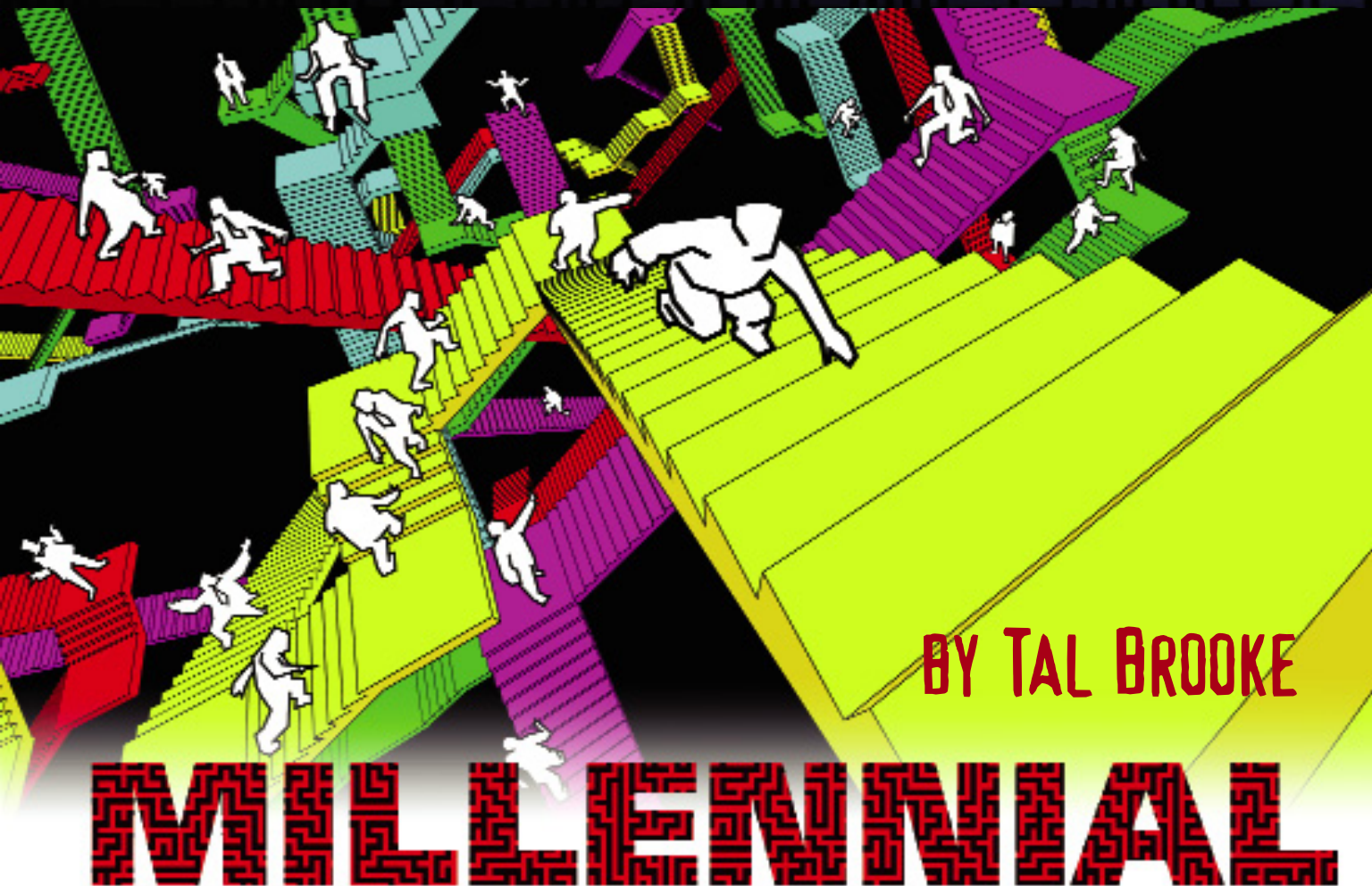


HOW TO ESCAPE THE



BY TAL BROOKE

I was on a plane going from Tel Aviv to Los Angeles, returning from a trip to Israel with Chuck Smith and 300 others on his annual tour. He and I were co-authoring a book about Calvary Chapel, an explosively successful church movement he had pioneered in the heyday of the Jesus Movement (*Harvest*; Old Tappan, NJ: Chosen Books/Fleming H. Revell Co., 1987). Chuck was intrigued by my conversion from Eastern mysticism after two years in India under a “miracle-worker.” Smith’s Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa was one of the largest megachurches in the nation, and famous for its tens of thousands of attendees—and there were at least ten other Calvary Chapels in the region, each attended by more than 6,000 people.

