

A Defence of (Reformed) Amillennialism

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[An Introduction](#)

Response to the editorial, “Jewish Dreams” (the *Standard Bearer*, Jan. 15, 1995), has made clear how deep and entrenched are the inroads of postmillennialism into Reformed circles. The editorial, written at the beginning of a new year, reminded Reformed Christians that our only hope, according to the Bible, is the second coming of the Lord Jesus. It sketched in broad outline the traditional, creedal Reformed conception of the last days: abounding lawlessness; widespread apostasy; the Antichrist; and great tribulation for the true church. It gave a warning against the false hope that is known as postmillennialism, quoting a Reformed creed that condemned “Jewish dreams that there will be a golden age on earth before the Day of Judgment.”

Against this [Reformed doctrine](#) of the endtime with its condemnation of postmillennialism have come vehement objections. The objections arise from conservative Reformed and Presbyterian men and churches.

One objector asked for a defense of amillennialism from Scripture. He also confidently asserted that the number of Reformed amillennialists is steadily decreasing, suggesting that the reason for this is the irrefutable arguments of the postmillennialists.

It is true that the postmillennialists are very vocal and aggressive in promoting their theory of the last days. Nor is this true only of those associated with the movement known as “Christian Reconstruction.” Also the men of the influential Banner of Truth publishing group vigorously and incessantly push postmillennialism, usually in connection with their expectation of a coming great revival of Christianity.

It is also true that there is little or no defense of amillennialism in the Reformed press. Exposure and condemnation of postmillennialism as false and dangerous doctrine are unheard of.

Reformed and Presbyterian churches and officebearers have apparently decided to tolerate postmillennialism. This is tacit sanctioning of the error. Postmillennialism is, at the very least, a legitimate option for Reformed Christians. It is, therefore, no wonder that these churches and ministers are unable to respond to the sharp attack on amillennialism by the postmillennialists. Much less can they take the offensive against the error.

Postmillennialism wins by default.

Error carries the day because truth is kept from the field.

The notion of some amillennialists that amillennialism and postmillennialism are two [valid](#) options for Reformed Christians and that the silence of the amillennialists will result in amillennialism and postmillennialism dwelling together in blest accord is silly.

The aggressive postmillennialists know better than this and intend, in fact, to wipe amillennialism out, root and branch. They have given the Reformed amillennialists fair warning. Gary North has written:

There are three main rival views of evangelical eschatology — four, considering dispensationalism. Either all are in error, or all but one is. It is always the task of Trinitarian theologians to discover what is biblically correct. When a theologian has concluded that a particular view is correct, he should seek to make his discovery a test of orthodoxy — if not in his own era, if that is premature, then someday. The goal of the Church should always be an increase in confessional precision. A large part of the Church’s confession [deals](#) with eschatology. Orthodoxy means *straight speaking*. One cannot speak straight with a four-way tongue.

It is time to stop believing in theological pluralism as anything more than a temporary stopgap. It is time to reject the idea of the equal ultimacy of incompatible theological positions. Premillennialism, postmillennialism, and amillennialism are theologically incompatible. God cannot be pleased with all three. At least two of them should be discarded as heretical, if not today, then before Christ comes in final judgment.

I contend that two of them will be. This is another implication of postmillennialism: the Church will eventually identify other eschatologies as wrong. Amillennialists and premillennialists believe that such eschatological precision and confidence will never come to the Church in history; therefore, they are formally defenders of eschatological liberty (at least in Presbyterian

circles) even though they cannot stand postmillennialism. They believe that today's eschatological confusion is a permanent condition: the equal judicial ultimacy of all three. We postmillennialists do not agree. We do not hold eschatologies in dialectical ... tension ("Eschatology and Social Theory," *Christianity & Society* 4, no. 2, April 1994:11).

The delightful Dr. North is wrong on two counts. Protestant Reformed amillennialists *do* believe that eschatological precision and confidence will come to the Church in history. In fact, they believe that this precision has already come to the church in history. It has come to the church as represented by the Protestant Reformed Churches. It is the confession of amillennialism with its corresponding repudiation of premillennialism and postmillennialism as false doctrines. And this, of course, indicates Dr. North's second mistake.

The quotation does serve to show that postmillennialism is not content peacefully to coexist with amillennialism, contrary to the thinking of the Reformed amillennialists who refuse to speak out in defense of amillennialism.

In this and a few subsequent editorials, I like to do my small part in defending and promoting the biblical doctrine of the last days, namely, Reformed amillennialism. This will necessarily involve demonstrating that postmillennialism is a false doctrine, as well as a vain and dangerous hope.

Let us have the positions clearly in our mind.

Both are teachings about the last days. Both instruct the church as to what she can expect in the future before the second coming of Jesus Christ.

They differ radically.

Reformed amillennialism teaches the church, that is, us who believe and our children, to expect increasing lawlessness in the world, apostasy from the truth in the churches, the establishment of the kingdom of Antichrist over the entire world, and great tribulation for all those who fear God and keep His commandments. To such a world, thus fully developed in sin, will Christ return.

Postmillennialism in Reformed and Presbyterian circles holds out quite a different prospect. Gradually, the gospel will convert the majority of the world's inhabitants. True Christians will possess political power in every nation, controlling all aspects of the life of the nation so that there will be a genuinely Christian culture. This will be the "Christianizing," as they put it, of the world. The human race will obey the law of God, at least outwardly (for many will remain unconverted). There will be earthly peace worldwide. The result will be unprecedented material prosperity. Poverty will disappear. Disease will be checked. Crime will be virtually non-existent.

Coming is a "golden age." It will last at least for a thousand years, perhaps a hundred thousand years.

Christ will get an earthly victory in history.

This earthly victory will be the "Messianic kingdom" in its full splendor.

At this point, the postmillennialists differ among themselves.

Some have Jesus returning to the grand earthly kingdom. Others, looking hard at the disconcerting testimony of [Revelation 20:7ff.](#), that at the very end Satan will unleash an all-out assault on the church, predict that the peaceable earthly kingdom of Christ will suffer revolution at the end from the ungodly who were only submitting outwardly.

In either case, the second coming of Christ will follow hard upon the “golden” millennial age.

Merely to describe the two positions is to squelch the inevitable protest from some, “What difference does it make? Must we argue about such things? Do not both the amillennialists and the postmillennialists believe in Jesus? Cannot we live together in harmony?”

Postmillennialism tells the Reformed saints that apostasy, Antichrist, and persecution are *past*. It calls them to take power in the world. It assures them of future earthly ease. It leaves the people unprepared for the struggle that lies ahead for the church, the fiercest struggle that the church has ever faced. It renders the people oblivious to the gathering storm at this very moment. The abounding lawlessness in Western society, for example, does not for the postmillennialist herald the “lawless one,” the “man of sin,” of [II Thessalonians 2](#). It is merely the prelude to the collapse of ungodly society so that the saints can take control.

I heard R. J. Rushdoony for the first time, early in my ministry, in the late 1960s as I recall, in Ft. Collins, Colorado. He described in graphic detail an impending collapse of civilization. His advice to Christians in view of this disaster? “Save your gold and silver.” This will empower the saints to reconstruct society. I did not know whether to laugh or cry. The thought of possessing any silver and gold was hilarious. The idea that a Reformed minister would strengthen Christians for their struggle in the last days by financial advice was sad.

In [Ezekiel 33](#), the Lord instructs the watchman to signal the approach of the enemy against His people, warning that the watchman who fails to blow the trumpet of alarm shall be guilty of the blood of the people.

Reformed amillennialism sees *the* enemy of the church approaching. It sees this in light of the Word of God, Holy Scripture. It is giving the warning. No opposition from dreamers of coming earthly peace will stop its trumpet.

As for those who refuse to heed the warning, their blood will be upon their own heads.

[Revelation 20](#)

The name by which the distinctively [Reformed doctrine](#) of the last things is known is “amillennialism.” This name derives from the 20th chapter of Revelation. Six times in verses 1-7 is mentioned a period of “a thousand years.” An angel binds Satan for “a thousand years” (vv. 1, 2). The result is that Satan cannot deceive the nations for “a thousand years” (v.3). John sees certain souls living and reigning with Christ “a thousand years” (vv. 4, 6). The rest of the dead

lived not again until the “thousand years” were finished (v. 5). When the “thousand years” expire, Satan is loosed, deceives the nations, and makes war against the saints (vv. 7-9).

The term “millennium,” of Latin origin, means “thousand years.” “Amillennialism,” therefore, is the teaching about the thousand year period of [Revelation 20](#) that *denies* that this period is a literal one thousand year period of history during which Christ will establish an earthly kingdom in the world. Positively, amillennialism holds that the thousand year period of [Revelation 20](#) is a figurative description of the entire period from Christ’s exaltation until [shortly](#) before His second coming. During this period two important events take place. One occurs in the abyss: Satan is bound. The other happens in heaven: the martyrs live and reign with Christ.

Millennial Error

The matter of the millennium, mentioned only in [Revelation 20](#), has come to require more attention in eschatology (the church’s doctrine of the last things) than Scripture would suggest. The thousand year period is just one more feature of the revelation of the end in the [book of Revelation](#). The reason why the subject receives so much attention, and *must* receive so much attention, is that serious doctrinal errors have attached themselves to the millennium of [Revelation 20](#).

On the one hand, there is the grievous heresy that bewitches multitudes of supposed evangelicals and fundamentalists so that they expect a carnal kingdom of the Jews in Palestine, preceded by a secret “rapture” of the church. This bizarre teaching involves denial of the oneness of Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church, rejection of the unity of the covenant of grace, opposition to infant baptism, and the embracing of the dreaded doctrine and practice of antinomism (lawlessness of life with appeal to “grace”).

On the other hand, there is the serious error tolerated, if not promoted, by Reformed and Presbyterian churches, that finds in [Revelation 20](#) the basis for expecting a carnal kingdom of Christ that will be victorious according to earthly standards. Not only does this error, known as postmillennialism (since it postpones Christ’s coming to the end of the future earthly golden age), find in [Revelation 20](#) the basis of a carnal kingdom, but it also finds in this chapter a mandate to the church to get busy to “Christianize” this world. Any church that declines this mandate is severely criticized, if it is not heartily damned.

The effect of this interpretation of [Revelation 20](#) is the radical, total reconstruction of Reformed eschatology. No longer are there signs of the return of Christ; no longer does the earthly future hold abounding lawlessness; no longer are we to anticipate great apostasy; no longer are the saints to prepare for Antichrist; no longer are we to brace ourselves for a great tribulation.

Especially because of these millennial errors, Reformed and Presbyterian people must be clear as to the meaning of [Revelation 20](#).

The Meaning of [Revelation 20](#)

“A thousand years” is a figurative, or symbolical, description of the entire age of the new covenant. The number 1,000 is a symbolical number, made up as it is of the number 10. In the Bible, 10 is the number of completeness. The symbolical nature of the thousand year period is in harmony with the symbolical character of the book of Revelation, e.g., the depiction of Satan as a great red dragon ([Rev. 12](#)). It is also in harmony with the obviously figurative character of the binding of the spirit, Satan, with a great chain. In addition, [Revelation 20](#) is a vision (“and I saw,” vv. 1, 4), not historical observation.

The binding of Satan represents the sovereign control and restraint of the devil by the Lord Jesus that prevents him from deceiving the nations. During the present age, Satan cannot unite the nations under Antichrist. This restraint is related to the “withholding” and “letting,” or restraining, of [II Thessalonians 2:6, 7](#) that assures that the man of sin, “that Wicked” (v.8), will be revealed in his proper, God-appointed time (v.6).

Throughout this same age, the martyrs — those who were beheaded on account of the witness of Jesus and on account of the Word of God — live and reign in heaven with Christ. The vision of the thrones in [Revelation 20:4-6](#) refers to what theology calls “the intermediate state,” that is, the life and glory of elect saints at death and until the second coming of Jesus.

This is plain.

John sees “souls” sitting on the thrones. Earlier, in [Revelation 6:9](#), the apostle spoke of the souls of the martyrs under the altar in heaven. Those souls in heaven were distinguished from humans dwelling on earth (v.10). The “souls” of [Revelation 20:4-6](#) are those men and women who had been beheaded for their faithful confession of Christ in time of antichristian persecution throughout the present age.

At the instant of death, the martyred saint is taken up in his soul to be with Christ in heaven, and there he lives and reigns with Christ.

Living with Christ in heaven in the soul at the instant of physical death is the “first resurrection” (v. 5). The postmillennialists argue that the living and reigning with Christ cannot refer to the intermediate state because the life of the soul at death is not resurrection. J. Marcellus Kik, whose commentary on [Revelation 20](#) has been very influential among modern postmillennialists, wrote: “The very fact that Revelation Twenty deals with a resurrection eliminates the interpretation that the Chapter is speaking of the intermediate state of the soul” (*An Eschatology of Victory*, Presbyterian and Reformed, p.230). The “Christian Reconstructionist” David Chilton has written:

We can dispose of the Amillennial position right away, by pointing out the obvious: this is a *resurrection, a rising again from the dead.*

Dying and going to heaven is wonderful, but, for all its benefits, it is not a resurrection. This passage cannot be a description of the state of disembodied saints in heaven (*Paradise Restored: A Biblical Theology of Dominion*, Reconstruction Press, p.196).

The postmillennialists are wrong.

