

The Future Work of Christ

by John F. Walvoord

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Chapter 1

The Coming of Christ for His Church

Many Scriptures testify to the fact that the present age will culminate in the coming of the Lord for His church. According to 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, this event will close the age with the resurrection of the dead in Christ, and living saints will be “caught up” to meet the Lord in the air and thereafter “be with the Lord.” In view of the extensive consideration of Biblical truth relating to this subject in a previous publication by the author,¹ the present discussion will be limited to the important aspects of the doctrine. Three lines of truth relating to the coming of the Lord for His church will be considered: (1) the rapture of the church, i.e., the coming of Christ for His church; (2) Christ in relation to the church in heaven; (3) the second coming to the earth.

Four Views of the Rapture

Four major interpretations have been advanced by those accepting the inspiration and infallibility of the Scriptures. These views are concerned not only with the character and events related to the second coming, but primarily deal with the question of the relation of these events to the predicted time of tribulation or trouble which will sweep all the world and especially the nation Israel. The four views relate the coming of Christ for His church and His second coming to the earth in relation to this time of tribulation as follows: (1) the posttribulation view, that Christ will come for His church as a phase of His return to the earth and that it will occur after the tribulation; (2) the midtribulation view, which holds that Christ will come in the middle of the seven-year period predicted by Daniel, but before the great tribulation of the last three and a half years preceding Christ’s return to earth; (3) the partial-rapture view, that Christ will catch out of the world those who are spiritually qualified before the tribulation, and as others become qualified, will catch them up to Himself throughout the tribulation period; (4) the pretribulation view, which holds that Christ will come for His church before the seventieth week of Daniel, the seven-year period preceding Christ’s coming to the earth to establish His millennial kingdom.

Of the four views it may be said that an insignificant fraction of expositors follow the partial-rapture view, and it has never attained the status of orthodoxy within evangelicalism. The midtribulation view has experienced some popularity in the present generation, but has practically no literature and is held by no specific group or denomination. The great body of students of Scripture who, are premillennial hold either the pretribulational or posttribulational view.²

Posttribulationism. Unquestionably, the majority view as far as the rapture is concerned is the posttribulational view, namely, that Christ will come for His church in connection with His second coming to the earth. This is the view advocated by the amillenarians and postmillenarians and by some premillenarians. They contend that to divide the rapture from the second coming to the earth by a period of at least seven years is to bifurcate what the Scriptures intend to be a single event.

Posttribulationists who have written on this subject usually attack the pretribulational view, rather than support their own position. Arguments gleaned from their writings in favor of the posttribulational position may be itemized as follows:

1. The argument from history. Posttribulationists appeal to the fact that the early church fathers were posttribulational and conclude that, therefore, the pretribulation position is new and novel. Pretribulationists reply by noting that modern posttribulationism with its doctrine of tribulation first and then the rapture is not what the early church fathers believed at all, for the early church held the any-movement view of the Lord’s return, thinking erroneously that they were already in the great tribulation. The modern form of posttribulationism which places the tribulation still future and to be followed by the

rapture is in some respects more recent than pretribulationism as it is taught today. Pretribulationists hold with the early church in the doctrine of imminency, but disagree that we are already in the great tribulation. Posttribulationists disagree with the early church doctrine of imminency but, like the early church, place the rapture after the tribulation.

2. The church will be preserved through the tribulation. This posttribulational argument attempts to play down the Scriptures that teach that the time of tribulation will be unprecedented in its severity and advances the position that the wrath of God in this period will be poured out only on unsaved people, while the church will go through the period without experiencing the wrath of God. Pretribulationists observe that this is not what the Bible teaches inasmuch as evidence seems to point to the martyrdom of most of those who do come to Christ in the period and that the nature of the judgment, such as earthquakes, pestilence, war, famine, etc., would affect believers as well as unbelievers. Pretribulationists also point out that posttribulationists adopt an extensive spiritualization of prophecies which should be taken literally in order to avoid contradiction of their viewpoint.

3. There are saints in the tribulation. Posttribulationists have seized upon the fact that there are saints in the tribulation as proving that the church is there as well. Pretribulationists reply by admitting that there will be people saved in the tribulation period. However, it is noted that none of the technical terms relating them to the saints of the present age, such as the phrase “in Christ,” or “the baptism of the Spirit,” or similar terms are to be found. The word *church* is never used in any passage dealing with the great tribulation.

4. The Bible predicts events occurring before the rapture; therefore, it cannot be imminent. This posttribulational argument is an admission that the early church fathers were wrong in believing in imminency because of events which must occur before the rapture according to posttribulation interpretation. The events usually cited, however, such as the predicted death of Peter, the destruction of Jerusalem, and implications that the period will be a long time, actually do not stand in the way of current belief in the imminent return of Christ and did not even hinder this in the first century. Even the few years from Pentecost to the time of Paul’s conversion and later revelation of rapture truth in its details could be considered a long time. The destruction of Jerusalem is nowhere stated to be either before or after the rapture. The death of Peter could, of course, have taken place any day. This posttribulation argument certainly does not militate against the doctrine of imminency today.

5. The prophecy of a resurrection occurring at the beginning of the millennium is cited as supporting posttribulationism. Pretribulationists, of course, agree with posttribulationists that there will be a resurrection before the millennium in connection with Christ’s second coming to the earth as this is explicitly taught in Revelation 20:4–6. Pretribulationists hold, however, that this resurrection relates to tribulation saints and possibly Old Testament saints, but does not include specifically the dead in Christ of the present age. All premillennial interpretations of Scripture agree that there is more than one resurrection, as Scriptures indicate as a minimum the resurrection of Christ, the resurrection of the righteous related to the second coming, and the resurrection of the wicked after the millennium. The further division of the resurrection of the church before the tribulation and the resurrection of other saints after the tribulation would be an additional refinement.

6. The same expressions are used for the Lord’s return for His church as are used for His second coming to the earth. Pretribulationists agree that the word *coming* (Gr. *parousia*) and other similar words may be used of both events, but find nothing strange in such usage. These are general words and must be invested by the context with their particular meaning as these same words are used of other events in the Bible and are not technical words.

7. The tares are gathered out “first” in the parable of wheat and tares in Matthew 13. Pretribulationists reply that in the first place the order is not important here as even posttribulationists admit that the separation of the wheat and the tares occurs simultaneously as illustrated in the judgment of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31–46. The reference to the wheat and tares, however, relates to the second coming and not to the rapture, as the entire interadvent age from the first coming to the earth to the second coming to the earth is in view in this passage. Significantly, in the same chapter in the parable of the dragnet, the order is reversed and the good fish are gathered into the vessels and subsequently the bad are “cast away” (Matt 13:48–50). The rapture, however, is not in view in either parable.

8. Expressions like “the day” and “the day of the Lord” are technical terms which could not refer to more than one event.