Chuck Smith and I were both leaders on the Israel trip as we crossed the land, traveling from Galilee to Jerusalem. Both of us had a full bus to oversee. We had an unusually good rapport and mutual trust. At the major sites, Chuck spoke as modern Israel became a tableaux against which premillennial prophecy had been applied constantly, site after site.

Now, on the plane back to Los Angeles, I was trying to process a prophetic interpretation with which I’d never felt comfortable: the expectation of an earthly millennium to be set up after Christ’s return following the “Great Tribulation.” This idea was, to me, a new spin on the Second Coming.

Christ was to rule the earth from

Jerusalem for a thousand years. Some believe this would be not just after the “Great Tribulation,” but after the vials of wrath (see Revelation) had been poured out in planetary judgment. Taken literally, the oceans would have turned blood-red, a third of its creatures dead, and unspeakable heat from the sun would have killed millions, along with things far worse. In all, it was a picture of vast ecological damage with an earth left in smoking ruins, billions of inhabitants dead.

Now imagine trying to set up shop and pick up the pieces from



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with a convoluted timescale along with many incongruous pieces. The practical problems of going from symbolic to literal are

ian” belief carried the world’s favor. Why did the secular publishing giants want to disseminate this “Christian” view? *Cui bono*—who gains? I will leave the question there.

Dispensational Premillennialism

In the 1800s the Dispensationalism movement began, based on a peculiar reading of prophecy that the church had never quite seen before. A key point in its system was what it termed “premillennialism,” or the expectation of a future earthly millennium.

When the term “millennialism” is used, it usually refers to the various doctrines of premillennialism, and more specifically to Dispensational Premillennial-

there to jump-start a millennium of universal bounty!

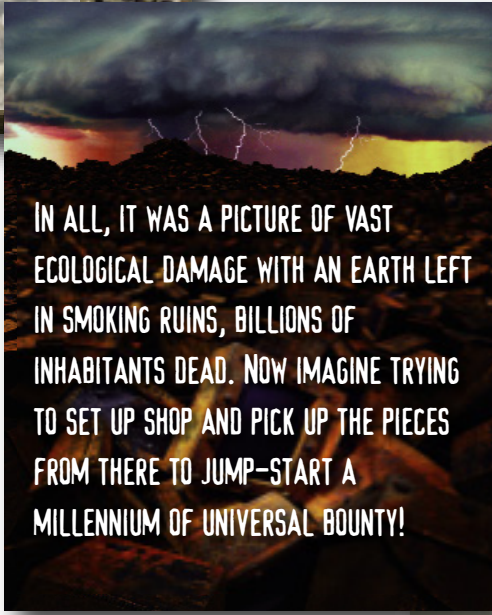
The incongruity of Christ occupying a third earthly temple didn’t fit the Jesus in the pages of the Bible. His only prediction about the temple was its certain destruction within that generation (which happened in A.D. 70 when Titus destroyed the city and the temple). Many believed that Christ, in his new role as Messiah, would reinstitute animal sacrifices. The very Lamb of God, who was once foreshadowed by such temple sacrifices, had himself annulled them by his ransom sacrifice on the Cross—indeed, their final fulfillment. The idea that he would once again oversee these same Old Covenant animal sacrifices was unthinkable!

A Judaized apocalyptic vision was trumping the long-accepted Christian view of the kingdom of God. The Old Covenant, in a castling chess move, was replacing the New Covenant in a step backward as Mosaic law was replacing the gospel of grace.

The thought of Christ assuming an earthly throne in Jerusalem, amid pollution and rotting flesh everywhere from the recent “tribulation” was just too untenable.

On a practical level, if we take the literal interpretation route, the millennial survivors would need centuries to clean up the oceans and lakes and rivers (imagine filtering out the heavy metals and toxins in Lake Erie alone—much less the vast Pacific), and to bury the millions of dead, just to make the planet livable.