The taking up to heaven of the soul of the believer at death is, indeed, resurrection. There is an act of the risen Christ upon the soul at the instant of death purifying it from all sin and transforming it from a soul adapted to earthly life into a soul adapted to heavenly life. There must be this resurrection of the soul by Christ if the soul is to be with Christ in heaven. Souls do not automatically fly away to heaven at death. Souls of believers do not naturally fly to heaven. The *Heidelberg Catechism* indicates Christ's raising of the soul of the believer at death in Question 57: "my soul after this life *shall be ... taken up* to Christ its head."

The saint goes to heaven by resurrection, and *only* by resurrection. There are two stages. The first is the resurrection of the soul. This is the resurrection of [Revelation 20:5](#). The second is the resurrection of the body. This is the second resurrection, implied by the first resurrection of [Revelation 20:5](#).

Accordingly, the first death of the reprobate ungodly is the suffering of God's wrath in his soul at the moment of physical death. The second death will be his suffering of God's wrath in hell in soul and body after the final judgment (see [Rev. 20:6, 14](#)).

At the end of the thousand years, Satan will be loosed for a short time (vv. 3, 7). The one who "leteth," or restrains, will be taken out of the way ([II Thess. 2:7](#)). This enables Satan to establish his world-kingdom under Antichrist. The result is the final, all-out assault upon the true church and her living, faithful members (vv. 8, 9). The "beloved city" represents the church. The "saints" are all those whom the Spirit of Christ has sanctified through faith in Christ.

After a short time of intense persecution of the church — the "great tribulation" of [Matthew 24:21](#) and the "time of trouble" of [Daniel 12:1](#) — fire from God will devour the ungodly in the second coming of Christ (cf. [II Thess. 1:6-10](#)).

Then follow at once the final judgment and the eternal state, heaven and hell ([Rev. 20:11](#) ff.).

The Explanation by Postmillennialism

The postmillennial explanation of the passage in the interests of the physical victory of an earthly kingdom of Christ in history is mistaken. The explanation by J. Marcellus Kik, adopted in the main by the "Christian Reconstructionists," is an example of this mistaken interpretation.

The reign of the saints is located *on earth*, as though the apostle never spoke of "souls," indeed, of "souls" who had been "beheaded." Beheaded souls do not live and reign on earth. B. B. Warfield, himself a postmillennialist, recognized that "disembodied souls" do not rule in Christ's kingdom on earth. Correctly, he concluded that [Revelation 20:4](#) gives us "the picture of the 'intermediate state'" ("The Millennium and the Apocalypse," in *Biblical Doctrines*, Banner of Truth, pp. 648, 649).

The postmillennialist interpretation supposes that Christ's taking of the soul of the Christian to heaven at death is not resurrection when, in fact, *only* resurrection can translate a sinful earthly

soul to a holy, heavenly life. The postmillennialist denies that the intermediate state involves resurrection in the face of the explicit testimony of [Revelation 20](#) that the living in heaven of souls that had been beheaded is the first resurrection.

The Kikkian/“Christian Reconstructionist” postmillennialists are even wrong in their explanation of the binding of Satan. Kik explains the binding as restraining Satan from having “complete control over the nations of the world” (*Eschatology*, pp. 203-208). But Satan *does* have “complete control over the nations of the world.” Of course, he is not the almighty sovereign. The triune God is sovereign. But Satan controls the nations of the world as to their spiritual condition. Scripture calls him the “god of this world.” History proves that for the past 1900 odd years now, Satan has governed nations as to their spiritual and moral life.

The binding of Satan is the restraint of him in this one respect: he cannot establish the kingdom of Antichrist. This is unacceptable to postmillennialism since it has decided that Antichrist is a thing of the past, having been fulfilled in the Roman empire from about A. D. 65 to about A. D. 313.

Kik is also in error when he explains that Satan is bound by *the action of the church*. The church has the great chain. She could almost completely “restrain his influence over the nations.” It is the fault of the church that the devil has so much influence in the world. If only the church would heed the “Christian Reconstructionists” and exert herself to get and wield dominion on earth, Satan would be bound (see *Eschatology*, p.196).

This is obviously false. The angel who binds Satan is not the church, but the servant of the ascended Lord Jesus Christ. Christ has bound Satan. Kik’s explanation is a denial that Satan is actually bound. Since the church has not yet exerted herself to get dominion, Satan is not yet bound. But the text says that he has been bound: “. . . and bound him a thousand years” (v.2).

[Revelation 20 against the Postmillennialists](#)

[Revelation 20](#) is no support to postmillennialism, but rather a refutation of that error. The saints do not gain earthly victory in the world; rather, they suffer and are beheaded. History does not come to its end with the earthly triumph of the church; rather, Satan is loosed, and the hordes of the ungodly attack the church and the saints. The hope held before the people of God is not a carnal kingdom on earth; rather, it is our living and reigning with Christ in heaven at death.

This hope, with its accompanying hope of bodily resurrection in the Day of Christ, does not render the Reformed amillennialist passive on earth. On the contrary. Exactly because we are assured that the worst that the foe can do is usher us into heaven and onto our thrones, we are encouraged to be faithful and diligent in our confession of the Word of God. This is the calling of the church in the world.

And this is preparation for the “little season” that is before the church, the loosing of Satan.

[Apostasy and Persecution](#)

It is the [Reformed doctrine](#) of the last things that the last days are a time of departure from the faith by many and a time of persecution of the true church by a wicked world. Apostasy and persecution characterize the entire age from Christ's ascension to His second coming. They increase and intensify at the very end in connection with the coming of the Antichrist and the establishment of the universal kingdom of the beast.

The Reformed faith repudiates the notion that the last days hold the prospect of the conversion of the majority of the human race so that the true church of Christ is in a position to persecute the ungodly.

The Reformed Creeds

Reformed doctrine is established by the Reformed creeds. These creeds teach the last days as the time of apostasy and persecution. The Second Helvetic Confession (1566), expressing the conviction of all the leading Reformers, stated:

And from heaven the same Christ will return in judgment, when wickedness will then be at its greatest in the world and when the Antichrist, having corrupted true religion, will fill up all things with superstition and impiety and will cruelly lay waste the Church with bloodshed and flames (Dan., ch. 11). But Christ will come [again](#) to claim his own, and by his coming to destroy the Antichrist.... We further condemn Jewish dreams that there will be a golden age on earth before the Day of Judgment, and that the pious, having subdued all their godless enemies, will possess all the kingdoms of the earth. For evangelical truth in Matt., chs. 24 and 25, and Luke, ch. 18, and apostolic teaching in II Thess., ch. 2, and II Tim., chs. 3 and 4, present something quite different (*Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century*, ed. Arthur C. Cochrane, Westminster Press, 1966, chap. 11).

The two main sections on eschatology in the "Three Forms of Unity" are Question 52 of the *Heidelberg Catechism* and Article 37 of the *Belgic Confession*. Question 52 of the Catechism locates every believer, and by implication the true church, in circumstances of persecution throughout the present age:

Q. What comfort is it to thee that Christ shall come again to judge the quick and the dead?

A. That in all my sorrows and persecutions, with uplifted head I look for the very same person, who before offered himself for my sake,... to come as judge from heaven: who shall cast all his and my enemies into everlasting condemnation, but shall translate me with all his chosen ones to himself, into heavenly joys and glory.

Article 37 of the Belgic Confession does the same. It declares that the final judgment is:

most desirable and comfortable to the righteous and elect: because then their full deliverance shall be perfected, and there they shall receive the fruits of their labor and trouble which they have borne. Their innocence shall be known to all, and they shall see the terrible vengeance which God shall execute on the wicked, who most cruelly persecuted, oppressed and tormented them in this world.

The article continues that it is only then, at Christ's return, that the faithful and elect will be crowned with glory and honor, all tears will be wiped from their eyes, and "their cause which is now condemned by many judges and magistrates, as heretical and impious, will then be known to be the cause of the Son of God."

Not only is there nothing in these articles about any hope of a "golden age," but also the articles plainly rule out the notion of an earthly kingdom of Christ in history.

The ungodly always dominate. The world's rulers always condemn the cause of the true church. The wicked always oppress the saints. The only hope of the church in the world, and their full deliverance, is the second coming of Christ and the final judgment.

This is Reformed doctrine.

Postmillennialism has no basis in the Reformed creeds. Postmillennialism conflicts with the Reformed creeds. Postmillennialism is condemned by the Reformed creeds, explicitly by the Second Helvetic Confession of 1566, implicitly by the others.

Perpetual War

As is true of all of the doctrines contained in the Reformed creeds, amillennialism is based on the plain teaching of the Bible.

The original promise of the gospel in [Genesis 3:15](#) put enmity between the church and a wicked world that is spiritually descended from Satan: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed..." Enmity is war. In the war, the ungodly - Satan's spawn - do real, although not fatal, harm to the saints: "... thou shalt bruise his heel." This war with its sufferings for the people of God continues to the very end of time at Christ's return, for [Romans 16:20](#) promises the apostolic church that "the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." Crushed principally at the cross, Satan is, nevertheless, not crushed finally until the Lord returns to cast him into the lake of fire ([Rev. 20:10](#)). In the meantime, he bruises the heel of Christ's body in the world without any letup.

[Psalm 2](#) teaches that the kings of the earth foolishly set themselves against Jehovah and His Christ until the Christ breaks them with a rod of iron. [Revelation 19:11ff.](#) makes clear that the destruction of these raging foes with a rod of iron will occur at Jesus Christ's second coming. That [Revelation 19:11ff.](#) refers to the second coming is evident from the opening of heaven (v.11) and from the fact that at that time Antichrist and his false prophet are cast into hell (v.20). Until the personal return of Christ, the nations under the government of the kings of the earth make war against Him as He is present in His church by His Word.

The climax of this war against the seed of the woman by the seed of the Serpent will be the persecution of the church by the Antichrist.

This is future with regard to the church at the end of the 20th century. In [Revelation 13](#), John prophesied the world-kingdom of the beast that would make war with the saints. In [Revelation](#)

[19](#), the apostle tells us that this beast, with his false prophet, appears in history immediately before the second coming of Christ. At His coming, Christ casts the beast and the false prophet into the lake of fire (v.20).

This is the clear, irrefutable teaching of [II Thessalonians 2](#). That individual who is “that man of sin,” “the son of perdition,” and “that Wicked” will be on the scene when the Lord Jesus comes again, for the Lord will “consume (him) with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy (him) with the brightness of his coming” (v.8). Inasmuch as he will oppose and exalt himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped, and will claim to be God himself, he is Antichrist (v.4). He will oppose Christ (who is the revelation of God), and he will present himself as Christ’s vicar, or substitute. Opposing Christ, he will necessarily oppose Christ’s church. This will be great tribulation for the church.

Reformed Christians may differ as to the identity of the Antichrist, whether he will be a certain pope of the Roman Catholic Church or a political figure who will have the backing of the false church headed by Rome. There may be no disagreement among us, that the Antichrist and his assault upon the church are future.

This view of the future is in harmony with the testimony of the Scriptures everywhere that persecution will be the lot of the believers always. “Blessed are ye,” said Christ, “when men shall revile you, and persecute you ... for my sake” ([Matt. 5:11](#)). “In the world ye shall have tribulation,” He said to the church at His leaving ([John 16:33](#)). In every age, God’s elect confess, “For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter” ([Rom. 8:36](#)). In [II Timothy 3](#), the apostle expressly describes the “last days,” that is, the present age between Christ’s ascension and His return, as the time in which “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (v.12).

Scripture contradicts postmillennialism’s dream of the earthly victory of the church in the future.

The True Church Becomes Smaller

Leading up to the final, furious fight of Satan’s minions under Satan’s man against Christ’s church is the great apostasy. This is a wholesale falling away from the truth by many who once confessed the faith. Either they truly confessed the faith in their forebears, or they insincerely confessed it personally.

The future is not bright with the prospect of mass conversions, much less the conversion to Christ of a majority of mankind, as is the dream of postmillennialism. On the contrary, the future is dark with the certainty of departure from Christ on the part of many who once professed Him. This is the clear, conclusive doctrine of the apostle in [II Thessalonians 2:3](#): “Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed.” The day of Christ, that is, the day of His personal, visible coming, is preceded by the sign of Antichrist. Antichrist is preceded and produced by apostasy. An outstanding sign of the end in the day of Christ is departure from the truth of the gospel. What this apostasy consists of and how it occurs are suggested in verses 9-12.

The falling away began already in the apostles' time as their struggle with legalism, gnosticism, and antinomism shows. It picked up intensity in the development of Roman Catholicism. Almost at once after the Reformation, Protestantism began to fall away in Arminianism, liberalism, and the mysticism represented today in the charismatic movement.

To those who have eyes to see the biblical signs, the present condition of the churches manifests plainly the truth of Reformed amillennialism.

The tactic by which postmillennialism tries to escape the force of the biblical passages that forecast apostasy and persecution in the last days is both desperate and deadly dangerous. It consists of referring all of these passages to an event in the past. This event is the destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70. Whatever in the New Testament, and in the Old as well, predicts tribulation for the people of God has already been completely fulfilled. Nothing of this applies to the church any longer. Thus, huge chunks of Holy Scripture are made irrelevant to the church, including most of the book of Revelation.