Pretribulationists observe that the expression “the day of the Lord” actually is a long period of time, including the entire millennium. In the nature of the case, an expression like *day* is a general term and has to be given meaning in the context. It is not true that this word is always used in the same sense in the Bible, and, as a matter of fact, it would be impossible to make this expression always a technical term.

9. The chronology of 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12 requires two signs preceding the Lord’s return, namely, the apostasy and the revelation of the man of sin. Pretribulationists observe that this passage is given as a correction of an error which had been taught the Thessalonians, namely, that they were already in the Day of the Lord and in the period of trouble which this would bring upon the earth. These signs relate to the Day of the Lord, not the rapture. This passage is actually an argument for pretribulationism rather than posttribulationism as the restrainer apparently is to be identified with the restraint of sin in the present age. This must be removed before the tribulation can come. Whether or not the restrainer is the Holy Spirit, as many believe, it would be natural for an event like the rapture to cause such a lifting of restraint, and the subsequent revelation of the man of sin. If there is any evidence in this passage relating to this question, it is for the pretribulationist view rather than the posttribulationist view.

10. The term *the end* is a technical expression always referring to the end of the interadvent age. Pretribulationists note that passages where this expression occurs (1 Cor 1:7–8; Heb 3:6, 14; 6:11; Rev 2:26) refer to a time which must necessarily be defined by the context. Significantly not one of the five texts used as proof are linked with the posttribulationist coming of the Lord and only one instance (1 Cor 1:7–8) even mentions it. Like other terms such as *the day* and *coming*, the expression *the end* is not technical in itself, therefore, could conceivably be used of the end of the church period as well as the end of the tribulation.

11. Certain passages, such as Matthew 24:31, relate the rapture to the end of the tribulation and lead naturally to posttribulationism. Pretribulationists point out that a rapture is not mentioned in Matthew 24:31, and in the passage neither translation nor resurrection is specified. As in many other instances, posttribulationists are assuming what they are trying to prove.

These brief answers to the principal posttribulationist arguments could be greatly expanded. The basic problem, however, is that posttribulationism has been occupied with refuting the pretribulationist arguments, but seldom if ever offers solid proof that the rapture occurs after the tribulation. As a matter of fact, not a single passage in the New Testament relating to the rapture contextually can be proved to refer to the close of the tribulation period. Posttribulationists therefore are driven completely to inference.

It is most significant that in all of the passages dealing specifically with the second coming of Christ to the earth not one word can be found concerning translation of living saints. Pretribulationists concede that there will be a resurrection of certain saints at this time, but in none of these resurrections is the church specifically mentioned. In fact, passages such as Revelation 20:4–6 specifically refer to the tribulation saints. It is significant that the great majority of educational institutions which are premillennial are also pretribulationist, especially the Bible institute movement which has specialized in the premillennial interpretation of the Scripture.

The midtribulation rapture. In the current dispute between pretribulationists and posttribulationists it is natural that some should be attracted to a mediate position. Although comparatively little literature has been created and no specific school of thought has emerged in support of the midtribulation view, it has been adopted by some contemporary evangelical scholars. Their position is that the church will be raptured at the end of the first three and a half years of the seven years of Israel’s covenant (Dan 9:27) and therefore will be caught out of the world before the time of the great tribulation which is the last three and a half years.

The principal argument in favor of midtribulationism is the identification of the trump which will be sounded at the rapture with the seventh trump of Revelation 11. This identification, however, is completely faulty as the series of trumpets culminating in the seventh trumpet are trumpets of angels having to do with the pouring out of wrath upon the earth and have no relation to the rapture or translation of living saints or to the resurrection of the dead in Christ. The seventh trumpet of

Revelation is near the end of the great tribulation, not at its beginning as the day of wrath has begun much earlier (Rev 6:17). This seventh trumpet is not the last in any event as there is a further trumpet mentioned in Matthew 24:31. The midtribulation theory renders impossible the imminency of the coming of the Lord as the events of the first half of Daniel's seventieth week would have to occur first.

Partial-rapture theory. This point of view, which arose a hundred years ago in the works of Robert Govett, has been principally expounded by G. H. Lange in the twentieth century.³ The concept of a partial rapture is derived from Scripture passages in which believers are urged to be prepared for the return of the Lord. Major passages cited by partial-rapturists are Matthew 24:40–51; 25:13; Mark 13:33–37; Luke 20:34–36; 21:36; Philippians 3:10–12; 1 Thessalonians 5:6; 2 Timothy 4:8; Titus 2:8; 2:13; Hebrews 9:24–28; Revelation 3:3; 12:1–6. Adherents to this point of view hold that believers must have good works in order to qualify for the rapture. Even in its simplest presentation, it is obvious that this is founded on a misapprehension of grace, the basis of salvation, and the nature of the body of Christ. If the question is raised, "How many works are required to qualify?" it becomes immediately apparent that this teaching is on a questionable foundation. According to 1 Corinthians 15:51 "all" Christians will be included in the translation and resurrection at the rapture. It is because of these objections that most evangelical scholars have considered the partial-rapture view unworthy of serious consideration.

Pretribulation rapture. This point of view is adopted in the discussion to follow and holds that Christ will come for His own before the seventieth week of Daniel is fulfilled and therefore before the great tribulation. This view has been generally followed in most advanced study of prophecy among premillenarians in the twentieth century and is in harmony with the doctrine of the imminency of the rapture held by the early church fathers. A thorough study of the doctrine in the last century has brought to light many details which formerly were obscure and has tended to harmonize the premillennial interpretation of the Scripture and solve problems which in former generations were only partially answered. Generally speaking, this view is held by most premillenarians today, especially those who distinguish the program of God for Israel and the church and who tend to interpret prophecy in a normal, literal way.

In the author's work on *The Rapture Question* some fifty arguments for pretribulationism are set forth in the conclusion.⁴ Without attempting to restate all of these arguments it may be observed here that pretribulationism depends upon two important premises. First, the church is regarded as a body of saints distinct from those of other ages, either before or after. Second, the tribulation is viewed as a future period of unprecedented trouble which will occur in the last half of Daniel's seventieth week, a seven-year period which is future and subsequent to the rapture. Generally speaking, opponents of pretribulationism have begged the question by assuming that the word *church* includes saints of all ages, often with no proof whatever, and have tended to neglect the specifics given in the prophetic word concerning the tribulation itself.