To me, a figurative symbol was being forced into a literal context

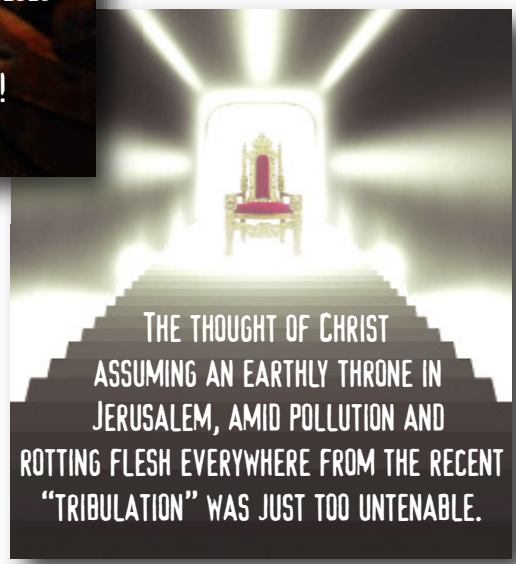


IN ALL, IT WAS A PICTURE OF VAST ECOLOGICAL DAMAGE WITH AN EARTH LEFT IN SMOKING RUINS, BILLIONS OF INHABITANTS DEAD. NOW IMAGINE TRYING TO SET UP SHOP AND PICK UP THE PIECES FROM THERE TO JUMP-START A MILLENNIUM OF UNIVERSAL BOUNTY!

massive, if not insurmountable.

The only thing you can do with a world in utter ruins like that is re-make it, I thought, and it’s exactly what the second epistle of Peter said and what the early church believed: “The elements will melt in fervent heat,” and a new heavens and a new earth will come (2 Peter 3:7-12). It doesn’t imply just a surface-cleaning of the old world during some post-Judgment Day millennium.

After returning from India newly converted, I first encountered millennialism in Hal Lindsey’s megabestseller *The Late Great Planet Earth*, a book that at first thrilled me, then stopped me cold in my tracks. My spirit resisted some major parts of this sleek schema being aggressively marketed as prophecy. I sensed a teaching powerful enough to seduce millions. The fact that the secular publishing giants published it was a red flag in itself: Rather than gaining the world’s enmity, this “Christ-



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ism. This thousand years, or “chiliasis,” is applied to a single verse in the entire Bible, to the period of time mentioned in Revelation 20:1-7. Specifically, premillennialists use the word to refer to a supposed thousand-year reign of Christ on Earth after the “rapture of the saints.”

Literal earthly millennialism teaches that the Jews rejected Jesus in the middle of his earthly ministry, thus making it impossible to fulfill the prophecy and the purposes of God at that time. So he stopped the prophetic clock, and postponed the fulfillment of his promise until the Second Coming.

Thus the Church is now seen as an interim measure.

“Chiliasm,” or premillennialism in its simple form—foreseeing a Jewish world kingdom, originated in the Jewish apocalyptic writings of rabbis of the intertestamental period during the development of the Babylonian Talmud, the “traditions of the elders,” which Jesus condemned.

By invoking a “postponement theory,” this Dispensational appropriation of the Jewish millennium negates Christ’s final proclamation on the Cross that “It is finished.”

No, they would say to Christ, “You are wrong. It is not finished.”

Dispensationalism implies that for the 1,800 years of the church’s long history, the very Spirit of Truth who was promised to bring believers into all truth, failed to show the Church the truth, and that not until Darby, Irving and Scofield (early proponents and popularizers of dispensationalism) came along were things finally set straight.

Dispensationalism implies that the Holy Spirit failed to show the Church this truth, and that the early church fathers missed it, as did all the great saints through history who either didn’t see the pattern or rejected parts of it. Thus the Holy Spirit defaulted on his charge of guiding the Church into all truth.

But this paradox is a red flag in itself. The late arrival of this novel teaching is the real red flag, not the failure of the Spirit of Truth.

Later on, I discovered the early church fathers didn’t miss it at all; they rejected millennialism at its root from the earliest beginnings of the church. The Rapture was not yet a teaching at that point.

Christ’s Kingdom

Christ distinguished his eternal kingdom from an earthly millennial kingdom in his confes-

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sion before Pontius Pilate, declaring, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36, 37). This is unmistakably clear.

Wasn’t that the very reason the Jews of Christ’s day rejected him as Messiah?—that he was not bringing them their long-awaited earthly kingdom?