Gary DeMar, who has boasted of postmillennialism's powerful exegesis, interprets [II Thessalonians 2](#) in such a way that nothing in the chapter is future. The man of sin was a "contemporary" of the apostle Paul. The day of the Lord was the day of the destruction of Jerusalem. The apostasy was the falling away of the Jews after the ascension of Christ. The coming of Christ was Jesus' coming in judgment upon Jerusalem (see DeMar, *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church*, American Vision, 1994, pp. 311-350).

Fundamental to this twisting of the Word of God in the interests of the carnal kingdom is the postmillennial understanding of [Matthew 24](#), Jesus' great eschatological discourse.

We look at this passage next time, God willing.

Matthew 24 (Again)

The risk that an editor takes when he launches a series of editorials is that the series will be interrupted. Reasons for the interruption are varied — and sometimes compelling.

The danger includes that the interruption will be extended for some time and several issues of the magazine.

By the time the editor resumes the series, the reader has forgotten the earlier articles in the series.

This danger with all its fullness has overtaken the editor of the *Standard Bearer*.

In the January 15, 1995 *SB* appeared an editorial, "Jewish Dreams," rejecting the earthly kingdom of postmillennialism as the hope of the Christian. The March 1, 1995 issue of the magazine contained two letters critical of the editorial, as well as a defense of the editorial by the editor ("A Letter and Response on 'Jewish Dreams'").

The March 15, 1995 *SB* also contained a letter that was sharply critical of “Jewish Dreams.” The author of this letter was Gary DeMar, leading advocate of the postmillennialism of the Christian Reconstruction movement. The heart of the letter was a defense of postmillennialism on the basis of Question 191 of the Westminster Larger Catechism. To this letter also, the editor responded (“Another Letter and Response on ‘Jewish Dreams’”).

DeMar’s letter, bristling with challenge, became the occasion for the series of editorials on “A Defense of (Reformed) Amillennialism.”

Lest I be guilty of failing to do what little I can to stop the decline from the truth of amillennialism, I intend to devote future editorials to a biblical, confessional defense of amillennialism against the erroneous doctrine of postmillennialism. These will have the “Christian Reconstruction” movement especially in view (*SB*, March 15, 1995, p. 296).

The series, therefore, concerns the biblical doctrine of the last things, a prominent and vital subject in our day. It is also controversial as the recent exchange with Dr. Gary North indicated.

The first installment appeared in the April 1, 1995 issue of the *SB* (pp. 317, 318). That editorial showed the radical differences between amillennialism and postmillennialism. It quoted with approval the declaration by the Christian Reconstructionist Gary North

that premillennialism, postmillennialism, and amillennialism are theologically incompatible. God cannot be pleased with all three. At least two of them should be discarded as heretical, if not today, then before Christ comes in final judgment (p.317).

The editorial charged postmillennialism with the sin of leaving “the people (of God) unprepared for the struggle that lies ahead for the church, the fiercest struggle that the church has ever faced. It renders the people oblivious to the gathering storm at this very moment” (p.318).

The second installment ran in the April 15, 1995 *SB* (pp. 341-343). This editorial dealt with one of the biblical passages that are fundamental in the controversy, [Revelation 20](#), the only passage that mentions the “millennium.” The editorial took note of the explanation of [Revelation 20](#) by Presbyterian exegete J. Marcellus Kik and by the Christian Reconstructionist David Chilton. It demonstrated that the phrase, “thousand years,” is a figurative description of the entire age of the new covenant during which particularly the martyred saints are raised in their souls at the moment of death to live and reign with Christ in heaven.

[Revelation 20](#) is no support to postmillennialism, but rather a refutation of that error. The saints do not gain earthly victory in the world; rather, they suffer and are beheaded. History does not come to its end with the earthly triumph of the church; rather, Satan is loosed, and the hordes of the ungodly attack the church and the saints. The hope held before the people of God is not a carnal kingdom on earth; rather, it is our living and reigning with Christ in heaven at death (p. 343).

The third installment is found in the May 1, 1995 *SB* (pp. 365-367). The topic of this editorial was “Apostasy and Persecution.” With reference to Gary DeMar’s *Last Days Madness*:

Obsession of the Modern Church (American Vision, 1994), it pointed out that postmillennialism, especially the Christian Reconstructionist brand, puts the great apostasy and great tribulation of the New Testament Scriptures *in the past*. Against this false and dangerous teaching, the editorial argued from Scripture and the confessions that the apostasy of [II Thessalonians 2:3](#) and the great tribulation of [Matthew 24:21](#) are still to be expected by the church, although both are also present realities. It quoted the powerful statement in chapter 11 of the Second Helvetic Confession (1566):

And from heaven the same Christ will return in judgment, when wickedness will then be at its greatest in the world and when the Antichrist, having corrupted true religion, will fill up all things with superstition and impiety and will cruelly lay waste the Church with bloodshed and flames (Dan., ch. 11).

The fourth installment appeared, in sequence, in the May 15, 1995 *SB* (pp. 389, 390). The title was, “A Defense of (Reformed) Amillennialism (4): [Matthew 24](#).” So far the hazard that threatens editorial series was avoided. It was after this installment that disaster struck.

As for the content of that fourth installment, its subject is so important to the controversy, and so closely related to the article that must follow, that, rather than summarize it, I must reprint it in part. What follows then is the last part of the fourth editorial in the series. This concerns the postmillennial interpretation of [Matthew 24](#).

*** **

The happy predictions of postmillennialism for the church in the world are overthrown by 2,000 years of history.

Postmillennialism’s denial of apostasy, antichrist, and persecution is refuted by historical events.

Amillennialism, on the other hand, rings true to history, past and present. To refer only to this one vital element in the controversy, the true church has always been and is today the remnant according to the election of grace. When and where has the true church ever been the majority? It was the remnant in apostolic times; it was the remnant at the time of the Reformation; it is the remnant today. Why, even in Israel/Judah, it was the remnant.

Awareness of developments in the world in light of the prophecy of the Holy Scriptures is not, however, the main reason for the astonishment of the Reformed Christian at the dream-world of postmillennialism. His amazement at postmillennialism’s rosy forecast of the earthly future is mainly due to the contrary testimony of the Bible.

What of the apostles’ prediction of departure from the faith in the last days in [II Thessalonians 2:3](#); [II Timothy 3, 4](#); [II Peter 2](#); and [I John 2:18, 19](#)?

What of the apostle’s warning of a coming Antichrist in [II Thessalonians 2](#)?

What of the apostle's alerting the saints to an impending tribulation as an element of those things that must shortly come to pass before the coming of the Lord, in the book of Revelation, e.g., 3:10; 6:9-11; 7:9-17; 11:1-12; 12:17; 13; 14:9-13;15:2; 16; 17; 19:2, 19-21; and 20:4, 7-10?

The answer given by the postmillennialist, particularly the "Christian Reconstructionist" (such as Gary DeMar, who asked for this biblical defense of amillennialism), to all of these astonished questions by the Reformed Christian is that all of the prophecies of apostasy, Antichrist, and tribulation have already been completely fulfilled. They are *past* events. The church of A. D. 1995 does not need to concern herself with them. Nothing of them is yet future. All was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70.

Postmillennialist Gary DeMar writes, "It is unbiblical to use the term 'Antichrist' for a present-day or future political ruler. The proper context is theological and pre-A. D. 70" (*Last Days Madness*, p.204).

The same author has written that the church must "recognize that the Great Tribulation is a past event." For "the tribulation had reference to the Jews, the people of Judea." It was "the destruction of Jerusalem" (*Last Days*, pp. 119, 110).

The exegetical basis of "Christian Reconstruction's" grand vision of a "Christianized" world - the victory of the gospel in history - is largely the interpretation of [Matthew 24](#) by J. Marcellus Kik. The Presbyterian's interpretation of Jesus' eschatological discourse has been reprinted in a book titled, *An Eschatology of Victory* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971), pp. 53-173.

Kik explains the chapter in such a way that verses 4-31 refer exclusively to the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome in A. D. 70. Nothing in these verses refers at all to Jesus' second coming and the events that immediately precede His coming. The abomination of desolation in verse 15 refers only to the desecration of the temple by the "idolatrous ensigns" of the invading Roman army (p.104). The "great tribulation" of verse 21 refers only to the suffering of the Jews at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem. The false Christs and false prophets of verse 24 refer only to the pretender-Messiahs and false teachers among the Jews at that time.

The "coming of the Son of man" in verses 27 and 30 is not the visible, bodily return of Christ, but His revelation in the preaching of the gospel by the apostles. The gathering of the elect by the angels in verse 31 is the spiritual saving of the elect through the gospel. "Angels" are human preachers.

The preliminary signs in the heavens of verse 29 are not the literal darkening of the sun and moon, prior to Jesus' second coming, but the going out of the figurative light of the Jews as a nation in A. D. 70. "The sun of Judaism has been darkened" (p.128). The shaking of the powers of the heavens in verse 29 "refers to Satan and his angels" (p. 133).

The basis for this understanding of [Matthew 24:4-31](#) according to Kik and his "Christian Reconstruction" disciples is Jesus' word in verse 34: "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled." Kik explains this word as meaning, very simply, that every single prophecy of Christ in verses 4-31 was fulfilled, exhaustively, in the lifetime of

the generation that was alive at the time of Jesus' instruction. All was exhaustively fulfilled in A. D. 70 in the destruction of Jerusalem. Nothing foretold in verses 4-31 pertains to the second coming.

The key to Matthew Twenty-four is verse 34.... Every thing mentioned in the previous verses were (*sic*) to be fulfilled before the contemporary generation would pass away.... The first thirty-four verses of [Matthew 24](#), along with verse 35... deal with the destruction of Jerusalem (pp. 59, 60, 67).

Gary DeMar agrees:

The events rehearsed in the Olivet Discourse are signs leading up to and including the destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70. These chapters have nothing to do with when Jesus *will* return at the final judgment. There are no observable signs leading up to His bodily return (*Last Days*, p.151).

This interpretation of Matthew 24 is basic to the postmillennial denial of apostasy, Antichrist, and great tribulation for the church in the future. For in the light of this explanation of Matthew 24, the postmillennialist goes through the entire New Testament rigorously applying all prediction of such things to the destruction of Jerusalem.

Fundamental to this interpretation of Matthew 24 is Kik's explanation of verse 34, the "key" to the chapter. If Kik is wrong here, his whole postmillennial conception of the earthly future collapses like a house of cards.

"This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled."

Does Christ teach that every last particular in the preceding verses was fulfilled exhaustively in A. D. 70?

We shall see.

[Matthew 24 \(Continued\)](#)

The apparent difficulty with Jesus' words in [Matthew 24:34](#) is that they seem to predict the end of the world in the lifetime of His disciples. He has been instructing the disciples concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world (v.3). He has just spoken of His visible, bodily coming in the clouds (v.30). Then, in verse 34, He declares, "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled."

In fact, of course, He did not [return](#), nor did the world end, in the lifetime of the generation to whom He was speaking.

Various erroneous solutions have been proposed for this seeming difficulty. Theological liberalism finds in the text evidence that Jesus Himself, like His apostles later, mistakenly

supposed that His personal, glorious, perfected, Messianic rule over all the world would occur within a few years. This is unbelief.

Others interpret “generation” as referring to the Jewish race, to believers, or to the human race. On this view, Jesus merely affirmed that there would be Jews, or believers, or humans yet alive when He would return. This is a forced and unnatural reading of the text. It is an effort to escape the difficulty posed by the words of Jesus. It does not do justice to the vehement assertion by Jesus in verse 35 concerning the truth of His words.

As was pointed out in the previous editorial, the postmillennial Presbyterian J. Marcellus Kik limited the reference of “all these things” to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Implied is that verses 3-31 speak exclusively of the destruction of Jerusalem. There is nothing in these verses that applies to the days leading up to the second coming of Christ. There is nothing in these verses, therefore, that applies to the church at the end of the 20th century. All was exhaustively fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem. All is past. Kik is followed in this exegesis by the postmillennial Christian Reconstruction movement.

This explanation is obviously false inasmuch as it ignores that Jesus’ teaching answers the question of His disciples about His coming and the end of the world, not only about the destruction of Jerusalem (v. 3). Also, Jesus speaks in verses 3-31 of events that cannot by any stretch of the imagination be restricted to the destruction of Jerusalem. Such is the mention in verse 14 of the coming of “the end” (Greek: *to telos*) after the gospel of the kingdom has been preached “in all the world” (literally, ‘in the whole inhabited earth’) “for a witness unto all nations.” Such also are the events spoken of in verses 29-31: the catastrophic signs in the heavens; the sign of the Son of man; the visible coming of the Son of man in the clouds; and the gathering of the elect by the angels with the great sound of a trumpet.

How then is verse 34 to be explained?

The natural sense of “this generation” is the normal lifetime of those to whom Jesus was speaking. If a generation is of some 40 years duration, “all these things” spoken of in verses 3-31 would, and did, take place within 40 years of Jesus’ having foretold them.

“All these things” would *happen*, or *take place*. The King James translation, “be fulfilled,” might be misleading, as though these things would occur fully and exhaustively during the span of that generation. The Greek is simply, “...till all these things *happen*” (*geneetai*).

“All these things” are the things that have to do with the destruction of Jerusalem, the (second) coming of Jesus Christ, and the end of the world. These were the things about which the disciples asked Jesus in verse 3. These were the things that Jesus prophesied in verses 4-31.