The supporting evidence for pretribulationism falls into six categories as follows:

1. Pretribulationism is an outgrowth of the same type of hermeneutics which leads to premillennialism, namely, a literal interpretation of prophecy as opposed to the amillennial, spiritualized or allegorical interpretation of prophecy. Consistent premillennial hermeneutics leads to pretribulationism. This is evidenced by the fact that many who have abandoned pretribulationism often abandon premillennialism also.
2. No positive evidence can be produced that the church is in the tribulation as no specific term distinguishing the saints of the present age from other ages is ever used in connection with those in the tribulation itself.
3. According to the accounts of the tribulation in the Scripture, the events are related to Israel and the Gentiles and not to the church. In fact, the church is promised deliverance from the period according to 1 Thessalonians 5:9 (cp. Rev 6:17; 1 Thess 1:9–10; Rev 3:10). Whenever the truth of the rapture of the church is presented in the Bible, it is always in the form of predicting it as an imminent event. It is therefore offered as a hope to believers and a basis for comfort and exhortation with no events indicated as necessarily occurring first (1 Thess 4:18; 5:6; Titus 2:13; 1 John 3:1–3).
4. The period in which sin is permitted to manifest itself without restraint seemingly is impossible until the restrainer

(probably to be identified as the Holy Spirit) is removed (2 Thess 2:7). This would seemingly require the rapture first before the tribulation can begin.

5. A number of events are described in prophecy as occurring in heaven between the rapture and Christ's coming to the earth, such as the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:10) and the consummation of the marriage union (Eph 5:27). On earth a period of time is needed between the rapture and the second coming to provide a group of saints who will remain in their natural bodies and populate the earth in the millennium (Isa 65:20–25). If a rapture occurred at the end of the tribulation, it would leave no saints in their natural bodies to populate the millennial earth. The necessity of this interval is brought out in the divine judgments related to the second coming, namely, the judgment of the Gentiles (Matt 25:31–46) and the judgment of Israel (Ezek 20:34–38), both of which judgments presume that there has been no separation of the saved from the unsaved such as a rapture would have effected at the time of the second coming.

6. Many contrasts exist between the rapture of the church and the second coming of Christ to the earth which tend to prove that they are distinct events and separated by a time period. The rapture pictures the saints meeting Christ in the air while at the second coming Christ meets the saints on earth. At the rapture the saints go to heaven; at the second coming the saints come to the earth. At the rapture there is no indication that sin is judged in the earth as it occurs before the day of wrath; at the second coming Christ establishes His kingdom, returning to the Mount of Olives, remaining on earth where He reigns as king. At that time sin will be brought into judgment and righteousness and peace will fill the earth. The second coming clearly follows the great tribulation which is given as a definite sign of the Lord's return. The rapture is constantly viewed as a signless event which is imminent.

The arguments for pretribulationism offered at length in the author's *The Rapture Question* as well as other important contributions to this field of study, such as J. Dwight Pentecost's *Things to Come* and Gerald Stanton's *Kept from the Hour*, demonstrate that pretribulationism is not wishful thinking, but is based upon a solid principle of interpretation, many passages of Scripture, and is supported by innumerable collateral proofs. The pretribulation point of view welcomes thorough investigation.

The Doctrine of the Rapture in Scripture

The fact that Christ would return to take His own out of the world is first introduced in the Upper Room Discourse in John 14:1–3. The disciples, already alarmed by predictions that Christ was going to leave them and that they would not be able to follow Him (John 13:33–36), are now informed that Christ is going to come for them, and take them to the Father's house. This was an obvious contradiction of their previous hope that Christ was going to reign on earth and quite different in its general character. It indicated that their hope was heavenly rather than earthly and that they were going to be taken out of the earth to heaven rather than for Christ to come to the earth to be with them.

In the first of Paul's epistles to the Thessalonians, further exposition is given the doctrine of the rapture as it was held by the early church. The Apostle Paul accompanied by Timothy and Silas had visited Thessalonica and in the course of their ministry extending over three Sabbath days had led a small number to the Lord. After being forced to leave because of persecution, Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to ascertain their condition. Upon his return to Paul, Timothy reported on their progress and also brought back certain theological questions he was unable to answer. Among them was the question of the relationship between the translation of living Christians and the resurrection of the dead.

This rather mature question coming from young Christians indicates the extensive character of the teaching ministry of Paul to them subsequent to their conversion. They apparently already believed in the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. They also believed that Christ would come at any moment to catch the living to be with Himself. The relationship of these two events was the matter in point. In answer to their questions, the apostle states in 1 Thessalonians 4:15–17: "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we that are alive, that are left unto the coming of the Lord, shall in no wise precede them that are fallen asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

From the Thessalonian passage it will be observed: (1) that the same Lord who ascended from the Mount of Olives to heaven would descend bodily from heaven to the realm of the atmospheric heavens; (2) His coming would be signaled by a shout, the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God; (3) at these signals the dead in Christ would be raised to rejoin their souls and spirits, which came with Christ from heaven when He came (1 Thess 4:14); (4) living saints instantly transformed would meet the Lord in the air and without dying would be introduced to their heavenly existence; (5) having thus met the Lord in the air, saints translated and resurrected would be forever with the Lord (1 Thess 4:17). This doctrine was introduced to them as a comfort in the loss of their loved ones as well as an encouragement to them in their time of persecution. It is noteworthy that no intimation is given of any intervening time of tribulation such as is discussed in 1 Thessalonians 5.

A major contribution to the doctrine of the rapture was given later to the Corinthian church as recorded in 1 Corinthians 15:51–58. This important theological passage is introduced by a restatement of the gospel that Christ died for our sins, and that He rose from the dead, thus supporting the doctrine of the resurrection of all men. At the conclusion of this discussion, the truth of the rapture is described as a mystery, a truth unrevealed in the Old Testament.

The Corinthian passage makes more explicit what is implied in Thessalonians, namely, that believers will receive a new body in contrast to our present corruptible, mortal, and sinful body. This heavenly body will be like the body of our Lord and suited for the heavenly sphere. The resurrection body will be incorruptible, that is, will not be subject to the decay and deterioration of age. It will be immortal in that it will be deathless. While it is not expressly stated in this passage, it is implied in 1 John 3:2 that our resurrection bodies will be sinless, a conclusion confirmed in Philippians 3:21 where our bodies are said to be “conformed to the body of his glory.” This resurrection and translation is said to take place “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump” (1 Cor 15:52).

Although there are other allusions to the coming of the Lord for His church in Scripture, these major passages bring out the central doctrine, namely, that when Christ comes living Christians will be translated and the dead in Christ will be raised from the dead. After meeting Christ in the air they will go to the Father’s house as promised in John 14:1–3 and in the heavenly sphere will fulfill predicted events which will take place in heaven prior to Christ’s second coming to the earth.

¹Cp. *The Rapture Question*.

²For discussion of these four views and their supporters, see *The Rapture Question*. For the partial-rapture theory, see pp. 105-25; for posttribulationism see pp. 127-70; for midtribulationism, see pp. 171-89. Only a summary of this material is presented here.

³Cp. Robert Govett, *Entrance into the Kingdom*; G. H. Lange, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ; Firstborn Sons, Their Rights and Risks*.

⁴*The Rapture Question*, pp. 191-99.