In the words of John, Christ’s Kingdom is not of a worldly origin or nature, nor is the world its end or object. It is not defended by worldly power, influence or carnal weapons; but by bearing witness to the truth, the preaching of the Gospel with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven. None can enter it except those who are born from above. It is beyond this world (John 3:3,5).

As classic commentators agree, the early Church’s view of the “thousand years” described in Revelation 20 was accepted as figurative of Christ’s spiritual reign in the present Gospel Age of the church between the First and Second Comings.



[CHRIST’S] ONLY PREDICTION ABOUT THE TEMPLE WAS ITS CERTAIN DESTRUCTION WITHIN THAT GENERATION (WHICH HAPPENED IN A.D. 70 WHEN TITUS DESTROYED THE CITY AND THE TEMPLE).

The Old Testament promises of the Messiah were fulfilled in Christ; Satan was “bound” at the Cross and the resurrection of Christ; there is now only one “Israel,” which is the Church made up of both Jews and gentiles; the Resurrection and the Second Coming are all one single simultaneous event, followed immediately by the one general Judgment and then the eternal state (the “new heavens and new earth”).

Looking at Revelation 20 itself reveals more problems with the idea of a literal millennial kingdom. First, while earthly events are mentioned (verses 3, 9), no earthly reign is mentioned. Christ is not described as on a literal throne, reigning in a literal earthly kingdom. Furthermore, we find nothing about national Israel, a rebuilt temple, restored sacrifices, etc.

While it is obvious that the “thousand years” is mentioned in the text, the picture presented in no way matches the dispensational picture. Further, the judgment occurs in verses 11-15, after the “thousand years!”

This fact alone destroys premillennialism, as the passages above clearly show that the judgment occurs at his coming with no mention of an intervening time period, much less some 1,000-year kingdom.

There is still the matter of the “thousand years” in Revelation 20.

Numbers are often symbolic. The number of the angels in Revelation 5:11 is “ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands.” Yet we know that the number of angels is actually “innumerable” (Hebrews 12:22).

We see “thousand(s)” used symbolically all over Scripture: Genesis 24:60; Exodus 20:6, 34:7; Leviticus 26:8; Deuteronomy 1:11, 5:10, 7:9, 32:30, 33:2; Joshua 23:10;

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1 Samuel 18:7-8; 1 Chronicles 16:15; Job 9:3, 33:23; Psalm 3:6, 50:10, 68:17, 84:10, 90:4, 91:7, 105:8; Ecclesiastes 6:6, 7:28; Isaiah 30:17, 60:22; Jeremiah 32:18; Ezekiel 48; Daniel 7:10, 11:12; Micah 6:7; 1 Corinthians 4:15, 14:19; 2 Peter 3:8; Jude 14.

So then, what exactly does the “thousand years” of Revelation 20 refer to?

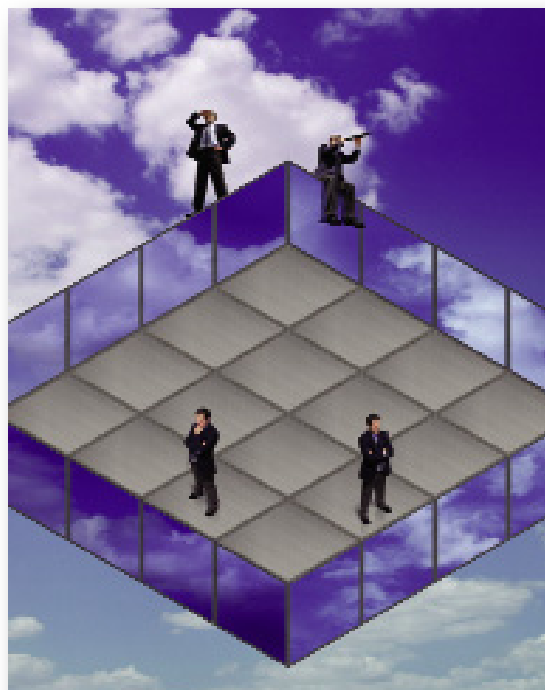
It refers to the present kingdom, the reign of Jesus Christ at the right hand of God now, during the Church age between the first and second advents—as most of the early Church believed.