All these things would happen before the generation addressed by Jesus would pass away. They would happen within about 40 years. They would happen in the destruction of Jerusalem by the then risen and ascended Lord Jesus Christ through the Roman army in A.D. 70.

All these things would happen *typically*, or *in the historical type*.

The destruction of Jerusalem was a God-ordained historical type of the deliverance of the elect church at the second coming of Christ through the judgment of tribulation. The New Testament church was delivered by the destruction of Jerusalem. It was delivered from the persecuting hatred of the Jewish nation. It was delivered also from the clinging, entangling Jewishness of the now transcended Old Testament worship: the temple service; the civil and ceremonial laws of the nation of Israel; the earthly forms of the promises and hopes of the people of God. The grand temple had to be thrown down, to the last stone, so that the mature church of believing Jew and Gentile might flourish in her New Testament spirituality.

This deliverance took place only by way of struggle, affliction, and tribulation.

Indeed, all these things took place in A.D. 70.

- **Typically!**
- **Merely typically!**
- **Not exhaustively!**
- **Not in the reality!**

The reality was yet in the future from the vantage point of the church standing on the ruins of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The early church understood this well, as is evident from her exegesis of [Matthew 24](#) and related passages after A.D. 70.

The reality is still in the future from the vantage point of the church in A.D. 1996. The reality, as the question of the disciples in verse 3 plainly shows, is the coming of Christ and the end of the world.

As is always the case with types, the destruction of Jerusalem came far short of complete fulfillment of the deliverance of the saints in the way of judgment. Verses 29-31 of [Matthew 24](#) make this failure of the type clear beyond any doubt. These events await the reality: the end of the world.

But this coming reality typified in the destruction of Jerusalem is certain.

The happening of the type according to Jesus' words which cannot pass away assures it.

Matthew 24 (Continued)

[Matthew 24, 25](#) is Jesus' answer to the question of His disciples in 24:3. The question was, "When shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" The question combined the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and the end of the world at Jesus' second coming. Jesus' answer likewise combines these two events. The reason for the combination of these two events in the great discourse by our Lord on the last things (eschatology) is that the destruction of Jerusalem was a historical type of the end of the world.

Throughout [Matthew 24:4-31](#), Jesus gives instruction to His church concerning the end of the world, and the things which the church must expect before the end of the world, under the figure, or type, of the destruction of Jerusalem.

Inasmuch as the destruction of Jerusalem was the type of the end, everything that Jesus has taught in the preceding verses can be said in verse 34 to “be fulfilled,” that is, happen, in A.D. 70. “All these things,” happen *typically* in A.D. 70. But these things do not happen in A.D. 70 *exhaustively*. They do by no means happen in *reality* in A.D. 70. The reality of all these things will happen when Jesus comes in the body at the end of the world.

It is the same with the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world as it is with the fulfillment of the other great prophecies of the Scriptures. Balaam’s prophecy in [Numbers 24:12-25](#) of the king out of Jacob was fulfilled historically in David, the son of Jesse. The mention of the various heathen nations that the king would subdue shows this. All the things of Balaam’s prophecy happened in the life and reign of King David.

But only typically. Not exhaustively. Not as to the reality.

The real happening of these things - the fulfillment — is in the kingship of Jesus Christ.

Similarly, the promise to Abram that his seed would receive the land from the Nile to the Euphrates was typically fulfilled in the glorious kingdom of Solomon ([Gen. 15:18](#); [II Chron. 9:26](#)).

But not in reality.

The reality is the present extent of the spiritual kingdom of Jesus Christ, which worldwide kingdom is yet expanding and will be perfected in all the universe at the coming of the Christ.

The peaceful kingdom of [Psalm 72](#) is, throughout the Psalm, both the earthly kingdom under Solomon and the spiritual kingdom of Jesus the Messiah. More precisely, it is the spiritual kingdom of Messiah foreshadowed in the earthly kingdom under Solomon.

The Reformed Tradition: Ridderbos and Calvin

This explanation of [Matthew 24:1-35](#) in terms of type/antitype, or figure/reality, is that of the solid Reformed tradition.

Exactly concerning the difficulty, how Jesus could say in [Matthew 24:34](#) that “this generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled,” the Dutch Reformed exegete Herman Ridderbos wrote:

By “all these things” (rendered by Ridderbos as “*dit alles*,” ‘all this’ - DJE) ... (is) to be understood ... the entire complex of the happening of the last time, including the coming of the Son of Man. In this connection one must [again](#) take into consideration the combining character of the representation of the future set forth here.... The starting point of this whole discourse is in

the destruction of the temple. And because this, according to the nature of prophecy, is seen in one and the same realm (“*in een vlak*”) with the great future of the Lord, it can be said that the generation which would be witness of this destruction shall not pass “till all these things be fulfilled.” Here, therefore, the great future is again designated in a complex, undifferentiated way. In the light of the fulfillment it is evident that “all these things” (“*dit alles*,” according to Ridderbos - DJE) do not come all at once and, therefore, would be seen merely in part by the then living generation.... The exegesis (of Matt. 24 -DJE) must also here adopt the historical viewpoint, that is, must proceed from the prophetic form of eschatology. See also the commentary on 24:14 (*The Gospel according to Matthew*, vol. 2, Kok, 1954, pp. 157, 158, in *Korte Verklaring*; the translation of the Dutch is mine).

This was also Calvin’s interpretation of [Matthew 24:34](#). Because Calvin’s interpretation is both clear and compelling; because it represents the Reformed tradition, indeed, the tradition of the Reformation; and because it destroys the novel interpretation by Kik and the Christian Reconstructionists, it deserves to be quoted in its entirety:

Though Christ employs a general expression, yet he does not extend the discourses to all the miseries which would befall the Church, but merely informs them, that before a single *generation* shall have been completed, they will learn by experience the truth of what he has said. For within fifty years the city was destroyed and the temple was rased, the whole country was reduced to a hideous desert, and the obstinacy of the world rose up against God. Nay more, their rage was inflamed to exterminate the doctrine of salvation, false teachers arose to corrupt the pure gospel by their impostures, religion sustained amazing shocks, and the whole company of the godly was miserably distressed. Now though the same evils were perpetrated in uninterrupted succession for many ages afterwards, yet what Christ said was true, that, before the close of a single *generation*, believers would feel in reality, and by undoubted experience, the truth of his prediction; for the apostles endured the same things which we see in the present day. And yet it was not the design of Christ to promise to his followers that their calamities would be terminated within a short time, (for then he would have contradicted himself, having previously warned them that *the end was not yet*;) but, in order to encourage them to perseverance, he expressly foretold that those things related to their own age. The meaning therefore is: “This prophecy does not relate to evils that are distant, and which posterity will see after the lapse of many centuries, but which are now hanging over you, and ready to fall in one mass, so that there is no part of it which the present *generation* will not experience.” So then, while our Lord heaps upon a single *generation* every kind of calamities, he does not by any means exempt future ages from the same kind of sufferings, but only enjoins the disciples to be prepared for enduring them all with firmness (*Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, vol.3, tr. William Pringle, Eerdmans, 1949, pp. 151, 152).

Calvin’s explanation of the related 14th verse of the chapter (“And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come”) is the same. Calvin flatly denies that the reference to the end is exhaustively and exclusively a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem, as is the contention of Kik and the Christian Reconstructionists. Calvin points to the obvious fact that is basic to the right understanding of the entire passage, namely, Jesus’ “blending” of the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world as figure and reality.

This is improperly restricted by some to the destruction of the temple, and the abolition of the service of the Law; for it ought to be understood as referring to *the end* and renovation of the world. Those two things having been blended by the disciples, as if the temple could not be overthrown without the destruction of *the whole world*, Christ, in replying to the whole question which had been put to him, reminded them that a long and melancholy succession of calamities was at hand, and that they must not hasten to seize the prize, before they had passed through many contests and dangers. In this manner, therefore, we ought to explain this latter clause: “The end of the world will not come before I have tried my Church, for a long period, by severe and painful temptations” (pp. 129, 130).

The interpretation of [Matthew 24:34](#) by J. Marcellus Kik and the Christian Reconstructionists as demanding that everything set forth in [Matthew 24:4-31](#) took place exhaustively and really in the destruction of Jerusalem is a radical departure from the historic Reformed explanation of the passage.

[Matthew 24 \(Concluded\)](#)

Standing decisively against J. Marcellus Kik’s interpretation of [Matthew 24:3-35](#), particularly verse 34, in his book, *An Eschatology of Victory* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971), are the following considerations drawn from the passage itself.

1) Kik’s interpretation ignores that part of the disciples’ question that asks about “the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world” (v.3). [Again](#) and again in his explanation of [Matthew 24:4-31](#) Kik [presents](#) the question that Jesus is answering as though it were only the question, “When shall these things (of the destruction of Jerusalem) be?” Kik begins his treatment of [Matthew 24:23-28](#), e.g., with the words, “The disciples desired to know when the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple would take place.” Not surprisingly, Kik immediately adds, “In answer to that question Jesus first gave preliminary signs in verses 4-14.” Kik then goes on to make Jesus’ words in verses 23-28 also refer only to the destruction of Jerusalem (*An Eschatology of Victory*, pp. 121, 122).

But the question of the disciples was not only about the destruction of Jerusalem; it “blended,” to use Calvin’s term, two events: the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world. In answering the disciples’ question, Jesus also “blended” the two events, and He did so from the very outset of His answer. That His answer, already in verses 4-31, had in view, not only the destruction of Jerusalem but also the end of the world at His second coming is indisputably evident both in verse 6 and in verse 14, where He speaks of “the end.”

2) Kik’s interpretation is forced to make two different comings of Christ out of the (identical) mention of His coming (Greek: *parousia*) in verse 27 and in verse 37. In accordance with Kik’s ironclad rule that everything before verse 34 refers only to the destruction of Jerusalem, the “coming of the Son of man” of verse 27 is only the judgment upon Jerusalem in A.D. 70, whereas the “coming of the Son of man” of verse 37 is His second, bodily coming at the end of the world. This is arbitrary, illegitimate exegesis, violating the canon of biblical interpretation that insists that the same word in the same context must mean the same thing, unless something

clearly makes this impossible. Kik's different explanation of "coming" in verse 27 and in verse 37 is especially irresponsible in light of the question of the disciples, "... and what shall be the sign of thy coming...?"

3) Similarly, Kik is forced to explain "angels" in the passage in completely different ways. In verse 31, "angels" have to be preachers of the gospel. But suddenly in verse 36, they are the heavenly spirits. Why? Because to let "angels" be 'angels' in verse 31 would imply that verse 31 is referring to the second coming of Jesus at the end of the world (which it surely is), and this would conflict with Kik's rule that everything preceding verse 34 refers only to the destruction of Jerusalem.

4) Kik's interpretation is demolished by the obvious, incontrovertible references in verses 4-31 to events that take place *after the destruction of Jerusalem*. Such is the reference in verse 14 to the preaching of the gospel "in all the inhabited earth (Greek: *oikoumene*) for a witness to all nations." Such also is the reference in verses 29-31 to the catastrophes in the heavens; the sign of the Son of man; the mourning of all the tribes of the earth; the coming on the clouds of the Son of man, visible to all; and the gathering of the elect from the dead by the angels with the sound of the trumpet. Kik's explanation of these references, indicated earlier, is nothing but allegorizing in order to explain them all away.

5) Kik's interpretation founders on verse 36: "But of that day and hour knoweth no man..." "That day" refers to some "day" that has been the main topic of the entire preceding discourse. This is the "day" of the second, bodily coming of Jesus Christ, as verse 37 makes explicit. Jesus has been setting forth this "day" in verses 4-31, typically in the destruction of Jerusalem and really in His second coming. Kik's thesis, therefore, that Jesus begins to treat His second coming only at verse 36 is shattered by "that day" in verse 36. It is as if Jesus says in verse 36, "That day that you asked about in verse 3 — the day of my second coming at the end of the world, of which the destruction of Jerusalem is a type — and that I have been talking about in verses 4-31 is unknown as regards the exact time of it, except by my Father."

6) The device itself of separating Scripture's treatment of type and reality in a passage by a neat dividing-line, so that everything before the line is type and everything after the line is reality, is artificial. It is wholly foreign to the actual way in which Scripture presents its prophecies, especially its prophecies about the last days. Where in [Psalm 2](#) is the neat dividing-line between David and the Messiah? Where in [Psalm 72](#) is the neat dividing-line between the kingdom of Solomon and the kingdom of Jesus Christ? Where in the book of Revelation is the neat dividing-line between the persecuting Roman empire and the kingdom of the beast, antichrist? Scripture knows of no such neat dividing-lines. It presents its prophecy as one whole, with type and reality interwoven throughout. This is what makes exegesis difficult, as every Reformed minister knows by experience.

The Postmillennial Problem

The interpretation of [Matthew 24:34](#) by Kik and the Christian Reconstructionists is a daring, if desperate, attempt to save the postmillennial scheme of a future, earthly, carnal kingdom.

Against their postmillennial enterprise stands the entire, massive New Testament prophecy for the church of apostasy, persecution, antichrist, and great tribulation. This prophecy of the church's struggle and suffering in the last days originates in Jesus' eschatological discourse in [Matthew 24, 25](#). How to deal with this? This is, indeed, the question for postmillennialism, especially that of the Christian Reconstructionist stripe.