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Chapter 2

The Church in Heaven

The Judgment of the Church in Heaven

After meeting Christ in the air at the time of the rapture, the church will proceed to heaven. There, according to many New Testament passages, the church will be judged for reward. If the rapture concerns only Christians, it is evident that only Christians will be involved in this judgment as only such will be eligible for the rapture itself. If Israel and other Old Testament saints are raised at the time of the rapture, they also may be judged or their judgment may be reserved to a later time, namely, the time of Christ's second coming to the earth when their rewards will be distributed in the form of privileged places of service in the millennial kingdom. As the judgment of the church does not concern the matter of salvation, it is primarily a question of rewards for service.

The central passage on the judgment of the church is 2 Corinthians 5:8-10: "We are of good courage, I say, and are willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be at home with the Lord. Wherefore also we make it our aim, whether at home or absent, to be well-pleasing unto him. For we must all be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad." Paul declares that it is his fundamental purpose in life to live in such a way that his life will be well spent in the Master's service. When he is judged at this judgment seat, it will be determined what is good and what is bad.

Although some have attempted to make this a Protestant purgatory, i.e., a time of punishment for unconfessed sin, it seems clear from the general doctrine of justification by faith that no condemnation is possible for one who is in Christ. Discipline such as is administered in this life will be of no value to those already made perfect in heaven. The bad works are discarded as unworthy of reward but good works are rewarded. The penalty is limited to the loss of reward. It is obvious that with imperfections which beset every Christian, no one will be able to claim perfection in that day. All will have a measure of failure, and it may be that all will have some reward. The judgment will be a general evaluation of a summary kind, but it is gracious rather than retributive.

The judgment seat of Christ, however, is a real issue with Paul. He speaks of "knowing therefore the fear of the Lord" (2 Cor 5:11). This fear is of the possibility that his life will be revealed as one wasted and spent in selfishness rather than in devotion and complete obedience to Christ. Christians contemplating the rapture of the church, therefore, must also face the fact that their lives will then be brought in review before God and that they will be rewarded according to what they have done.

Three figures are used in the New Testament to illustrate the principles involved in the judgment seat of Christ. The first of these is found in Romans 14:10-12: "But thou, why dost thou judge thy brother? or thou again, why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of God. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, to me every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God." In this passage life is viewed as a stewardship with every Christian having to give an account of his stewardship at the judgment seat of Christ. An application is made of this truth that we should not judge each other, but rather should give our principal attention to fulfilling our own stewardship in such a way that we will have a good report when we must render account.

In 1 Corinthians 3:11-15 the figure of a building is used to illustrate the principle of judgment. In verse 11 the foundation of

the building is revealed to be Christ who as Savior provides a foundation for every Christian life. On this foundation every man must build his building. Ultimately the building is to be tested by fire which “shall prove each man’s work of what sort it is” (1 Cor 3:13). When tested in this way, reward is promised for that which abides and loss is assured for that which is burned: “If any man’s work shall abide which he built thereon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved; yet so as through fire” (1 Cor 3:14-15). In view of the fact that the building is to be tested by fire, Christians are urged to build their house of gold, silver, and precious stone which is incombustible in contrast to wood, hay, or stubble which is easily consumed by fire (cf. 1 Cor 3:12).

No meaning is assigned to the particular materials mentioned from Scriptural background. However, gold is often used to represent the glory of deity; silver is the metal of redemption, and precious stones reflect wealth of other kind. The use of these materials undoubtedly reflects Christian life and witness which as gold manifest the glory of God, as silver the extension of the gospel, and, as precious stones, accomplish many things which are of value in God’s sight. By contrast, wood, hay, and stubble represent three degrees of worthlessness, stubble being fit for nothing. Hay is suitable only for beasts. Wood, while being a useful tool of man, can also be destroyed by fire. The final test of all man’s work is what evaluation is placed upon it at the judgment seat of Christ. Christians, accordingly, are urged to build a life which embodies eternal values.

A third figure is found in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 where life is compared to an athletic contest: “Know ye not that they that run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? Even so run; that ye may attain. And every man that striveth in the games exerciseth self-control in all things. Now they do it to receive a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, as not uncertainly; so fight I, as not beating the air: but I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage; lest by any means, after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected.” The objective in a race is to win the prize and to this end all minor considerations must be put aside.

In like manner the Christian’s goal is to receive reward at the judgment seat of Christ, and therefore he must accomplish the will of God. The Apostle Paul not only likens life to a race, but also to a boxing match where he beats his own body in order to bring it under subjection. The figure speaks of self-discipline and self-control. The reward promised is an incorruptible crown in contrast to the corruptible crown of laurel leaves which soon faded away, so often given athletes in Greek contests. Paul wanted to live and preach in such a way that he himself might not be considered worthless at the judgment seat of Christ. The term *rejected* refers to his rewards and life rather than to his personal salvation, and Paul had in mind that an athlete who did not conform to the rules would have his victory disallowed.

In addition to these figures of speech, Christ in the seven messages to the churches of Asia in Revelation 2—3 challenges those in each church to live in the will of God that they might receive their proper reward at the judgment seat of Christ. No more searching analysis can be made of any human work than the question of Christ’s evaluation at that future tribunal.

The Marriage Union of Christ and the Church

As indicated in some earlier discussion, the present work of Christ and the church is set forth in the figure of Christ as the Bridegroom and the church as the bride. The future aspect of this includes the consummation of the marriage union between Christ and His church. In keeping with the oriental symbolism, the church in its relation to Christ will follow the pattern of the customary marriage in Christ’s day. The first step in such a marriage was the legal union consummated when the parents of the bridegroom and the bride agreed on the marriage and entered into formal contract in which the dowry was paid. As fulfilled in the symbolism of Christ in the church, this occurs at the moment an individual believes in Christ as his Savior and accepts the payment of his redemption which Christ Himself paid on the cross. The bride accepts this situation, and acknowledges Christ as her loved one as well as her Redeemer. Throughout the present age, Christ is preparing His bride for the future consummation as indicated in Ephesians 5:26. The church as a pure virgin is awaiting the coming of her Bridegroom as indicated in 2 Corinthians 11:2. The first phase of the marriage is an indication of the grace of God, for while the Bridegroom is altogether lovely, the bride has little to commend herself in natural or spiritual beauty. The transformation into a lovely bride is made possible by the grace of God.

The second phase of the wedding is marked by a procession of the bridegroom to the home of the bride accompanied by his friends often at a late hour at night as illustrated in the parable of the ten virgins (Matt 25:1-13). In the case of Christ, this will be fulfilled at the rapture of the church when Christ the Bridegroom comes from the Father's house to the earth to receive His bride and take her back to the place that He has prepared for her (John 14:1-3). When this event takes place, the church will be forever with the Lord, and the marriage union is consummated.

