

Amillennialism

by

Prof. Robert B. Strimple

I. Christ: The Theme of O.T. Prophecy.

A. Premillennial's Literal Hermeneutic: Dispensational premillennialists regard the as yet unfulfilled OT prophesies given to Israel under the old covenant as having a literal fulfillment in the millennium. This will entail a return to the *Old Covenant, including:*

1. Jerusalem as capital city of the kingdom.
2. The temple rebuilt.
3. A reestablished priesthood.
4. Animal sacrifices again offered.
5. Christ entering the temple each Sabbath by the eastern gate while the priests offer sacrifices (Ez 46).
6. Observation of dietary laws.
7. Circumcision (Ez 44:23, 9).

B. Is Such A Literal Hermeneutic The Correct One?

1. *All Evangelicals Agree* that the Old Testament sacrifices, feasts, and ceremonies were "*teaching tools* pointing forward to the work of Christ" (86)
2. *Why, Then, May Not* the promised land, Jerusalem, the temple, and the nation of Israel have a like significance, pointing the way toward the new covenant?
3. *Typological Interpretation Does Not Deny The Importance Of The Types*: The types do not, themselves, lack reality. Yet their relation to the NT is one of shadow/reality. Once the reality has come to pass in its fullness, the shadow passes away.

C. How Does The NT Interpret These OT *Figures*? Answer: *Typologically*

1. *Christ is the True Israel, as are those who are in Him.*
 - a. *Isaiah's Servant Songs have a Double Referent* that has long baffled Jewish commentators. On the one hand, they refer to

Israel, God's chosen one and servant (41:8-9; 44:1-2, 21; 45:4; 49:3). On the other, they seem also to refer to some individual (42:1-4). *These prophecies are interpreted by the NT as referring to Christ* (Mt 8:17 and Acts 8:30-35).

b. *Matthew (2:15) sees a Double Referent in Hosea 11:1 ("Out of Egypt I called my son").*

c. *Paul identifies Christ, not Physical Israel, as Abraham's Seed* (Gal 3:16). Gal 3:7 and Rom 4:11, 16, moreover, identify the *church* as Abraham's offspring.

d. *Henceforth, we who are in Christ are the True Israel:* Gal 3:26-29, Rom 2:28-29, and Phil 3:3.

e. *The Old Covenant is obsolete, having been Superseded by the New:* Heb 8:8-12 identifies the new covenant with Israel (Jer 31:33-34) with the covenant instituted by Christ with the church. Most importantly, Heb 8:13 declares the old covenant obsolete and passing away. *This makes impossible the dispensational view of Ez 40-48 as a reinstatement of temple sacrifice.*

f. *UPSHOT: The OT did not see how its own prophecies were to be fulfilled - indeed, it could not prior to Christ. The NT authors were able to interpret the OT in the light of His coming of the new covenant that He instituted. So should we.*

2. *The Land Of Promise a Type Of a New Heaven and Earth.*

a. *Literalism would dictate that the Jews were promised Canaan Only:* Gen 17:8.

b. *The NT views this promise as involving The World, Even The Universe:* Rom 4:13, Heb 11:9-10, 13-16, and 2 Pet 3:3.

c. *UPSHOT: Amillennialism does ignore prophecies regarding the restoration and renewal of Israel. But it places them in the context of the new heaven and earth (Is 65:17; 66:22; 2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1) and a final redemption that is cosmic in scope.*

3. *The Holy City a type of the Presence Of God Himself.*

a. Heb 12:18-24, Gal 4:25-26, and Rev 14:1 (cf. Rev 4:1-6).

b. *The Distinction, "Earthly vs. Heavenly," is that of "Copy vs.*

Real" (cf. Heb 9:23-24).

c. *Spiritual Realities are as Real as The Types to which they are Compared:* To refer the OT types to their ultimate counterparts is not to engage in "spiritualizing" or "allegorical" exegesis that somehow minimizes their significance.

d. *What is the Reformation Principle of the Literal Interpretation of Scripture?* It is interpreting Scripture in the light of Scripture.