Why, shove it all into the past upon the Jews!

But this demands a new and different interpretation of Matthew 24, an interpretation that delivers the New Testament church from last-days struggle with false doctrine and apostasy and from end-time persecution at the hands of antichrist.

Such an interpretation is provided in the explanation of verse 34 that holds that everything mentioned prior to verse 34 happened exhaustively, exclusively, and in reality in the destruction of Jerusalem.

A stunning coup, if it could be carried off.

It cannot.

In [Matthew 24](#) our Lord Jesus Christ taught His church to expect spiritual struggle and physical persecution to the very end in a world that becomes increasingly evil and hostile.

Just as all the history of the church in the world proves.

Just as we see today with our very own, Scripture-enlightened eyes.

The Kikkian and Christian Reconstructionist interpretation of the chapter is a failure. Worse, it is grievous false doctrine that makes the Lord predict the very opposite for His true church of what He actually did forecast: earthly victory in a carnal kingdom rather than spiritual victory through tribulation.

Since postmillennialism, at least the Christian Reconstructionist brand, by its own admission stands or falls with its interpretation of Matthew 24, postmillennialism is now exposed as erroneous. Those holding this view should repent of it, and abandon it forthwith for amillennialism.

But postmillennialism is fundamental to theonomic Christian Reconstructionism. Gary North is certainly correct when he asserts, "Theonomy without postmillennialism is impotent" ("Foreword," in Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion*, p. xxxvi). Therefore, Christian Reconstructionism hereby fails.

A Practical Issue

The issue is practical.

Christ and the apostles warn the church that she must expect hard struggle in the last days - our days - with heretics, apostasy, antichrist, and the great tribulation.

The church needs this warning.

More often! Louder!

Her salvation is at stake.

This warning, with the encouraging comfort of the true church's preservation and spiritual victory, Reformed amillennialism can and does give.

Only Reformed amillennialism.

[Those Glorious Prospects in Old Testament Prophecy](#)

It is those glorious prospects in Old Testament prophecy that are the real basis in Scripture for the postmillennial dream. The postmillennialists make a half-hearted appeal to [Revelation 20](#) (see the editorial in the *Standard Bearer*, April 15, 1995). They refer to a stray text, here and there, in the New Testament. But their theory of the last things rests, in the end, on Old Testament prophecy, specifically, Old Testament prophecy of the coming, victorious, glorious Messianic kingdom.

Here, in the Old Testament prophecies that hold out grand prospects for the future, is the bulwark of postmillennialism. Messiah's rule over the nations with the iron rod, of [Psalm 2](#); the peaceful kingdom, of [Psalm 72](#); the filling of the earth with the knowledge of Jehovah, of [Isaiah 11](#); the prosperous condition of the saints, of [Isaiah 65](#); and the little stone filling the whole earth, of [Daniel 2](#) — these are the prophecies and these are the passages that ground, and motivate, postmillennialism.

[Avoiding the New Testament Testimony](#)

There is a reason for this. There is a reason why postmillennialism deliberately takes its stand on Old Testament Scripture. The reason is that the New Testament is against their theory of a coming "golden age" for the church before the return of Christ. The massive testimony of the New Testament is that the little flock of Christ will suffer tribulation throughout the present age. At the end, lawlessness will increase in the world, there will be great apostasy in the sphere of the visible church, Antichrist will be revealed, and the saints will endure great persecution ([Luke 12:32](#); [John 15:18ff.](#); [Matt. 24:3-31](#); [II Thess. 2:3ff.](#); [Revelation 17:8](#)).

Herman Bavinck profoundly and powerfully voiced this New Testament witness when he wrote:

Jesus only knows of two aeons: the present and the future aeons. In the present aeon his disciples cannot expect anything other than oppression and persecution and must forsake all things for his sake. Jesus nowhere predicts a glorious future on earth before the end of the world. On the

contrary, the things he experienced are the things his church will experience. A disciple is not above his [teacher](#), nor a slave above the master. Only in the age to come will his disciples receive everything back along with eternal life ([Matt. 19:27-30](#); cf. [Matt. 5:3-12](#); [8:19, 20](#); [10:16-42](#); [16:24-27](#); [John 16:2, 33](#); [17:14, 15](#), etc.)

The whole New Testament, which was written from the viewpoint of the “church under the cross,” speaks the same language. Believers ... should not expect anything on earth other than suffering and oppression ([Rom. 8:36](#); [Phil. 1:29](#)). They are sojourners and foreigners ([Heb. 11:13](#)); their citizenship is in the heavens (Phil. 3:20).... Therefore, along with the entire groaning creation, they wait with eager longing for the future of Christ and for the revelation of the glory of the children of God ([Rom. 8:19](#); [I Cor. 15:48 f.](#)), a glory with which the sufferings of the present time are not worth comparing ([Rom. 8:18](#); [2 Cor. 4:17](#)). Nowhere in the New Testament is there a ray of hope that the church of Christ will again come to power and dominion on earth. The most it may look for is that, under kings and all who are in high positions, it may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity ([Rom. 13:1](#); [I Tim. 2:2](#)). Therefore, the New Testament does not first of all recommend the virtues that enable believers to conquer the world but, while it bids them avoid all false asceticism ([Rom. 14:14](#); [I Tim. 4:4, 5](#); [Titus 1:15](#)), lists as fruits of the Spirit the virtues of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control ([Gal. 5:22](#); [Eph. 4:32](#); [I Thess. 5:14 f.](#); [I Peter 3:8 f.](#); [2 Peter 1:5-7](#); [I John 2:15](#), etc.).

It is a constant New Testament expectation that to the extent to which the gospel of the cross is spread abroad, to that extent the hostility of the world will be manifested as well.... In the last days, the days that precede the return of Christ, the wickedness of human beings will rise to a fearful level. The days of Noah will return. Lust, sensual pleasures, lawlessness, greed, unbelief, pride, mockery, and slander will erupt in fearful ways ([Matt. 24:37 f.](#); [Luke 17:26 f.](#); [2 Tim. 3:1](#); [2 Peter 3:3](#); [Jude 18](#)). Among believers as well there will be extensive apostasy. Temptations will be so powerful that, were it possible, even the elect would be caused to fall. The love of many will grow cold and vigilance diminish to the extent that the wise will fall asleep along with the foolish virgins. Apostasy will be so general that Jesus can ask whether at his coming the Son of man will still find faith on earth ([Matt. 24:24, 44 f.](#); [25:1 f.](#); [Luke 18:8](#); [I Tim. 4:1](#)) (*The Last Things: Hope for This World and the Next*, Baker, 1996, pp. 109, 110).

Ominous Concentration on the Old Testament

Postmillennialism, therefore, is forced back upon the Old Testament. This bypassing of the New Testament in order to rely on the Old Testament is both erroneous and ominous. The reason is not that the Old is not inspired and authoritative, or that the Old is less inspired and authoritative than the New. But the reason is that the New Testament is the fulfillment of the Old Testament. As the fulfillment particularly of the eschatology of the Old Testament, the New Testament both clarifies and authoritatively explains the Old Testament prophecies of the last things.

A sound interpreter reads the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament. He does not force his understanding of the Old Testament upon New Testament doctrine.

The renowned Old Testament scholar O. T. Allis called attention to the error of ignoring the eschatology of the New Testament, while concentrating on that of the Old Testament, in his classic refutation of dispensational premillennialism (the “rapture theory”). He noted “the tendency to exalt the Old Testament at the expense of the New Testament, to insist that its (the Old Testament’s) predictions stand, we may say, in their own right, and are in no sense dependent upon the New Testament for amplification, illumination, or interpretation.” On the contrary, wrote Allis:

The doctrine of the Christian Church, as generally accepted, has always been that the New Testament takes precedence over the Old, that Christ and His apostles are the authoritative interpreters of the Old Testament, that its types and shadows are to be interpreted in the light of the clearer gospel revelation. As Augustine expressed it so aptly: “In the Old Testament the New is concealed (*latet*); in the New Testament the Old is revealed (*patet*).” This does not mean that the New Testament conflicts with the Old Testament, but rather that it explains it and that its explanation is to be accepted as authoritative (*Prophecy and the Church*, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1964, pp. 48, 49).

Bavinck made the same telling point against the chiliasts, or millennialists. Bavinck observed that this teaching of a future, earthly kingdom of God “loves to appeal” to the court of Old Testament prophecy. With specific reference to the millennial insistence on interpreting this Old Testament prophecy literally, disregarding the teaching of the New Testament, Bavinck stated:

... what the Spirit of Christ who was in them (the Old Testament prophets - DJE) wished to declare and reveal by them ... is decided by the New Testament, which is the completion, fulfillment, and therefore interpretation of the Old.... The New Testament views itself - and there can certainly be no doubt about this - as the spiritual and therefore complete and authentic fulfillment of the Old Testament.... The New Testament is the truth, the essence, the core, and the actual content of the Old Testament (*The Last Things*, pp. 91-98).

What is ominous is that in basing its doctrine of the end on Old Testament prophecy, rather than on New Testament clarification and interpretation of Old Testament prophecy, postmillennialism, which claims to be Reformed, lines up with anti-Reformed dispensationalism.

The All-Important Kingdom Prophecies

That Old Testament prophecy is, in fact, the real biblical basis of postmillennialism is evident from such a representative and influential book as Loraine Boettner’s *The Millennium* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1958). The texts put forward in support of postmillennialism are largely drawn from the Old Testament, e.g., among others, [Psalm 97](#); [Zechariah 9:10](#); [Psalm 2](#); [Psalm 72](#); [Isaiah 2](#); and [Daniel 2](#). The only New Testament passage referred to that conceivably bears on the issue is [Matthew 13:33](#), the parable of the leaven (see pages 22-29).

The main objection raised by Boettner against amillennialism is the kingdom prophecies in the Old Testament:

We understand the Bible to teach very definitely that the world is to be converted to Christianity before Christ returns, and that the amillennial position, which makes no provision for a Christianized world, leaves a whole continent of prophecies unexplained, many of which then become quite meaningless. The kingdom prophecies of the Old Testament, as well as various statements in the Psalms and in the New Testament, often in highly figurative language, surely foretell a future golden age of some kind.

Boettner added a significant, self-incriminating statement: “We are bound to say that in this regard we agree with the Premillennialists, as against the Amillennialists.” I intend to come back to this suspicious agreement of postmillennialism and premillennialism in a future article.

The kingdom prophecies that Boettner mentioned are [Isaiah 2:2-4](#); [Micah 4:1-5](#); [Isaiah 11:1-10](#); [Isaiah 42:1-4](#); [Isaiah 65:17-25](#); [Jeremiah 31:31-34](#); [Joel 2:28](#); [Malachi 1:11](#); and [Psalm 72](#) (see pp. 119-124).

A Crucial Text

We may take [Isaiah 65:17-25](#) as representative of all the Old Testament prophecies upon which postmillennialism pins its hope. This is the passage that begins with Jehovah God’s promise that He creates “new heavens and a new earth” (v. 17). Verse 20 declares that in this new world “there shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed.” Verses 21-23 prophesy a peaceful, prosperous, profitable life for the elect and their offspring. The passage ends by extending the peace of the new creation to the animal world: “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock...”

I choose this passage deliberately. The postmillennialists themselves appeal to this passage as the strongest support of their doctrine of a coming golden age and as the clearest refutation of amillennialism. Their argument is that the passage predicts a renewed creation in which there will yet be both death and sinners. In the world of new heavens and a new earth, a child will die at 100 and sinners will be accursed. This cannot be the case in the new creation after Jesus’ return, but this will be true in the golden age of postmillennialism.

Postmillennialist, Christian Reconstructionist Gary North assures his readers that “this detailed and obviously literal prophecy, above all other passages in the Bible, poses the greatest problems for amillennialists, who deny the coming of any period of literal worldwide blessings” (*Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, Institute for Christian Economics, 1988, p. 145).

Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr. calls [Isaiah 65](#) “the major passage setting forth the spiritual conception of the change wrought by Christ in history.” The unwary reader must not be deceived by the words, “spiritual conception.” Gentry does not have in mind spiritual blessings such as the forgiveness of sins. Gentry understands Isaiah 65 to be promising “a period of unprecedented, literal (read: physical, carnal - DJE) blessings ... for mankind prior to the resurrection.” With a curious disregard for the eschatological lineup that he is suggesting, Gentry says that Isaiah 65 “poses no problem for the postmillennialist, nor ... for the premillennialist.” Both of them expect, and

desire, a carnal kingdom in history, stuffed with material goodies. But the passage is, however, a decided problem for the amillennialist. It is perhaps the greatest single exegetical problem facing amillennialism, which is why amillennialists rarely comment on the passage, and when they do, they do not make a great deal of sense (*He Shall Have Dominion: A Post-millennial Eschatology*, Institute for Christian Economics, 1992, pp. 360-365).

The Postmillennial Interpretation of Isaiah 65

The postmillennial interpretation of the passage is that Christ will triumph in history in such a way that the saints will enjoy earthly peace, earthly prosperity, and very long earthly life. Somehow, there will even be a kind of “transformation” of nature. But this will take place before the second coming of Christ, since, according to verse 20, children shall die and sinners shall be accursed.