A third aspect of an oriental wedding was the marriage feast held for the benefit of guests. The ten virgins of Matthew 25 were such guests as well as others. There has been some difference of opinion as to whether the symbolism of the marriage feast is fulfilled in heaven following the rapture or whether it will be on earth in connection with the second coming of Christ. On the basis of Revelation 19:7-9 the wedding feast is announced at the close of the tribulation and is related to the second coming of Christ to the earth. For this reason, many feel that the wedding feast will have its fulfillment spiritually in the millennium itself when saints of all ages will be present to join in the festivities with Christ the Bridegroom and the church as the bride. The fact that the wedding feast is announced in Revelation 19 prior to the second coming of Christ is another indication that the rapture itself must have already occurred as the Bridegroom goes for His bride before the wedding feast. The two illustrations in Matthew (22:1-14 ; 25:1-13) both picture the wedding feast on earth and lead to the conclusion that the wedding feast is related to Christ's second coming to the earth and the millennial kingdom which will follow. In both of these instances in Matthew, the bride is not mentioned. According to oriental custom the bride did not necessarily attend the wedding feast although, as a matter of fact, the church as the bride will be present in the millennial scene.

The figure of marriage wonderfully illustrates the love of Christ for His church which prompted Him to give Himself for it (Eph 5:25) which explains His present work for His church (Eph 5:26) and which will be brought to consummation at the rapture when the church, perfect in every way, is presented to the Bridegroom (Eph 5:27).

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The Future Work of Christ

by John F. Walvoord

Chapter 3

Christ's Coming to Reign

The Second Advent

The second coming of Christ to the earth is the theme of many passages in both Testaments, the more important passages being as follows: Deuteronomy 30:3; Psalm 2; Isaiah 63:1-6; Daniel 2:44-45; 7:13-14; Matthew 24—25 ; Mark 13; Luke 21; Acts 1:11; Romans 11:26; 1 Thessalonians 3:13; 5:1-4 ; 2 Thessalonians 1:7—2:12 ; 2 Peter 2:1—3:17 ; Jude 1:14-15; Revelation 1:7; 19:11-21 .

The first reference to the second coming of Christ in the Scriptures is found in connection with the prediction of the regathering of Israel in Deuteronomy 30:1-5. The promise is given in connection with the invitation to Israel to repent and return to the Lord, which repentance is predicted as taking place just before the second coming of Christ in Zechariah 12:10-14. This theme is amplified in many other Scriptures and reveals that the second coming of Christ has the immediate object of delivering Israel from her persecutors and restoring to their land those who were dispersed.

In Daniel 2:44-45 and Daniel 7:13-14 it is revealed that the second coming of Christ will end the times of the Gentiles and bring in the millennial kingdom of Christ. Daniel 7:13-14 describes it in these words: "I saw in the night-visions, and, behold, there came with the clouds of heaven one like unto a son of man, and he came even to the ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." The coming of Christ as portrayed in Isaiah 63:1-6 reveals that there will be a terrible judgment upon unbelievers in the day of Christ's return and that it will be a day of vengeance. This of course is confirmed by many later passages.

One of the most comprehensive passages in the New Testament is found in Matthew 24:27-30. Here, in answer to the question of the disciples concerning the signs of His coming and the end of the age, Christ reveals a comprehensive order of events which will precede and follow His second coming. In the early portion of Matthew 24 a general description of tribulation which characterizes the present age and especially the end of the age is described. There will be wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes as well as persecution of those who confess the Lord. There will be many false prophets and much iniquity, and the love of many professing Christians will grow cold. As the age comes to its end the gospel of the kingdom will be preached to all the world.

Matthew 24 also indicates the specific character of the period just preceding the second coming as fulfilling the time of great tribulation anticipated in the prediction of the time of Jacob's trouble (Jer 30:7) and the great tribulation of Daniel 12:1. Christ predicts that this time of great tribulation will be a spectacular event which will result in immediate persecution of the people of Israel who are in Judea. They are accordingly exhorted to flee immediately (Matt 24:15-20). This time is designated as the "great tribulation," unprecedented in its severity, which will end in the destruction of all flesh if it were not cut short by the second coming of Christ. During this period there will be many false reports of a secret coming of Christ and an abundance of false christs and false prophets (Matt 24:21-26).

The second coming of Christ itself is described in graphic terms in Matthew 24:27-30, "For as the lightning cometh forth from the east, and is seen even unto the west; so shall be the coming of the Son of man. Wheresoever the carcass is, there

will the eagles be gathered together. But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”

In demonstration of the fact that the second coming of Christ will not be a secret event, it is described as lightning spreading across the heavens from the east to the west as the glory of Christ becomes manifest to the entire world. It will occur after the tribulation and be just preceded by darkening of the sun and the moon, and by stars falling from heaven. The sign of the Son of man predicted in Matthew 24:30 is apparently the glory of the Lord which will appear in the heavens as Christ returns. It is predicted that all the earth will see this event and it may extend over an entire twenty-four hour period which in the earth's rotation would permit the entire earth to see it. According to Matthew, Christ will come back accompanied by clouds and with great power and glory.

According to Matthew 25:31-46 after the second coming to the earth Christ will establish His throne and then judge the nations, separating the sheep from the goats, that is, separating the saved from the unsaved. The sheep and the goats although saved by faith and by grace, as are the saints of all ages, are manifested in that time by their works which demonstrate their true character. The goats, representing the unsaved, are cast into everlasting fire. The sheep, the tribulation saints among the Gentiles who have survived the persecutions, will be ushered into the millennial kingdom. A similar judgment related to the second coming may be observed in Ezekiel 20:34-38 where the rebels, that is, unsaved Israelites, are purged out and believing Israel is ushered into their promised land. Passages parallel to Matthew 24-25 such as Mark 13 and Luke 21 confirm these major facts and add detail. The Gospel of John, while introducing the subject of the rapture of the church (14:1-3), does not deal at length with the subject of the second coming to the earth. It is probable, however, that the Acts 1:11 reference has to do with the second coming of Christ to the earth. According to this passage He will come to the earth as He went to heaven, that is gradually, bodily, visibly, and accompanied by clouds.

The second coming of Christ referred to in Romans 11:26 confirms the Old Testament predictions that Christ in His second coming will deliver Israel from her persecutors and bring great spiritual revival to His ancient people. In general the Pauline letters are more concerned with the rapture than they are with the second coming to the earth. Some have taken 1 Thessalonians 3:13 as a picture of Christ coming to the earth with His saints from heaven. Others have referred to it as the arrival in heaven in connection with the rapture because the coming is stated to be “before God” and related to the church.

The day of the Lord in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-4 has to do with the period immediately preceding Christ's coming to the earth which is a time of tribulation, and speaks of the wrath of God which will be poured out in the great tribulation as well as the second coming of Christ itself. This time of judgment is in contrast to the prospect of the church for the coming of Christ for them when they will be caught up to be with the Lord as revealed in the preceding chapter.

