,7-9).

It is at this time that the prophesied "great falling away" will take place (2 Thes. 2:11-12),

-- and the man whom the Apostle Paul called "the man of sin" will be revealed (2 Thes. 2:8-10).

God's saints remain on earth during this time (shown by 1 Cor. 15:51-55 and Rev. 20:14).

8. At some point, I see indications in Scripture that a significant remnant in natural Israel will be saved (Rom. 11; 2 Cor. 3:13-16) -- i.e., these Israelites will become true "children of Abraham" by following the faith of Abraham (Matt. 8:12; John 8:39-40; Romans 4; 9:6-8; Gal. 3; Heb. 11:8-10) even as Gentile Christians do today. Note that these natural Israelites will be "regrafted" back into the same "olive tree" again (cf. Rom. 11). This is not the "separate program" for a "separate people of God" of dispensationalism. Rather, it is the reception of natural Israelites back into the One Body of Christ -- the Church, "the Israel of God" (see Eph. 2:11-22).

9. After the "little season," Jesus Christ will return to earth literally and visibly (Matt. 24:27; Luke 17:24; Acts 1:11; Rev. 1:7).

All of the dead are raised in one general bodily resurrection (see above), the saints with glorified bodies (Job 14:14-15; Romans 8:17,19,30; 1 Cor. 15:35-56; 2 Cor. 5:1-10; 1 John 3:2).

This is our "blessed hope" (Titus 2:12-13; 1 Peter 1:3-5; 1 John 3:2-3 -- cf. Ps. 16:9-10) - the "salvation" of the saints is complete only then (1 Peter 1:3).

The resurrected saints and those believers still alive (also glorified) will be "caught up" to "meet Him in the air" (1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thes. 4:15-17).

Thus, Christ comes "with" His people (Col. 3:4; 1 Thes. 3:13; 4:14; Jude 14) and executes vengeance on the antichrist and his "armies" - lost wicked humanity (Matt. 24:39-41; 2 Thes. 1:7-8; 2:8; Jude 15; Rev. 6:12-17).

The heavens and the earth are destroyed by fire (Ps. 102:25-26; Isa. 24:19-20; 34:4; 51:6; Matt. 24:35; Heb. 1:11-12; 2 Peter 3:7,10-12; Rev. 6:13-14; 20:11) and recreated into a "new heavens and new earth" (Isa. 65:17; 66:22; 2 Peter 3:13; Rev. 21:1).

It should be noted that this is a series of rapidly occurring events (Psalm 50:3-6, and evident in many of the previously referenced passages - esp. 1 Cor. 15:52), virtually simultaneous.

There will be one judgment (see above) of all people - eternal destinies, rewards, etc. are all decided at this one judgment.

Those not found "written in the Lamb's Book of Life" are cast into the Lake of Fire (Matt. 25:41,46; Rev. 14:9-11; 20:15), where they suffer according to their sins (cf. Matt. 10:15; 11:22,24; Mark 6:11; Luke 12:47-48) and are eventually destroyed in the consuming flames (Isa. 51:6; Mal. 4:1,3; Rom. 9:22; Phil'p. 3:19; 2 Thes. 1:9; 2:9; Heb. 10:27; Jude 7). Satan and his angels suffer the same fate (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:10), though it is not clear if Satan himself suffers destruction (Rev. 20:10 -- but see also Ezekiel 28:18-19).

10. Christ will "deliver the Kingdom up to the Father" that "God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28). This simply means that Jesus Christ will continue to reign as Deity (Rev. 22:1-4 - "throne of God and of the Lamb") -- "His Kingdom shall have no end" (Isa. 9:7; Dan. 7:13,27; 2 Peter 1:11; Rev. 11:15; 22:5).

Believers will spend eternity beholding God made visible in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6; Rev. 22:4). [4] This eternal reality is symbolically described in Rev. 21-22. This is the Kingdom of God fully actualized (Matt. 25:34; 2 Tim. 4:1,18; Heb. 12:28)

-- it is in this sense that we pray "Thy Kingdom come" (Luke 11:2).

Thus, the grand end of God's plan for history is that ontological reality of His actualized Kingdom, "wherein dwells righteousness" and "all things are reconciled" (Eph. 1:10; Col. 1:20; 2 Peter 3:13; Rev. 21:27).