Listen, critically, to Dr. North:

This process of cosmic transformation will accelerate in response to the spread of the gospel. Man’s genetic code will eventually be healed, so that there will be no more miscarriages; this same promise applies even to his domesticated animals ([Exodus 23:26](#)). Sickness will be removed ([Exodus 23:25](#)). These blessings were available to the Israelites, but they failed to obey God’s law. These blessings are still available to us. Isaiah promised that man’s life expectancy will someday increase: “There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed” ([Isaiah 65:20](#)). Time’s threat will therefore be reduced. This future era will represent a return to the lifespans of men before the great flood. So great will be the visible and biological blessings of God that it will be a fundamental transformation of the way our world presently works. And it will come specifically in response to the ethical transformation of the great portion of mankind: “And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear” (v. 24).

Notice that Isaiah was not speaking about the world beyond the grave and after the final judgment, for sinners will still be operating in the future period of history described by the prophet. He was speaking about a period of time called the *new heavens and new earth*: “For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth” (v. 17a). Obviously, this cannot possibly refer to a period beyond the final resurrection, for there will be no sinners among us then. They will all be in the lake of fire, along with Satan and his angelic host ([Revelation 20:14-15](#)). Therefore, *the new heavens and new earth must begin before Christ comes again in final judgment.* (*Unconditional Surrender*, pp. 143-145).

A Spiritual Interpretation of Isaiah 65:17ff

Postmillennialism — the teaching about the last things that posits the earthly victory of the church and a coming “golden age” in history — rests its case, finally, on Old Testament prophecy.

Emphatically not on New Testament doctrine about the days leading up to the coming of Christ.

Old Testament prophecy forecasts glorious prospects for Judah and Jerusalem.

One such passage is [Isaiah 65:17-25](#). Jehovah creates new heavens and a new earth (v.17). In this new world, Jerusalem will be a rejoicing and the citizens of Jerusalem, a joy (v.18). None will die young, and old sinners will be accursed (v. 20). The people of Jerusalem will live productive, profitable, peaceful lives, free from disappointment, opposition, and trouble. They will build houses and live in them; they will plant vineyards and eat of them; theirs will be lives without weeping (vv. 19-23). Such will be the bliss of this new world that even the animals will be at peace: “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together” (v.25).

According to postmillennialist, Christian Reconstructionist Gary North, this proves that, when the church aggressively works at dominating nations and culture, there will be a long period of earthly victory, earthly prosperity, and earthly peace for the saints before the second coming of Christ. This will be the Messianic kingdom of Jesus in its [full](#), final glory.

The passage in [Isaiah 65](#) prophesies of a coming era on earth and before the final judgment (since sinners will still be active) in which there will be great external blessings, including very long life spans (“Foreword,” in Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion*, Institute for Christian Economics, 1992, p. xxvii; see the longer explanation of the passage by North quoted in the August, 1996 issue of the *Standard Bearer*, pp. 439, 440).

To the postmillennialist, the Isaiah 65 passage is not only one of many Old Testament prophecies that predict a glorious future of earthly power and peace for the church in history, but it is also the passage that clinches the postmillennial position against amillennialism. It is “the one passage *more than any other passage in the Bible*, that categorically refutes amillennialism” (North, *He Shall Have Dominion*, p. xxviii - the emphasis is North’s).

The Error of a Literal Interpretation of Prophecy

The postmillennial interpretation of the passage is erroneous. The error is obvious and grievous. It is the error of interpreting Old Testament prophecy in a literal way, so that the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy is earthly, rather than spiritual.

North freely acknowledges that his interpretation of the passage is literal. Indeed, he boasts of this as though it were a virtue, railing against the spiritual interpretation of amillennialism as a fault.

A postmillennialist can interpret this passage literally: a coming era of extensive millennial blessings *before* Jesus returns in final judgment. So can a premillennialist.... But the amillennialist cannot admit the possibility of such an era of literal, culture-wide blessings in history. His eschatology denies any literal, culture-wide triumph of Christianity in history. Therefore, he has to “spiritualize” or allegorize this passage (*He Shall Have Dominion*, p. xxviii).

Equating the spiritual interpretation of Old Testament prophecy with allegorizing is either ignorance or malice. Both are inexcusable in one who claims to be a Reformed defender of the faith.

But our interest is drawn to this postmillennialist's startling admission of a literal interpretation of Old Testament prophecy.

Does he not know that in this insistence upon a literal interpretation of Old Testament prophecy the postmillennial Christian Reconstructionists break with the entire Reformed tradition? Commenting on the very passage under discussion, [Isaiah 65:17ff.](#), John Calvin wrote:

Now the Prophets hold out those things which relate to the present life, and borrow metaphors from them; but it is in order that they may teach us to rise higher and to embrace eternal and blessed life. We must not fix our whole attention on these transitory blessings, but must make use of them as ladders, that, being raised to heaven, we may enjoy eternal and immortal blessings (*Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, vol. 4, Eerdmans, 1956, p. 401).

Expressing, not a Dutch Reformed idiosyncrasy but the Protestant consensus, the great Dutch Reformed theologian Herman Bavinck wrote:

And this kingdom (of Messiah -DJE) is sketched by the prophets in hues and colors, under figures and forms, which have all been derived from the historical circumstances in which they lived.... But into those sensuous earthly forms prophecy puts everlasting content.... Prophecy pictures for us but one single image of the future. And this image is either to be taken literally as it presents itself but then one breaks with Christianity and lapses back into Judaism or this image calls for a very different interpretation than that attempted by chiliasm (millennialism DJE).

This “very different,” and correct, interpretation of Old Testament prophecy is, Bavinck continued, “symbolic” and “spiritual” (*The Last Things*, Baker, 1996, pp.90-98).

Does Gary North not know that this issue of the literal or spiritual interpretation of Old Testament prophecy is the basic issue between dispensational premillennialism (the “rapture theory”), which is the enemy of the Reformed faith, and Reformed covenantal theology?

Does not this postmillennial Christian Reconstructionist see that the Spirit of Christ speaking in New Testament Scripture gives a symbolic, spiritual interpretation of Old Testament prophecy? The raising up of the tabernacle of David is not fulfilled in the restoration of the earthly dominion wielded by David's royal line, but in the spiritual salvation of the Gentiles (cp. [Amos 9:11](#) with [Acts 15:16-19](#)).

God's calling them “my people” which were not His people does not refer to earthly Israel, as the literalist must hold, but to the spiritual church of Jew and Gentile (cp. [Hosea 1, 2](#) with [Rom. 9:24-26](#)).

Ezekiel's new temple is not a physical building that will yet be erected on a mound of dirt in the earthly city of Jerusalem, but the spiritual body of Jesus Christ (cp. [Ezek. 40-48](#) with [John 2:18-22](#) and [I Pet. 2:1-10](#)).

The irenic Bavinck was not too severe when he said that to interpret the prophecy of the Old Testament literally means that one "breaks with Christianity and lapses back into Judaism."

Christian Reconstructionism with its avowed literalist interpretation of Old Testament prophecy, its binding of all the civil laws that regulated national Israel upon New Testament Christians (if not today, then in the coming millennium), and its willingness to impose such ceremonies as the dietary laws of the Jews and the garb of the Jewish priests upon the church of the new dispensation has already succumbed to this mortal peril.

But postmillennialism generally flirts with this horrendous heresy by its identification of the Messianic kingdom with an earthly kingdom of physical dominion, material prosperity, and worldly peace. This was, and is, the hope of the Jews (see [John 6](#)). The cause is a literal interpretation of Old Testament prophecy.

The Impossibility of a Literal Interpretation

Whatever [Isaiah 65:17ff.](#) may mean, it is not a prophecy of the improvement of the present form of creation; of material houses, fields, and work; of physical life extended to hundreds of years; and of the avoidance of mundane troubles.

The fulfillment of Isaiah 65:17ff. is not earthly.

The prophecy may not be interpreted literally. The New Testament teaching that all prophecy is fulfilled spiritually in Jesus Christ, His gospel, and His church forbids it.

It *cannot* be interpreted literally. Gary North cannot interpret the prophecy literally. To interpret the prophecy literally would mean that literal, earthly, Old Testament Jerusalem and its people, the Jews, will be the main delight of Jehovah God in the coming Messianic kingdom (v.18).

Interpreted literally, the passage teaches that nowhere will anyone cry during the "golden age": not the mother in childbirth, not the child who gets a spanking, not a penitent sinner over his sins, not a mourner at the deathbed of a loved one. For "the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying" (v. 19).

Also, a literal interpretation demands that prior to the second coming of Christ, before the radical renewal of all things, the fierce wolf will be friendly with the domestic lamb and that the carnivorous lion will eat straw (v. 25). Now the Christian Reconstructionists are jolly optimists, as they never tire of telling us. But does even the most optimistic of them really expect this radical change in the animal world before the coming of Christ? Will frogs no longer eat bugs? Will spiders no longer catch flies? Since lambs will be safe from wolves, and bullocks from lions, will lambs and bullocks also be safe from the saints? Must we all become vegetarians in the millennium? But this is demanded by a literal interpretation.

North, Gentry, and their cohorts cannot even explain the glorious opening words of this important prophecy literally: “I create new heavens and a new earth” (v. 17). A literal interpretation does not vaguely and lamely speak of a “fundamental transformation of the way our world presently works,” as North does in the quotation given in the August, 1996 issue of the *SB*.

Isaiah did not prophesy a “fundamental transformation of the way our world presently works.” He prophesied a *new world*. Such will be its newness, said the prophet, that it will be radically different from the present world. It will be a new world in distinction from “the former” world.

Nor will this new world come about by gradual “transformation,” much less transformation “in response to the ethical transformation of the great portion of mankind,” as North explains. In plain language, the new world of [Isaiah 65](#) will not come into being by the efforts of the church to dominate culture and as the effect in history of men’s obedience to the law.

But Jehovah God will “create” the coming new world. The word in Hebrew is *bara*, the word that describes the exclusively divine action of calling into existence the things that are not as though they were. By a wonder of divine power, wisdom, and goodness, comparable to and outstripping the wonder of the original creation of the heavens and the earth, a new world will replace the old one. This wonder will be an act of sheer grace, not something that the saints have deserved by keeping the law.

North’s interpretation does not do justice to the plain sense of the main thought of this important prophecy, much less explain it literally.

[Isaiah 65:17ff.](#) is not about the present world, Jerusalem, Jews, long and trouble-free earthly lives, nice houses, good farms, plenty of money, ease, happy times, and tame wolves.

It is about Jesus Christ, His church, salvation, eternal life, and a new, different world.

It is about a *spiritual* Christ, a *spiritual* people, *spiritual* salvation, *spiritual* blessings, *spiritual* life, and a *spiritual* world.

If the prophecy is not about this, the Jews can have it.

A Christian is not interested.

[A Spiritual Fulfillment of Isaiah 65:17ff](#)

The literal interpretation of Old Testament prophecy ends in a carnal Messianic kingdom.

The literal interpretation of the prophecy of [Isaiah 65:17ff.](#), advocated by postmillennialist Christian Reconstructionism, ends in an earthly kingdom of Christ.

Besides, a consistently literal interpretation leads to absurdity. Not even the most ardent advocate and practitioner of a literal interpretation of Isaiah 65:17ff. can carry it off, as was demonstrated in the previous editorial

But Old Testament prophecy of the coming Messianic kingdom may not be interpreted literally. To do so is, at best, to become a dispensational premillennialist, turning eschatology into the restoration of Old Testament Israel and its earthly glories, and, at worst, as Herman Bavinck warned us, to lapse into Judaism.

The New Testament instructs us to interpret Old Testament prophecy spiritually. In the earthly figures familiar to the prophets and their hearers, the Holy Spirit of Christ foretold the spiritual glories of Jesus Christ, His church, and His new creation. Those earthly features of the prophecy — houses, fruitful vineyards, [successful](#) labor, trouble-free days, no crying, long earthly life, Jerusalem — are not the reality of the prophecy.

They never were the reality of the prophecy.

They were not the reality of the prophecy for the spiritual Israelite at that time. He or she saw through them and beyond them to better and higher prospects: the things that eye has not seen, that ear has not heard, and that never entered into the heart of man to imagine, the things that God has prepared for them that love him ([I Cor. 2:9](#)).

Must it be spelled out? Houses, fruitful vineyards, successful labor, trouble-free days, no crying, long earthly life, and Jerusalem are all things that eyes have seen, ears have heard, and have entered into the heart of man to imagine. These are not the things, therefore, that God prepared for the spiritual Israelites who loved Him.

Those earthly trivia, once used to represent the heavenly kingdom and life, certainly are not the reality of Old Testament prophecy for us New Testament believers who have already begun to experience the life, riches, and glory of the risen Christ by the gift and indwelling of the Spirit of Pentecost.

I do not think that the postmillennial Christian Reconstructionists really appreciate the absolute disinterest with which the Reformed amillennialist regards the splendid earthly kingdom of postmillennialism.

Suppose for a moment that the Christian Reconstructionists by their constant badgering of the churches and by their own heroic efforts, in alliance with the charismatics, bring about their dream. The whole world, including every nation, is governed by Christians and fulfills the fondest expectations of Kik, Boettner, Rushdoony, North, Chilton, Gentry, and the others.

We Reformed amillennialists will not be jumping for joy. Why should we? There will be death in that world. Sooner or later, we will still have to feel the bitter pang of separation from a beloved wife, child, parent, and friend. What difference does it make that we go through this grief after 500 years rather than after 50 years? Indeed, the grief after 500 years of love must be worse than the grief after 50.