e. *This is precisely the sort of Exegesis in which the NT writers Engage.* They interpret the elements of the old covenant in the light of the new (*progressive revelation*). So should we.

f. The prophecies of Is 2:2-4 and Micah 4:1-3 about "many peoples" from "all nations" streaming to Jerusalem are being fulfilled *now* as men and women of every tribe on the face of the earth call upon the name of Zion's King and become citizens of 'the Jerusalem that is above.'" (93)

4. *The Kingdom of David is seen by the NT as a Type of a Present and Eternal (not Future and Provisional) Kingdom.*

a. Peter sees *God's promise to David* as already having been fulfilled: 2 Sam 7:16 and Acts 2:30-31.

b. James sees the restoration of David's throne, and its *Broad Scope*, as having *Already Been Fulfilled*: Amos 9:11-12 and Acts 15:13-21.

c. If it were not James who has said this, Dispensationalists would make the charge that this is a Dangerous "Spiritualizing" of OT Prophecy.

5. *The Temple of God a Type of Christ.*

a. The prophets speak of *Future worship of God in Terms of the Temple*.

b. Yet Christ identifies *Himself* as the Temple: Mt 12:6, Jn 2:19-22, Jn 4:10, 14 (cf. Ez 47:1), and Rev 21:22.

c. UPSHOT: Prophecy requires no Future, Literal Rebuilt Temple.

II. *The Second Coming of Christ: The Grand Finale of Redemptive History.*

A. The OT does not teach a *Future Millennial Kingdom*.

B. The NT goes even Farther, *ruling out* a Millennial Kingdom. Why? *The End Time Events will happen all at once*.

1. The Concurrence of these Events.

2. Dispensationalism artificially separates these events in order to fit in a Millennium.

C. What the Scriptures teach.

1. A *Single* Resurrection of the Just and Unjust: Jn 5:28-29, Acts 24:15. References to the resurrection of the just (Lk 14:14, 20:14, Phil 3:11 and 1 Thess 4:16) have been taken to *imply* two resurrections. But nowhere in Scripture, except Rev 20:4-6, are two resurrections mentioned. Amillennialists argue that the "first resurrection" is a *metaphor for something other than physical resurrection*, and that we must abide by the clear teaching of the other passages that there is *one* resurrection.

2. One return of Christ, one judgment.

2 Thess 1:5-10 speaks of *final, eternal* punishment of the wicked and simultaneous relief given the saints, *both occurring at Christ's return*. Hence, *Christ's coming for his saints* (the rapture), *and his coming in judgment upon the rest of the world*, are *one and the same event*.

3. The Resurrection/Glorification of the body, judgment, and renewal of all creation as *Simultaneous* Events (no intervening Millennium).

a. Rom 8:17-23 gives no hint of a 1000+ year gap between the saints' resurrection and the final restoration of all things.

b. 2 Pet 3:3-14 identifies *Christ's coming* (4, 10), *the judgment* ("day of the Lord" in vv. 7 and 10-12), and *the renewal of creation* (13) as contemporaneous events.

c. 1 Cor 15:22-26 indicates the same.

III. Two Passages Considered Crucial by Millennialists.

A. Romans 11 (esp. v. 26: "And so all Israel will be saved").

1. *Even if* a Future Conversion of Israel is Predicted, this is not proof of Premillennialism.

2. Nowhere in Rom 9-11 does Paul speak of a Return of the Jews to their land or an earthly reign of Christ from Jerusalem.

3. But does Paul even predict a Future Conversion of national Israel?

a. The context of Rom 9-11: Paul is wrestling with the issue of how the Messiah, foreseen in the OT as a great blessing to the *Jews*, could have been rejected by them.

b. Rom 9:1-5 Acknowledges that Israel was chosen by God and possessed the highest spiritual blessings.

c. Rom 9:6-7 rejects the false implication that God has been untrue to His Purpose for Israel. His explanation: *not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.*

d. Rom 9:8-10:21: There follows a series of illustrations that "mere physical descent from Abraham did not guarantee the possession of the blessings promised to Abraham."