Another important factor relative to the second advent is revealed in 2 Thessalonians 1:7—2:12. The fact that Christ will be revealed in glory in the heavens and will take vengeance on unbelievers is repeated as in other passages. Detail given concerning the period preceding the second coming reveals that it will be a time of apostasy, that in it the “lawless one” will be revealed who will oppose God and exalt himself to be god and as such will be worshipped in the temple of God. Revealed here is the fact that this evil character cannot take his place in the world until the restraint which now characterizes the present age be removed. Many have understood this to be a reference to the Holy Spirit in His restraining work which will be removed in large measure when the rapture of the church takes place. The wicked person of whom this passage speaks will support his work by satanic miracles which will deceive those who do not believe the truth. This will come to an end at the second coming of Christ when he will be destroyed as indicated in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 and confirmed by Revelation 19:20.

An extensive revelation is given in 2 Peter 2:1—3:17 relative to the apostasy which will characterize the present age which will have its culmination in the period preceding the Lord's return. The passage especially emphasizes, however, the destruction of the heavens and the earth which will follow the millennial kingdom (2 Pet 3:10). 2 Peter in general describes the broad context of the second coming, that is, the events which precede and events which will ultimately follow, but it

does not describe the second coming specifically.

Jude quotes Enoch as predicting the second coming of Christ (Jude 1:14-15). Here are gathered many of the elements found in preceding passages such as the fact that the Lord will be accompanied by myriads of His saints and at His second will execute judgment upon the wicked. In Jude as in 2 Peter the second coming of Christ is presented as a judgment of God upon apostasy.

The last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation, is in many respects the capstone on the doctrine of the second coming of Christ. This truth is introduced in the first chapter with the pronouncement, "Behold, he cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they that pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth shall mourn over him. Even so, Amen" (Rev 1:7). Most of the book of Revelation consists in exhortations and predictions in view of the Lord's return and unfolds in more detail than any other portion of Scripture the great tribulation which will precede the second advent.

The great tribulation is climaxed by the vision which John records in Revelation 19:11-21. In this, Christ is pictured as coming from heaven on a white horse accompanied by the armies of heaven to claim His right as King of kings and Lord of lords to judge the wicked earth. The resultant description gives in graphic detail the destruction of the armies which had been previously gathered in a final gigantic world war. All of these armies oppose Christ at His second coming. Not only the armies, but the world ruler and the false prophet are destroyed, and the beast and the false prophet are cast alive into the lake of fire.

This glorious event is the prelude to the establishment of the millennial kingdom of Christ. The early verses of chapter 20 of Revelation indicate that Satan will be bound and cast into the bottomless pit to remain inactive for the entire thousand years of Christ's reign on earth. The vision which John sees is given specific interpretation, namely, that Satan is so bound that he will not deceive the nations. He will remain bound for a thousand years and after this will be loosed. This interpretation makes impossible the spiritualization of this passage as many have done in an attempt to eliminate the millennial reign of Christ. In the verses which follow, the millennial kingdom is established.

The Second Advent in Relation to the Program of God

The second advent is not only an important event, in itself of tremendous significance, but its relationships extend to every important undertaking of God related to the end time.

Relation to Israel. As previously indicated the second coming of Christ has a most important relation to Israel as a nation. At this coming of Christ, Israel is delivered from her enemies and persecutions which characterized the time of Jacob's trouble which just precede the second advent. It also is the time in which Israel is brought into the millennial reign, which is a time of deliverance, glory, and blessing for the nation Israel. This deliverance is indicated in many passages such as Joel 2, Matthew 24—25, Romans 11:26, and Revelation 19:17-21. Zechariah 14:1-3 indicates that Jerusalem itself in the midst of military conflict will be rescued by the return of the Lord.

The second coming of Christ will also be the occasion for Israel's judgment. Those who survive the tribulation will be judged concerning their relationship to Christ and those who are worthy to enter the kingdom will be brought into the promised land while others will be purged out (Ezek 20:34-38; Matt 24:9—25:30). It is probable that the judgment of Israel raised from the dead will also take place at this time and Israel will be rewarded (Dan 12:2-3).

Those Israelites living on earth who qualify for entrance into the kingdom are brought into the land promised to their fathers and fulfill extended passages of prophecy relating to the regathering, revival, and restoration of the nation Israel such as Isaiah 25:9-10; 27:12-13; 61:3—62:12; 65:18—66:28; Jeremiah 23:1-40; 31:1-40; 33:1-26; Ezekiel 33:21—37:28; 40:1—48:35; Daniel 2:44-45; 7:9-27; Zechariah 13:8-9; Romans 11:26; Revelation 20:4. possible a world in which all people at least outwardly profess to follow the Savior, and civilization as a whole attains an unusually high standard of morality and spirituality. Only at the end of the millennium when Satan is again loosed is there rebellion against Christ which results in judgment upon those who join hands with Satan (Rev 20:7-10).

Relation of the second advent to the tribulation period. The second coming clearly marks the end of the tribulation. All millennial views agree that this is the case, although the postmillennial theory associates the coming of Christ with the closing period of trouble in the millennium rather than a period of tribulation before the millennium. At the second coming of Christ the tribulation comes to abrupt close and sin is judged.

Relation of the second advent to the rapture. As indicated in a previous discussion, the pretribulation concept of the rapture places the translation of the saints more than seven years before the second advent. While both are a “coming” of the Lord, at the rapture Christ comes only to the air to remove the saints from the earth and take them back to heaven, while at the second advent Christ comes to the earth, His feet touch the Mount of Olives (Zech 14:4), and He assumes His proper role as King over the whole world (Zech 14:9). As indicated in previous discussion, the rapture of the church and the second advent to the earth are different events distinguished by many important characteristics.

The second advent in relation to the millennium. As indicated plainly in Revelation 19—20 the millennium immediately follows the second advent according to the premillennial interpretation. The postmillennial view places the second advent after the millennium and the amillennial view denies that the millennium follows. If the many passages cited concerning the second coming and the kingdom on earth are understood in their normal meaning, it teaches unmistakably a kingdom on earth following the second advent, the duration of which is stated in Revelation 20 to be one thousand years. Just as the first coming of Christ was literal, personal, and bodily and was followed by the present age, so the second coming of Christ will be followed by the millennium kingdom. The analogy of this first coming as well as the description of His second coming demands a personal and literal return of Christ. The various judgments, His manifested glory, the resurrections related to the second advent and many other factors combine to require such an interpretation. Few events of the Scripture are given more accurate presentation and are more clearly described by preceding and succeeding events than the second coming of Christ. In view of this obvious act, it is unnecessary that any form of interpretation should be adopted which would explain away that which is so plainly taught in the prophetic Word.