There will be sin in the postmillennial kingdom. Every day we will know our misery of guilt and shame, the worst misery of all. Every day anew we will have to battle indwelling sin, which wrenches from us the groan, “O, wretched man that I am.” What difference does it make that Gary North sits on the throne of the world and that Kenneth Gentry, Jr., is in charge of radio, television, movies, and the internet worldwide?

There will be hordes of ungodly in this postmillennial kingdom, on the admission of even the most optimistic postmillennialists themselves. They will hide it. Outwardly, they will conform to the law of God, particularly the civil regulations of the Old Testament Bible, either out of selfish desire to enjoy the material prosperity or out of fear of Christian Reconstructionist vengeance. But in their hearts they will hate God. They will be rebels inwardly against the Christ. At the end of the millennium they will rise against the Lord ([Rev. 20:7-9](#)).

This will grieve the Reformed amillennialist. If there were but one enemy of Christ in the kingdom, this would grieve him. For there would be in the Messianic kingdom a despising of God’s commandments, at the very least in the hearts and minds of the ungodly. And, as the Psalter puts it, “because Thy statutes are despised, with overwhelming grief I weep.”

There will be no vision of God in the face of Jesus Christ in this kingdom of postmillennialism. Still only in a glass darkly.

For these reasons alone, we Reformed amillennialists would not be enthusiastic over Christian Reconstructionism’s kingdom. Indeed, we would be groaning, as we do today, waiting for the redemption of our body ([Rom. 8:23](#)). We would be crying night and day for divine vengeance on Christ’s and our enemies ([Luke 18:1-8](#)). We would be praying fervently, “Lord, put an end to this postmillennial business as soon as possible, and come quickly.”

What is even more distressing for the Reformed amillennial believer is that this postmillennial kingdom is supposed to be the culmination and final form of the Messianic kingdom. According to the postmillennialists generally and the Christian Reconstructionists in particular, with the ending of the millennium the kingdom of Christ comes to an end. The eternity that follows will not be the Messianic kingdom, but only the bare kingdom of God.

As regards the kingdom of Jesus Christ, that’s it!

That earthly reign by means of the church, filled with sin, death, and unregenerate reprobates who hate and curse Christ morning, noon, and night, is the climax and conclusion of Christ’s kingdom.

Behold ... a dismal flop!

If that is the Messianic kingdom at its very highest and greatest, Christ is destined to be displayed publicly as a royal failure.

The Christian Reconstructionists never tire of railing upon Reformed amillennialists as defeatists. They do not hesitate to accuse the church in history of being responsible for the failure of their millennial kingdom yet to appear.

Talk about defeat!

Is their earthly kingdom with its sin, death, and sinners the best that Christ can do as king?

That Christ is a sorry failure.

I do not believe it for a moment. The Reformed amillennialist recoils from the very notion as blasphemy.

The postmillennial dream is not the Messianic kingdom, much less the apex and end of it.

Nor is this the prophecy of Isaiah 65: 17ff.

As we shall see.

[A Spiritual Fulfillment of Isaiah 65:17ff \(Concluded\)](#)

The postmillennial dream of a “Christianized” world in history rests finally on Old Testament prophecy of a coming, glorious kingdom of Christ (see the editorial, “Those Glorious Prospects in Old Testament Prophecy,” in the Aug. 1, 1996 *Standard Bearer*).

That Old Testament prophecy which more than any other is supposed to prove postmillennialism and refute amillennialism is [Isaiah 65:17ff.](#):

For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth ... I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy.... There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed.... The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock... They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the Lord.

Postmillennialism, which can find no support in the New Testament’s massive teaching of apostasy from and persecution of the church in the last days, appeals to Old Testament prophecy inasmuch as postmillennialism insists on interpreting this prophecy literally. On a literal interpretation of [Isaiah 65:17ff.](#), there will be an earthly fulfillment of the prophecy: an earthly kingdom of Christ with carnal delights, especially long physical life (see the editorial, “A Spiritual Interpretation of Isaiah 65:17ff.,” in the Sept. 15, 1996 *SB*; for the postmillennial interpretation of the Isaiah passage, see the editorial in the Aug. 1, 1996 *SB*, pp. 439, 440).

In the editorials in the September 15 and October 1, 1996 issues of the *SB*, I demonstrated that there neither *may* nor *can* be a literal interpretation of Isaiah 65:17ff. The prophecy must be interpreted spiritually and has, accordingly, a spiritual fulfillment.

What now is the spiritual interpretation and fulfillment of Isaiah 65:17ff.?

Comprehensively, Isaiah 65:17-25 prophesies the entire saving work of God in Jesus Christ. As is customary with the prophets, Isaiah sees this work as one, great [event](#), much as one sees the distant mountains as one, great range. Included are both the perfection of salvation (and of the Messianic kingdom) in the Day of Christ and the beginning of salvation (and of the Messianic kingdom) throughout the present age between Pentecost and the Day of Christ. All of this salvation, of course, has its basis in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for God's elect world.

That this is, in fact, the content of Isaiah's prophecy is proved from New Testament comment on the passage. In [II Peter 3:13](#), the apostle applies the prophecy of [Isaiah 65:17](#) to God's work in Jesus Christ on the day of Christ's second coming. In the context of the teaching that the present creation will be destroyed by fire, Peter says, "Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."

The apostle Paul, however, instructs us that there is also a fulfillment of the prophecy throughout the present age. In [II Corinthians 5:17](#), he tells us that "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

The authoritative New Testament explanation of the prophecy is that God's saving work in Christ will be a renewal of the creation for the benefit of the church, the "elect" of [Isaiah 65:22](#), at the second coming of Jesus, which renewal begins already now in the regeneration of each elect personally.

There is nothing in the New Testament reflection on the prophecy that so much as hints at an earthly kingdom in history consisting of carnal benefits, physical dominion, and worldly peace.

Specifically, Isaiah 65:17ff. is the prophecy of the new world of heavens and earth that Jesus Christ will create at His second coming. This is the plain teaching of Isaiah 65:17ff. itself: "I create new heavens and a new earth." This is the New Testament explanation both in [II Peter 3:13](#), already quoted, and in [Revelation 21:1](#): "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea."

When He comes again in the body, at the end of history, Jesus Christ will destroy the present form of the creation in order to re-create the heavens and earth that God made in the beginning in their new, glorious, final form. The creation will share in the glorious liberty of the children of God ([Rom. 8:19-22](#)).

This new world will be the dwellingplace the home — of the new human race in Christ, the elect church from all nations, believers and their children (Is. 65:22, 23). The new creation will be home to the saints because Jehovah God will live with them there in Jesus Christ in the fellowship of the everlasting covenant. The new world that is coming will be "my holy mountain" (Is. 65:25).

There will be no trouble and no sorrow there, absolutely none — not one tear (Is. 65:19). [Revelation 21:4](#), the New Testament light on the prophecy, informs us that the reason is that there will be no death in the new world. Christ, mighty Messianic king, will have destroyed the last enemy for us ([II Cor. 15:26](#)).

As is typical of Old Testament prophecy, the prophet announced this coming deathless world in figurative language: long, earthly life (v.20). No baby will die in infancy; to die at 100 years of age would be accounted mere childhood; all the inhabitants will fill their days. The reality is: no death! everlasting life in resurrected soul and body, because the life of the people of God in the new world will be the immortal life of the risen Christ.

The New Testament gives this explanation of this and similar, figurative Old Testament prophecies everywhere, e.g., [John 5:25](#), 26. [Revelation 21:4](#), the authoritative New Testament interpretation of [Isaiah 65:20](#), puts beyond any doubt that this is what Isaiah meant: “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; *and there shall be no more death.*”

Cursed sinners will be excluded from the new world, existing everlastingly under God’s curse in hell ([Is. 65:20b](#); cf. [Rev. 21:8](#)).

The lifting of the curse from God’s beloved world on the basis of Christ’s redeeming death and by the power of His renewing Spirit will extend to the animals. There will be animals in the new creation, just as there were animals in the original creation of Genesis 1 and 2. Christ’s redemption will be enjoyed by them, so that they will live in peace with each other as they did in the original phase of creation before the transgression of the first and unfaithful king ([Gen. 1:29-31](#)). There will be no death in the world of animal and plant.

The complete absence of death in the new world will be due to the perfect purging of sin from the creation. Peter tells us this “...wherein dwelleth righteousness” ([II Pet. 3:13](#)). Only righteousness will dwell there. No unrighteousness whatever will be found there. All ungodly men will have perished under the judgment of God (v.7).

Is this not a wonderful salvation?

Do not believers and their offspring have a grand hope, abundantly able to sustain them in all their present tribulations?

Is not the everlasting kingship and kingdom of Jesus the Messiah glorious?

Will not His victory be manifested as incomparable? All foes destroyed, even death. All God’s people perfectly delivered from sorrow and death unto the bliss of fellowship with the triune God in His Face, Jesus the Christ. The creation itself transformed into a new world, whose goodness and splendor cause the old form of the world to fade forever into forgottenness.

All this fulfillment of Isaiah 65:17ff. will be spiritual. The prophecy holds before us, as it held before the true Israelite in Isaiah’s day, a spiritual salvation; spiritual blessings; spiritual life;

and, indeed, a spiritual world. For the last Adam is spiritual, and we expect to live a spiritual life in our spiritual body in a spiritual creation ([I Cor. 15:42ff.](#)).

The second specific fulfillment of Isaiah 65:17ff. is the spiritual life in Christ by faith of every regenerated child of God in the time between Pentecost and the second coming. This is the authoritative explanation of the Isaiah prophecy by the apostle in [II Corinthians 5:17](#): “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.” He is a new creature already, in fulfillment of the prophecy of [Isaiah 65:17](#).

The new world that is coming in the Day of Christ already breaks into the present world by the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit of Christ. It breaks into the heart of every elect child of God. It makes him a new creature. There is in his life a beginning of the deliverance from sin, sorrow, and death; of the joy; of the profitable, holy work; of the fellowship with God; of the everlasting life, of Isaiah 65:17ff. This shows itself in his confession and behavior. It brings down upon him the persecution of those who hate the Messiah and oppose His reign, the enemies of the new world.

This powerful beginning of the new world in the life of the Christian here and now does not, however, gradually bring about the culmination of the kingdom of Christ in creation. Regenerated saints do not realize postmillennialism’s “golden age.”

As our present, earthly body becomes the future, spiritual body by the wonder of resurrection in the Day of Christ, so also does the present, pitiful, earthly creation become the future, glorious, spiritual creation by the wonder of recreation in the Day of Christ.

“Behold,” says Jehovah by the prophet, “I create new heavens and a new earth.”

Man cannot accomplish it.

Redeemed man cannot accomplish it.

Not even the postmillennialist.

The Victory of Christ in History

Jesus Christ is victor.

He is victor already now. He is victor in this world.

We do not see this yet. But we believe it as the clear testimony of the Bible.

In His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, He has become the Lord. He sits now at God’s right hand. He wields the power of providence, upholding and governing all things ([Eph. 1:19-23](#); [Heb. 1:3](#); [Rev. 5](#)).

Jesus Christ is victor as Mediator of the covenant and Head of the church. By His atoning death and bodily resurrection, He has conquered sin, Satan, death, and the ungodly world and has become the sovereign, almighty, life-giving Lord on behalf of His church.

He is victor, not only personally on high in heaven but also as He is present in His church down here in the world by His Spirit and Word.

His gospel goes out into all the world with conquering power ([Rev. 6:1,2](#)).

His church on earth is a victorious institution. She is indestructible. She cannot be defeated by her foes. "I will build my church," said the Christ, the Son of the living God, "and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" ([Matt. 16:18](#)).

She accomplishes her ecclesiastical calling and labor with unique, awesome power, and without fail. "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" ([Matt. 16:19](#)).

The church of Christ has been victorious in history, as regards her mature, New Testament form, since the day of Pentecost.

Not only is the church victorious but also each member of the church is victorious by the indwelling, empowering Christ. Here and now. Indeed, he is not merely a conqueror. He is more than a conqueror ([Rom. 8:37](#)). His many enemies are made in the end to work his good. The assurance of this is the strength and zeal of the Christian life.

Jesus Christ is victor in history.

His body and its members share in this victory.

This is what the church is celebrating when she confesses, "Jesus Christ our Lord."

The victory of Jesus Christ in history is the main concern of postmillennialism, especially the Christian Reconstructionist form of postmillennialism. Its dream of the future conversion of a majority of mankind, the "Christianizing" of the world, the dominion over the nations by the church, and a "golden age of peace and prosperity", before the [return](#) of Christ, represents the victory of Christ in history. Postmillennialism is optimistic about the future of history. It is an "eschatology of victory."

Amillennialism's sober forecast of increasing lawlessness, great apostasy, and persecution of the church by Antichrist is judged to be a denial of the victory of King Jesus in history. Reformed amillennialism is scorned as defeatist and pessimistic.

Christian Reconstructionist postmillennialist Greg L. Bahnsen saw the victory of Jesus in history as the main issue between postmillennialism and amillennialism:

What is really at stake is the question of the *future prospects on earth* for the *already established* kingdom. Shall it, prior to Christ's return, bring all nations under its sway, thereby generating a period of spiritual blessing, international peace, and visible prosperity? Shall the church, which has been promised the continual presence of Him who has been given all power in heaven and earth, be successful in making disciples of all nations as He commanded? On this basic and substantive issue — one which succeeds in separating out the three millennial schools — it becomes apparent that the *essential distinctive* of postmillennialism is its scripturally derived, sure expectation of gospel prosperity for the church during the *present age*.