(1) Ishmael (9:8-9)

(2) Esau (9:10-18)

(3) In 9:24-26, Paul recalls that God told Hosea that He would *choose* others who were not his people to be "my people." They would be called "sons of the living God." (Hosea 2:23, 1:10)

(4) In 9:27-29 he cites Isaiah 29:16 and 45:9 as evidence that *not* all of Israel would be saved, but only a remnant.

(5) In 10:19 he cites Deut 32:21 as evidence that God would make Israel envious "by those who are not a nation."

(6) In 10:20-21 he cites Is 65:1-2 in defense of God's present choice of the Gentiles.

e. Rom 11:1-10 reaffirms that God has *not* rejected His People: A believing remnant remains.

(1) Paul cites himself as an example of a believing Jew (11:1).

(2) Israel's situation is no different than in Elijah's day when a remnant was chosen.

(3) UPSHOT: God has been true to His purpose in election, *for*

election is not coextensive with the whole nation. (Rom 11:7)

f. Rom 11:11, Traditionally viewed as a turning point in Paul's Argument, is not.

(1) Prior to 11:11, Paul stated that God's rejection of the Jews is not *total*. After 11:11 he seems to say that neither is it *final*. Rom 11:12, 15, 25-26 foresee widespread conversion of Jews.

(2) Yet this conversion of Jews is not future - *it is contemporaneous with that of the Gentiles, and will be to the end.*

(a) "Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may *now* receive mercy *as a result of God's mercy to you.*" (11:31)

(b) I.e., Paul conceives of the Jews' conversion occurring *in the present* as a result of the Gentiles' conversion, which incites them to envy. Cf. 10:19.

(c) While this did not happen in Paul's day, the process of Gentile conversion and Jewish response will continue until "the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved." (11:25-26)

(3) Conclusion: When Paul talks about the conversion of Israel, he is not Speaking of a Future Conversion After that of the Gentiles, but a *Present One in Response* to the Gentiles.

B. Rev 20:1-10.

1. Preliminary Caveats.

a. Amillennialists have a High View of Scripture: They "agree that if a truth is taught with unmistakable clarity in Scripture, it is to be believed - even if it is taught in just one verse." (119)

b. The Question is: Is the millennium clearly taught in this passage?

c. Amillennialism claims a Literal interpretation: "Amillennialists want to interpret Revelation 20 in a way that is consistent with the rest of the Scriptures," and in so doing follow the principle that

"the less clear, more difficult portions of the Bible are to be interpreted in the light of the more clear portions, the poetry in the light of the prose, the figurative in the light of the literal." (119)

2. The Exegesis of the Passage.

a. Nothing in it gives "Any hint that it is to be connected with those OT prophecies that speak of a coming era of national glory for Israel."

b. The Chronology of Rev 19 and 20 is unclear.

(1) Rev 19 seems to bring *us down to the end of the age*, the second coming of Christ, the final battle, and judgment on the forces of evil.

(2) Is it possible that Rev 20 *takes us back to the first coming of Christ and the Beginning of the Church Age?*

(3) Such Discontinuous Chronology occurs elsewhere. Rev 11:18 brings us to the end of the age ("the time has come for judging the dead"), and 12:1 takes us back to its beginning with its figurative account of the birth of Christ and his ascension.

c. Rev 20:1-10 has *two* visions linked by the phrase "*A Thousand Years.*"

(1) The Scene of the One (20:1-3, 7-10) is *Earth*: The vision begins: "And I saw an angel *coming down* out of heaven." It relates Satan's binding and casting into the Abyss for 1,000 years "to keep him from deceiving the nations." After the 1,000 years he is released, gathers his forces for a final showdown, and is defeated by fire falling from heaven.

(2) The Scene of the Other (20:4-6) is *Heaven*: It, too, begins, "And I saw" - martyred souls reigning on thrones with Christ. *This recalls* John's earlier vision of Christ on his *heavenly* throne (Rev 4-5) and his promise, "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne." (Rev 3:21)

(3) UPSHOT: Christ's Millennial reign with the Saints is a *Heavenly Reign*.

d. Satan's binding in Rev 20 is an Allusion to the events of Rev 12.