Meanwhile, adding to present-day confusion, premillennialists have consistently given wrong dates for Christ’s return, though this hasn’t given them pause to reflect on whether they might be defined as false teachers: date-setting, in defiance of Scripture—and getting it wrong at that!

As many have noted, if such a thing as a thousand years of Christ’s political rule on earth were to be in the Christian’s future, it is unthinkable that Jesus and the apostles never had anything to say about it. Nowhere in the New Testament is there any reference to a

“millennial” kingdom after the return of Jesus.

Rather, Jesus and the apostles all taught that at his coming there would be an immediate final judgment, leaving only the genuine believers, who will be made immortal to live in the new creation of God for eternity. They allowed neither time nor place for a “thousand-year” physical reign on this present Earth.



Christ’s Kingdom is not a natural earthly kingdom but a spiritual one. The following New Testament passages (Luke 17:20-21; John 3:3, 5-7, 18:36; Romans 14:17; 1 Corinthians 4:20, 15:50; Colossians 1:13; 1 Thessalonians 2:12; 2 Timothy 4:18; Hebrews 12:28; 2 Peter 1:11) expressly teach that the Kingdom:

1. Does not come “with observation” (literally, ‘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.

Appeals to the Old Testament

To defend their view of a future millennial kingdom, premillennialists resort to citing passages of Scripture in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, which fore-

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tell the rebuilding of the temple and other aspects regarding the nation of Israel.

But as Bible scholars have known since the early Church, these passages are not about the millennium at all. They are about the ancient remnant of Jewish exiles returning to Jerusalem immediately after the Babylonian captivity.

Jeremiah prophesied before the Babylonian captivity and foretold its 70-year duration. Ezekiel also wrote during that time. These great prophets were referring to the restoration of the temple and city immediately after the Babylonian captivity, 500 years before Christ, as did Daniel. They were not writing about some distant future millennium. Incidentally, the very same passages are also used to justify a third return of the Jews to

the land of Palestine in our time, so it gets confusing.

God allowed a remnant of the ancient Israelites to return in repentance from their Babylonian captivity to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. This is recorded in the book of Ezra (1:1-3, 5). The contemporary names of ancient rulers such as Cyrus make it impossible for these verses to refer to any time in history but then!

Historians tell us the second temple was completed between 520 and 516 B.C. It was dedicated with great rejoicing. The prophecy of Jeremiah 33:7-8 did come true:

Verse 7: And I will cause the captivity of Judah and the captivity of Israel to return, and will build them, as at the first.

Verse 8: And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me.

Jeremiah 33, having been fulfilled, cannot be reapplied again and again. It was satisfied to the letter after the Babylonian captivity. God made good on His promise of a return to the land!

The establishment of the modern nation of Israel in 1948 by the United Nations is a key milestone in premillennial doctrine, seen as the ancient Israelites returning to their homeland in what is a third return.

But only one return to rebuild the temple and Jerusalem was ever promised in these often cited ancient prophecies—and that has already taken place, as Jesus walked the streets of Jerusalem in his day.

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The ancient prophecies cited to justify present-day Israel have already been fulfilled in the ancient world after Babylon. Premillennialists, looking for wiggle room, have learned to echo the claims of Zionists: that Israel never received all of the land promised by God, therefore it was never fulfilled, which is why so many American Christians want the Israelis of today to take

thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass."

"All came to pass," and God's promise was fulfilled then and there! So the present charge that the full land claim was never fulfilled is wrong. Yet some dispute this, and the land-claim debate continues.

Related to who might be entitled to a land claim if it still existed, I noticed, during the visit to Israel, that there are ongoing debates as to who can claim to be a true Hebrew. In the face of the destruction of all the ancient tribal genealogical records (critical for temple functions), proof is impossible.

The above factors would complicate the Dispensational view of the present "return" of modern-day Jews to Israel. It would also present a problem in the populating of a pure-blooded biblical Hebrew-only millennial kingdom.

Messianic Rule

There are many variations of the premillennial theme,

but they all are overshadowed by the Jewish apocalyptic vision of a culmination of history in an exclusively Jewish-ruled world centered in Jerusalem in which material goods are supplied in abundance; all want, crime, and sickness are eliminated; and their Messiah will sit on David's throne and rule over all. As has been observed, this doctrine is a plain denial of the claims of Jesus and the apostles that Jesus already reigns as Lord and King and is the present fulfillment of all these very messianic prophecies.