. . . In short, postmillennialism is set apart from the other two schools of thought by its essential *optimism* for the kingdom in the *present age*. This confident attitude in the power of Christ's kingdom, the power of its gospel, the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit, the power of prayer, and the progress of the great commission, sets postmillennialism apart from the essential pessimism of amillennialism and premillennialism.... In the final analysis, what is characteristic of postmillennialism is not a uniform answer to any one particular exegetical question but rather a commitment to the gospel as the power of God which, in the agency of the Holy Spirit, shall convert the vast majority of the world to Christ and bring widespread obedience to His kingdom rule ("The *Prima Facie* Acceptability of Postmillennialism," *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction: Symposium on the Millennium* 3, no. 2, Winter, 1976-77, pp.66-68; the emphasis is Bahnsen's).

Gary North sprinkles the charge that Reformed amillennialism is "defeatist" liberally throughout his writings. He misses few opportunities to jeer at Reformed amillennialists as "pessimillennialists." The amillennial doctrine of the last things, says North, makes "God ... a loser in history (*Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, Institute for Christian Economics, 1988, p.167). This is a damning indictment of a doctrine.

Nor is it only the Christian Reconstructionists who present the controversy between amillennialism and postmillennialism as centering on the victory of Christ in history. The Presbyterian J. Marcellus Kik did the same. The coming "glorious age of the church upon earth" in which "all nations (become) Christian and (live) in peace," he called "the triumph of Christianity throughout the earth." He accused amillennialists of being "pessimists and defeatists":

To say that the defeat of Satan will only come through a cataclysmic act at the second coming of Christ is ridiculous in the light of these passages. To think that the church must grow weaker and weaker and the kingdom of Satan stronger and stronger is to deny that Christ came to destroy the works of the devil; it is to dishonor Christ; it is to disbelieve His Word. We do not glorify God nor His prophetic word by being pessimists and defeatists. With sufficient faith in Christ we could crush Satan under our feet shortly. Or else these passages have no significance to the church of Christ (*An Eschatology of Victory*, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971, pp. 4, 19, 20).

The dubious honor, however, of the fiercest, and most wicked, attack on amillennialism belongs to the father of Christian Reconstructionism, Rousas J. Rushdoony. Lumping amillennialism with premillennialism (and we will see about this in a forthcoming article), Rushdoony has dared to write:

Amillennialism ... (is) in retreat from the world and blasphemously surrender(s) it to the devil. By its very premise that the world will only get worse ... it cuts the nerve of Christian action.... If we hold that the world can only get worse ... what impetus is left for applying the word of God to the problems of this world? The result is an inevitable one: amillennial believers who profess faith in the whole word of God ... are also the most impotent segment of American society, with the least impact on American life. To turn the world-conquering word of the sovereign, omnipotent, and triune God into a symbol of impotence is not a mark of faith. It is blasphemy ("Postmillennialism versus Impotent Religion," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, pp. 126, 127).

According to Rushdoony and his disciples, amillennialism denies the victory of Christ in history. Thus, it makes God and His Word impotent. To make God impotent is blasphemous. Amillennialism, therefore, is blasphemy.

In light of these savage assaults upon amillennialism and us amillennialists, it is surprising that some postmillennialists have objected to my tempered criticism of Christian Reconstructionism. I have been restrained.

In light of this constant barrage of violent condemnation of amillennialism from within the Presbyterian and Reformed community, it is nothing less than astounding that there is no spirited defense of amillennialism in those circles in which the Christian Reconstructionists move.

In light of postmillennialism's own sharp, radical distinguishing of itself from amillennialism in terms of nothing less than the victory or defeat of Christ in history, it is incomprehensible that some who do speak out, weakly, in favor of amillennialism still attempt to align amillennialism with postmillennialism as two acceptable eschatologies in the Reformed churches.

Reformed amillennialism repudiates postmillennialism's "victory of Jesus Christ in history," root and branch. That is, the *kind* of victory desired and dreamed by postmillennialism, we renounce.

But Reformed amillennialism takes a back seat to no one, including the most fervent Christian Reconstructionist, in believing, confessing, preaching, teaching, and defending the victory of Jesus Christ in history.

Christ has dominion.

Now.

The Victory of Christ in History (Concluded)

The gross error of postmillennialism is that it misconceives the victory of Christ in history as carnal rather than spiritual. Gary North is wrong when he says, "It's not a question of 'dominion vs. no dominion'; it's a question of whose dominion" (*Unconditional Surrender*, ICE, 1988, p. 317).

It is emphatically not a question of “whose dominion.”

Jesus Christ has dominion.

Jesus Christ has dominion in the world in history

Jesus Christ has dominion now.

Not only does Jesus Christ now have dominion over all creatures, including His enemies, by His power, but also He now has dominion in His church by His Spirit and Word.

The question is not, “Whose dominion?”

But the question is, “What kind of dominion?”

Specifically, the question is, “*Carnal* dominion or *spiritual* dominion?”

Carnal dominion is earthly victory. It is victory according to the thinking of man. It consists of numbers — the conversion of a majority of humans; of physical force — a Christian police force and army; of control of culture — godly television, radio, and newspapers; of deliverance from worldly cares and natural miseries — the virtual eradication of poverty, sickness, and war; and of material prosperity — jobs, money, houses, and long life.

This is the dominion of Christ that is proclaimed by postmillennialism, especially by Christian Reconstructionism. This is supposed to be the victory of Christ in history, the flourishing of the Messianic kingdom.

It is a carnal dominion.

The victory heralded by Reformed amillennialism is spiritual. It is real victory. It is real victory here and now. But it is victory according to the thinking of God. It is contrary to human standards of victory. It makes all natural human thinking about victory, including that of Christian Reconstructionism, foolishness. No eye can see this victory, just as no eye can see the kingdom that is established by this victory ([John 3:3](#)). The victory and kingdom of Christ can only be known by faith.

The true victory of Christ in history is His saving of the elect church from sin. It is His empowering that church to confess His name. It is His preservation of the church in holiness of life unto life eternal. To this saving of the church belongs Christ’s institution of true churches that preach the gospel purely, administer the sacraments properly, and exercise Christian discipline rightly.

The conquering Christ gathers the elect church out of all nations and institutes true churches in all nations. Thus, the nations are saved and disciplined, as Christ commanded in [Matthew 28:19](#). In the salvation and obedience of the elect among them, the nations are saved and disciplined, regardless of [the numbers](#), whether many or few. The postmillennial notion that the salvation of

a nation requires the conversion of a majority of the population is unbiblical. Just as the elect remnant in Israel was the real nation of Israel, even though they were the small minority ([Rom. 9:6](#)), so also the elect Chinese are the real China, the elect Dutch are the real Netherlands, and the elect English are the real England. If the victory of Christ is a matter of sheer numbers, Christ is the loser in history, since He saves fewer humans than perished in Adam, as even the most optimistic postmillennialist must admit.

Christ's victory in history is the gathering of the church out of the nations. This gathering includes that the church is faithful to her calling to confess Jesus Christ. He Himself said that [building the church](#) is His work in history ([Matt. 16:18, 19](#)). The church is His glorious and indestructible kingdom, the fulfillment of the prophecy of [Psalm 72](#), as the Heidelberg Catechism teaches in Lord's Day 48 when it explains the petition, "Thy kingdom come," as meaning, "Preserve and increase thy church."

Since the church is made up of her elect members, the dominion of Christ is also His reign in the heart and life of each of His chosen people. The Heidelberg Catechism begins its explanation of the victorious kingdom of Christ here: "Rule us so by thy Word and Spirit that we may submit ourselves more and more to thee." The victory of Christ in history is the faith, confession, battle against sin, warfare against the world, obedience to the law, repentance, and endurance to the end of every elect, redeemed, and regenerated child of God.

The victory of Christ is progressive. The perfection of it, as regards the church, the individual elect, and the creation, will be realized by Christ Himself personally at His coming. The perfection of His victory is not to be within history, but as the end of history ([I Cor. 15:22-28](#); [Rev. 21](#); [Rom. 8:18-23](#)). There is good reason for this. It must be demonstrated, so that none can doubt or gainsay, that *Christ*, Christ *personally*, is Savior and Lord to the glory of God.

The King accomplishes this victory by the gospel ([Mark 16:15](#); [II Cor. 10:3-5](#)).

To mock this spiritual victory of Christ is unbelief.

To be dissatisfied with it is ingratitude.

To underestimate its awesome power and wondrous glory is folly.

To be oblivious to it because one has his heart set on a carnal victory and earthly kingdom of the Messiah is "Jewish dreams."

Only the spiritual nature of the victory of Christ in history harmonizes with the teaching of the Bible that the church in the world is a church that is always reproached and persecuted - a church "under the cross" ([Matt. 24:9, 10, 21-31](#); [John 15:18-16:4](#); [John 16:33](#); [II Thess., 1:4-10](#); [II Tim. 3](#); [I Pet. 4:12-14](#)).

Only the spiritual character of Christ's victory in each elect believer explains the fact that the man or woman who, according to [Romans 8:37](#), is conqueror in history, indeed, "more than

conqueror,” is at the same time, and all the while, “killed all the day long ... accounted as sheep for the slaughter” (v.36).

At the same time, victorious and persecuted! Christian Reconstruction cannot understand this, does not know what to make of this. Only the spiritual mind, the mind of Christ, understands this. The natural mind supposes that the victorious party *does* the persecuting.

Blinded by its assumption that the victory of Christ in history is carnal, postmillennialism stumbles into other, glaring errors. For one thing, a Loraine Boettner can cheerily announce that the world is getting better right along. Chapter 7 of his *The Millennium* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1958) is entitled, “The World is Growing Better.” This, in a century that has witnessed the horrors of Nazi Germany; the atrocities of Stalin’s Soviet Union; the slaughters of Mao’s China; the killings of Pol Pot’s Cambodia; the cruelties of the Africans at the present time; and the butcheries of their own offspring by the United States.

This, in a century that has seen the “Christian” West sink into the depths of approving homosexuality.

For another thing, the dream of earthly victory arouses the desire to bring it about, quickly. This demands numbers and political power. Since Calvinists are few, and Christian Reconstructionists still fewer, the Christian Reconstructionists make alliances with the more numerous charismatics in order to realize the dominion of Messiah (see Bruce Barron, *Heaven on Earth? The Social & Political Agendas of Dominion Theology*, Zondervan, 1992 and Michael G. Moriarty, “The Dominion Pursuit: Will the Church Christianize the World?” in *The New Charismatics*, Zondervan, 1992). The dream of an earthly kingdom of Christ always produces strange bedfellows.

Worst of all, postmillennialism, in fact, charges Christ with being a weak and defeated King in history. At least, up to the present time. For as yet His kingdom has not been victorious in history, as postmillennialism counts victory. For almost 2,000 years Christ has failed to “Christianize” the world. So far, He has been a “loser.” In addition, the leading postmillennialists attribute the failure of Christ to achieve victory to the weakness and faithlessness of His church. The Commander has poor troops. J. Marcellus Kik has written:

Unfortunately the Church of today does not realize the power that Christ has given her. Christ has placed in her hands the chain by which she can bind Satan. She can restrain his influence over the nations. But today the Church bemoans the fact that evil is becoming stronger and stronger. She bemoans the fact that the world is coming more and more under the control of the Devil. Whose fault is that? It is the Church. She has the chain and does not have the faith to bind Satan even more firmly. Satan is bound and the Church knows it not! Satan can be bound more firmly and the Church does it not! (*An Eschatology of Victory*, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971, p.196)

Gary North agrees: “The only thing that is holding up the victory of God’s home guard is the home guard’s lack of confidence, lack of training, and lack of tactics” (*Unconditional Surrender*, p. 366).

This is a reflection on Jesus Christ. For, as North declares, Jesus is the “Supreme Allied Commander” (p.365). If only He had better troops, that is, a stronger church! But why doesn’t He? Has He been unable now for 2,000 years to create men and women who are strong and faithful enough to do His will and bring about His earthly kingdom?

O, the weak Jesus Christ of Christian Reconstructionism!

The Jesus who depends upon men and who is evidently unable to make His men dependable is a defeated Jesus.

North admits this: “*Christ is waiting for His church to surround Satan’s last outpost. Christ is waiting for the work of the leaven to replace Satan’s leaven in the dough of creation*” (*Unconditional Surrender*, p.332; the emphasis is North’s).

What is the difference between a Jesus who is helplessly waiting for men to get busy finally to bring about His kingdom and the Jesus of Arminianism who is helplessly waiting for men to let Him reign in their hearts?

Neither of them is the Jesus Christ of Reformed amillennialism.

Our Jesus is Lord.

He conquered in His cross and resurrection.

He has been conquering in the gospel from Pentecost to this moment.

His Messianic kingdom has come in its prophesied power, peace, riches, and glory. Worldwide!

Faithful, zealous, energetic “troops,” made willing in this the day of His power, serve Him, doing all that He commands them to do, although not perfectly. These are the living members of the true, Reformed and Presbyterian churches in the world.

Jesus is victor.

Really.

A spiritual victor.