(1) Rev 12 describes a *restraint* placed on Satan at Christ's *First Coming*. Satan wanted to destroy the woman and her child, but could not. Accompanying these events was a heavenly battle in which Satan was cast down from heaven. Might Rev 20 be a recapitulation of his? In both places Satan is "cast down" by an angel or angels.

(2) The First Coming of Christ elsewhere described as a Decisive Victory that curtails Satan's activity.

(a) Matt. 12:28-29: Jesus described his own mission by a parable. He had come to *bind* (*deo* - same word as Rev 20:2) the strong man and carry off of what had been in his possession.

(b) John 12:31: "Now is the time for judgment on this world; *now the prince of this world will be driven out* (the same word, *ballo*, is used in Rev 20:3).

(c) cf. Col. 2:15, Heb. 2:14-15 and 1 John 3:8

(3) Evidence that Rev. 20:1 is a figurative representation of Christ's victory over Satan at the cross.

(a) At the cross Satan was bound - But Not Absolutely. Similarly, Rev. 20 says that Satan is bound, but adds: *that he might deceive the nations no longer*. The word, *ethnos* ("nations") was used by the Jews to designate the Gentiles. Hence, Rev 20 links Satan's binding with the arrival of salvation for the Gentiles in the present age.

(i) Jesus *did* commission the mission to the Gentiles (Acts 26:17-18).

(ii) *Our* struggle with evil powers (Eph 6:11-12) is not inconsistent with *their* being bound: Jude 6, 2 Pet 2:4, Rev 9:14 all speak of the fallen angels being bound, awaiting

punishment. But this does not mean that they are not active.

e. Revelation always refers to *the battle* (*ho polemos*): Rev 20:8, 16:14, 16, 19:19.

(1) The battle of Armageddon (Rev 16 and 19) is the battle of Gog and Magog (Rev 20).

(2) If Rev. 19 and 20 describe the same battle, then the events of Rev. 20:1-10 Recapitulate the Time Between Christ's Advents.

f. Who are the "Souls" reigning with Christ in Rev. 20:4?

(1) These "Souls" are not yet resurrected.

(a) "Soul" *Can* Mean "Person." If so, Then John's vision would be of Saints in their Resurrected State On The Earth. e.g., Acts 2:41.

(b) The context *does* not indicate this, however.

(i) The Intermediate state is indicated by the Contrast of *Soul* with *Body*.

(ii) The scene seems to be Heaven, Not Earth: the setting of Rev 20:4 appears to be that of Rev 4-5, and 20:4 appears to the fulfillment of Christ's promise in 3:21.

(iii) Throughout Revelation the throne of Christ and His People is *always* in Heaven: 1:4, 3:21, 4:5, 6:16, 7:9ff, 8:3, 12:5, 14:3, 16:17, 19:4-5, 20:11, 21:5, 22:1, 3

(c) What, then, is meant by "First Resurrection"?

(i) Strimple identifies it with the believer's Reception Into Heaven: "The first resurrection occurs when he or she departs this life and is immediately ushered into the presence of Christ to reign with him. The second resurrection will be bodily at Christ's second coming." (127)

(ii) Other Amillennialists identify it with Regeneration.

(a) 1 Jn 3:14, Eph 2:4-6, and Col 2:13 speak of

Christians as already having "come to life" in Christ.

(b) Eph 2:6, 1 Cor 3:21-22, and Col 3:1-2 speak of them as *already* spiritually enthroned with him in heaven.

g. What is the meaning of "1,000"?

(1) Most Amillennialists think that it symbolizes the completion of the age ("10" and "3" are numbers of perfection, 10³ the ultimate such symbol).

(2) Strimple thinks that it is used to encourage beleaguered Christians, stressing the *brevity* of their present suffering in relation to their glorious reign to come.

Author

Dr. Robert Strimple is Professor of Systematic Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Escondido, California. He was the founding dean, and the first president of Westminster in California.

This article appears on [The Mountain Retreat](#).