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Chapter 4

The Millennial Kingdom and the Eternal State

Major Features of the Millennial Kingdom

An earthly kingdom. The premillennial interpretation of the reign of Christ holds that He will reign on earth for one thousand years after His second advent. This is in contrast to the amillennial view which identifies the millennium with the present church age or the intermediate state, and the postmillennial view which views the kingdom as also in the present age and climaxing with the second advent. If the premillennial interpretation is correct and we can understand the Scriptures relating to this kingdom in their normal literal sense, a panorama is unfolded in both the Old and New Testaments which gives us many details of this reign of Christ on earth. Its general characteristics are unfolded in such passages as Isaiah 2:1-4; Isaiah 11; Psalm 72; Jeremiah 23:5-8; 31:31-40; Ezekiel 37; Daniel 2:44-45; 7:13-14; Micah 4:1-8; 5:2-5; Zechariah 14. The outstanding New Testament passage is Revelation 20.

Christ as supreme Ruler of the millennial kingdom. According to Psalm 2:6, God will fulfill His purpose of setting His Son on the throne over the earth, "Yet I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." As king over all the earth, Christ will fulfill hundreds of prophecies that anticipate such a situation.

The Scriptures present Christ in His first coming as a king (Luke 1:32-33; Matt 1:1; 21:1-11). It was in His offer to Israel as their king that He was rejected (Mark 15:12-13; Luke 19:14). Even His cross bore the inscription that He was the King of the Jews (Matt 27:37). When He returns to the earth in His second coming, He obviously will be coming as King (Rev 19:16) and will fulfill the promise given to David that of his seed would come one who would reign on the throne forever (2 Sam 7:16; Ps 89:20-37; Isa 11:1-9; Jer 23:5-6; 33:14-26).

The evidence in support of the concept that Christ will reign on earth is so abundant that only by wholesale spiritualization can these passages be construed to mean anything other than their ordinary meaning. The characteristics of the reign of Christ are plainly set forth in many passages, such as Isaiah 11, and the New Testament confirms the literal interpretation. The announcement to Mary, for instance, concerning the birth of Christ plainly interprets these prophecies in their literal sense. In Luke 1:32-33 the angel announced the birth to Mary in these words: "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end." All of the references previously cited in support of the earthly rule of Christ likewise are proof texts for the fact that Christ will reign over the earth. Associated with Him in His reign will be resurrected saints of all ages, some of whom, like David, will have a particular rule (Isa 55:3-4; Jer 30:9; 33:15-17; Ezek 34:23-24; 37:24-25; Hos 3:5; Amos 9:11). The church likewise will reign with Christ as will also all the tribulation saints who have been martyred (2 Tim 2:12; Rev 20:4-6). Numerous other passages confirm this concept of Christ's reigning assisted by other rulers, some of whom may be resurrected saints (Isa 32:1; Ezek 45:8-9; Matt 19:28; Luke 19:12-27).

Principal features of the political government of the millennium. It was God's original intent in creating Adam that he should rule the earth. Due to the fall, this responsibility was transferred to Christ who as the last Adam will accomplish that in which Adam failed.

The rule of Christ on earth will be an absolute one characterized as a rule of a rod of iron with immediate judgment on any who oppose Him. (Ps 2:9; 72:9-11; Isa 11:4; Rev 19:15). A prominent feature of the government will be perfect justice in

contrast to the inequities which often exist in political rules today. The meek and the poor will have equity in that day (Isa 11:3-5) and the wicked are warned of immediate judgment (Ps 2:10-12).

The political judgment of Christ will be principally directed to those who survive the tribulation and enter the millennium in their natural bodies both of Israel and of the Gentiles. The sheep of Matthew 25:31-46 and the godly remnant of Israel left after the rebels are purged out (Ezek 20:33-38) will comprise the earthly citizens of the millennium. There is evidence that they will rapidly multiply and before the end of the thousand years will be able to fill the earth with renewed population. These who enter the millennium are also anticipated in the parables of the wheat and the tares (Matt 13:30-31) and the good fish of the parable in Matthew 13:49-50. In this political government Israel will have a prominent place, and numerous passages relate to this in the Scripture (Isa 9:6-7; 12:1-6; Jer 23:5; Mic 4:1-8, etc.)¹ Many passages likewise refer to Christ's rule over the entire earth of which Zechariah 14:9 may be taken as representative. Gentiles, although in a subordinate role in relation to Israel, will nevertheless be greatly blessed in the millennium and share in the prosperity of the period.

Spiritual characteristics of the millennium. While the millennial kingdom is primarily a political rule, because of the unusual characteristics of the kingdom there is much to foster and promote spiritual life during this period. The amillennial objection to a literal kingdom on the ground that it is primarily moral and spiritual is beside the point. Premillenarians agree that there is much evidence of spiritual blessing and righteousness in this period, and this is derived from the fact that the kingdom is governed by Christ.

The fact that the glorified Christ is in the earthly scene and is visible to those in the millennium is unquestionably an important factor in the spiritual life of the period. As is anticipated in Jeremiah 31:34, everyone will have the evidence before him that Christ is indeed the Son of God and all that the Scriptures claim of Him. Missionary effort will be unnecessary for the knowledge of the Lord will be universal as Isaiah says, "For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Jehovah, as the waters cover the sea." (Isa 11:9). Christ as the world ruler of the millennial kingdom will be the object of worship, and the universal instruction in Biblical truth as well as the many demonstrations of divine power and the abundant ministry of the Holy Spirit will foster a spiritual life on a world-wide scale unprecedented in the history of the world.

The millennium will be a period which will feature personal righteousness as well as national righteousness in keeping with Solomon's prediction: "In his days shall the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace, till the moon be no more." (Ps 72:7). The righteous rule of Christ Himself is described in specific terms in Isaiah 11:3-5. The absence of war and universal peace (Ps 72:7; Isa 2:4) will provide the context in which spiritual life will flourish. The praise of the Lord and the joy which will attend the blessings of that period are described in Isaiah 12:3-4 and Isaiah 61:3-7. In addition to the presence of Christ the power of the Spirit will tend to foster and promote a deep spiritual life (Isa 32:15; 44:3; Ezek 39:29; Joel 2:28-29).

Although difference of opinion has existed concerning the exposition of Ezekiel 40:1—46:24, which describes temple worship and sacrifices in the millennial scene, whether this should be interpreted literally as many premillenarians do or symbolically, in either case it supports the concept of a deep spiritual life in the millennial kingdom.² Taken as a whole the millennial kingdom will be characterized by righteousness, joy, and peace on a world-wide scale similar to that which was enjoyed by the early church.

Economic, social, and physical aspects of the millennium. Many prophecies combine to give other aspects of the millennial kingdom. Because of the righteous rule of Christ and the efficient political government, there will be justice for individuals and peace among nations. Physical and financial prosperity will characterize the period as the curse laid upon the earth because of Adam's sin seems to be life (Isa 35:1-2; cf. Isa 30:23-24; 35:7). Poverty and lack of necessary physical things will be reduced to a minimum in an era of prosperity such as the world has never known (Jer 31:12; Ezek 34:25-27; Joel 2:21-27; Amos 9:13-14).