The very Old Testament prophecies that foretold the establishment of the Messiah's kingdom and his reign upon the throne of David were announced and applied at the birth of Jesus, in Luke 1:32, 33.

New Testament scriptures also unmistakably declare that these prophecies were fulfilled at Christ's Ascension when "He sat down on the right-hand of the majesty on



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land from the Arabs by any means possible.

But wait! Rewind the tape to Joshua's time. Here is what the Bible states to refute the modern claim that not all the land was given by God:

"And the Lord gave unto Israel all the land which he swore to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein.

And the Lord gave them rest round about, according to all that he swore unto their fathers: and there stood not a man of all their enemies before them; the Lord delivered all their enemies into their hand.

There failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass" (Joshua 21:43-45, KJV).

Here it is: "And the Lord gave unto Israel all the land which he swore to give unto their fathers. ... There failed not ought of any good

high” (Hebrews 1:3). At that time, “[God] made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority, and power, and dominion” (Ephesians 1:20, 21).

On the Day of Pentecost, Peter announced that Jesus was the one whom God raised up to sit on David’s throne (Acts 2:29-36; note also Acts 13:23). It was an accomplished fact, not something waiting to be fulfilled thousands of years later.

Both John the Baptist and Jesus announced that the Kingdom was “at hand,” and never suggested that “at hand” meant that it was to come some 2,000 years later. (Matthew 4:17, Mark 1:15).

Just before his ascension, Jesus declared, “All authority has been given unto me in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18). That’s why Paul tells us in Colossians 1:13, “God has delivered us out of the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of his son.”

He is not referring to some distant future millennial reign, because Christ was reigning in Paul’s day, and continues to reign in the midst of his foes and with his people in willing subjection. John wrote that Jesus “made us to be a kingdom, to be priests unto his God and Father” (Revelation 1:6). This is Christ’s Kingdom of which we are already part in the present.

According to Paul, Jesus was already reigning and will reign until the Day of Resurrection and Judgment, when death will be abolished. Then comes the end.

As the early church realized in leaving Old Covenant expectation, it is time to stop looking for an earthly physical millennium and believe the Old Testament prophecies which have been fulfilled in Christ and His eternal Kingdom.

Discerning Truth

During my return flight from Israel, I was grateful for the fact that when I first read the Bible in India it was without some gradient of interpretation that had been overlaid on the text—one that forced a pattern



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of belief rather than allowing the text to speak in plain meaning so a pattern could emerge on its own.

After the gradient of interpretation reveals the intended schema, it is like an optical illusion. You might see it one way briefly at first, but then it shifts to the dominant view, and that becomes the only way you can see it. You are now trapped in seeing the pattern only one way, though you may know there is another perspective. This can happen to doctrines. One view can take precedent, blinding you to other interpretations. In the realm of deception, this is a formidable thing. It’s also how deception works.

It made sense to me that a one-way doctrinal “optical illusion” might deceive millions in the Christian subculture who have read Scripture with the same gradient of interpretation placed over the text—now locked in on a single paradigm. When big names push this view in bestsellers and in T.V. appearances, the system gains even more ground. No one dares suspect it might be flawed. On the tour I saw countless copies of the Scofield Bible marked up by avid readers. I noticed it interprets the text in the printed margin notes

on every page, this great Dispensational Bible. It was like being handed special glasses to help you read the Bible.

The Apostle Paul warns us that “strong delusion” will come, decimating the church by inundating believers in waves of deception. This delusion will grow in intensity as we approach “the end” of the age. It is a process that might explain “the great falling away” predicted as the church age reaches its end. The terrible shape of this delusion could well be growing before us.

So we must each discern for ourselves. We can’t make a critical decision based on some famous authority or because the great herd of believers went along with a belief because it was popular. We must be able to think for ourselves when being guided by the Word of God. When people awoken from deception, they find the answer was there in Scripture all along, if they had only checked.

Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords in the present. “Wherefore, receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, whereby we may offer service well-pleasing to God with reverence and awe” (Hebrews 12:28).

Those of us in Christ should be supremely grateful that we can look forward to a glory that goes beyond our ability to conceive, as Paul says of his visit to the third heaven. In the present fallen world we must be encouraged that the final heavenly outcome of things will be beyond what words can describe. □

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