The blessings of the millennium will even extend to the human body. Indications are that disease will be at a minimum and physical health the normal situation (Isa 29:18; 33:24; 35:5-6; 61:1-3; 65:20). The world population which will be small at the beginning of the millennium due to devastating judgments of the tribulation and purging judgments of the second

coming of Christ will be supplanted by a rapidly growing population. Multiplied births will characterize both Israel and the Gentiles (Isa 30:19-20; Ezek 47:22).

Important changes will also occur on the face of the earth at the beginning of the millennium such as the division of the Mount of Olives (Zech 14:3-8). Jerusalem is seemingly elevated to a high plateau (Zech 14:10) and the rest of the land will be depressed.³ These changes in typography are related also to the division of the land pictured in Ezekiel 48:1-27; 45:4-19.⁴

The multiplied details of every aspect of life relating to the millennium makes untenable the efforts to spiritualize all these Scriptures and make them conform to the present age. The description of this period is so graphically different in all of its aspects that it demands a literal fulfillment in the period following the second coming of Christ. The millennial kingdom will be the crowning work of Christ prior to the eternal state.

The Close of the Millennium

The thousand-year reign of Christ will close, according to Revelation 20:7-9, with a rebellion against Christ as God and King. This will be occasioned by the loosing of Satan who has been bound throughout the millennial kingdom and who upon his release immediately prompts many on earth to rebel against Christ. Those who are deceived in this way have been born during the millennium and, while forced by circumstance to make an outward profession of faith in Christ, nevertheless reveal their true state of unbelief as soon as opportunity arises. Those who rebel, led by Satan, encompass the city of Jerusalem in an attempt to take it by force and according to Revelation 20:7-9 are destroyed by fire which comes from heaven. With the destruction of the army, Satan himself is cast into the lake of fire (Rev 20:10) where the beast and the false prophet were cast a thousand years before. The millennial kingdom, the most ideal state imaginable for man apart from the eternal state itself, thus closes with another graphic demonstration of the wickedness of the human heart even under such ideal circumstances and forever shuts the mouths of any who would question God's justice in judging the world.

The Judgment of the Great White Throne

The vivid description of the final judgment of the dead follows in Revelation 20:11-15. The implication of this passage is that the judgment concerns itself only with the wicked dead although this is not stated explicitly. The great white throne is pictured as being in space, and both earth and heaven flee away and apparently are dissolved. Before this throne, the dead are brought, raised from the dead, and then are judged by their works. Whoever was not found in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire. While there has been some debate as to the exact character of the book of life, there can be little question that at this point the absence of their names in the book of life is a clear indication that they are not saved. On this basis they are cast into the lake of fire to join Satan and the beast and the false prophet. The tragic fact of this judgment is that none of these cast into the lake of fire needed to have this destiny. Christ had died for every one of them, and their passage into this place of unending torment is a judgment which God Himself, although unwilling that any should perish, is forced to exact by His own justice and their failure to appropriate the grace of God.

The New Heaven and the New Earth

Revelation 21-22 presents the glorious picture of the eternal state following the millennial kingdom. In Revelation 21:1-8, the introductory passage states the main features of this period. The old heaven and earth have been dissolved and a new heaven and a new earth created in which circumstances are radically different than in our present earth as indicated by the cryptic statement "the sea is no more." The new heaven and the new earth are seen as the resting place of the holy city, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven and is described as a bride adorned for her husband. In this new blessed estate God will be in fellowship with His people and present in the world, sorrow will be no more, evil and unbelief will be excluded, and all will be able to partake freely of the blessings which God will shower upon them.

The Heavenly Jerusalem

Principle feature of the new heaven and the new earth is the heavenly Jerusalem described as coming down from God in Revelation 21:2. Details are furnished concerning this city, beginning in Revelation 21:9. Difference of opinion has existed as to whether the new Jerusalem thus described refers to the millennial period or the eternal state. Many considerations seem to indicate that the description given here is that of the heavenly Jerusalem after the millennium has concluded. The city is described as it will appear in the eternal state.

It is not impossible, however, that the heavenly Jerusalem was in existence before this period, as it is not said to be created at this time. The new heavens and new earth are said to be created, but the new Jerusalem comes down from heaven. Some believe, therefore, that the heavenly Jerusalem will be a satellite city throughout the millennial reign of Christ and in this city resurrected and translated saints will dwell. By contrast, those in their natural bodies will live on the millennial earth itself. While there is no clear Scripture which supports this concept and it must be held merely as an inference, it would solve a number of problems incident to the relationship of resurrected and translated beings to those still in their natural bodies who will conduct themselves in a normal way on the earth. Undoubtedly if this is the case, those in the heavenly Jerusalem will be able to commute to the millennial earth throughout the thousand-year reign of Christ and participate in its activities. Foundations of the wall have the names of the twelve apostles which would relate the church to this city. Angels guarding the gates make clear that the holy angels will also participate in the city.

Most graphic dimension is that of the size of the city which measures 1,342 miles on each of its four sides and is a like dimension in height. Some understand that the city is in the form of a cube, others in the form of a pyramid, with other variations which combine these various concepts. The foundations of the city are revealed to be garnished with precious stones, reflecting every color of the rainbow, with the street of the city being transparent gold and the gates of the wall pearls.

The most important feature of the city is the fact that there is no temple in it, for God Himself is going to dwell in the city. Likewise there is no darkness and no need of artificial light, for the glory of the Lamb will illuminate the whole city, and eternity will be one continuous day. In chapter 22 a major feature is a pure river which comes from the throne of God. Also described is the tree of life whose fruit ministers to those who live in the eternal state. The leaves of the tree will be for the health of the Gentiles. This does not imply sickness, but rather the well-being of those who partake of it. The servants of the Lord are pictured serving God in these glorious surroundings and continuing forever to enjoy the presence of the Lord.

It is in this eternal state that the promise of 1 Corinthians 15:24 is fulfilled, when a conquered world is presented to the Godhead by Christ. This must not be construed as ending the role of Christ as King, but rather ending its temporal phase and beginning its eternal characteristics. With the introduction of the eternal state the revelation of Scripture comes to its close and the unending day of the glorious eternal state begins.

With the close of the prophetic narrative, the Biblical revelation of Jesus Christ also comes to its conclusion. In the beginning of eternity, all that was anticipated in the first and second comings of Christ is fulfilled, and Christ is honored as King of kings and Lord of lords. The eternity which stretches beyond the horizon of Scriptural revelation is one of unspeakable bliss for the saints and unending joy in the presence of God. In the center of the service and worship of the saints will be Jesus Christ, "the same yesterday, today, and for ever." To this eternal destiny every believing heart turns in anticipation and joyous expectation.

¹ Cf. Walvoord, *Millennial Kingdom*, pp. 303-4.

² For further discussion see Walvoord, *ibid.*, pp. 309-15.

³ Charles Feinberg, *God Remembers*, pp. 257-58.

⁴ Merrill F. Unger, "The Temple Vision of Ezekiel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 105:427-28, October, 1948.

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