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## Eschatology and Missions

Don Fanning

*Liberty University*, [dfanning@liberty.edu](mailto:dfanning@liberty.edu)

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## Eschatology and Missions

The anticipation of a special intervention of God in time and history whether it was His First Coming or will be His Second Coming has had a significant effect on the worldview, lifestyle and ministry strategy of believers throughout history. Whatever our belief system of Eschatology, it will mold and guide our decisions and motivation for service, sacrifice and lifestyle. This chapter will search for this principle and conclude with a suggested biblical perspective to guide our lives until Jesus comes again.

Christians of every age have asked the same question as the disciples did: "Tell us, when shall these things be?" When theologians, prophets and missiologists evaluate the timeline of the Church, Matthew 24 is probably the most quoted and referred to passage in the Bible. Echoes from great preachers like A.B. Simpson have sounded through our century: "Let us bring back the King," meaning that through the completion of world evangelization we can "hasten the day of the Lord" (Jansen 1995:3).

Since the focus of Eschatology and Missions is based on the results of one's beliefs about the Second Coming there will not be an attempt to defend any one of the different beliefs concerning the Second Coming. Different views of Eschatology have motivated the mission efforts of the Church in different ways throughout history.

For clarity, the author's conviction is the Premillennial-PreTribulational view or the Dispensational view. Paul Enns describes this view in *The Moody Handbook of Theology*: Dispensational premillennialism can be identified through two basic features: (1) a distinction is made between God's program for Israel and His program for the church; (2) a consistently literal interpretation of the Scriptures is maintained. Dispensational premillennialists believe that the church will be raptured (1 Thess. 4:13-18) prior to the Tribulation period; God will judge unbelieving Gentiles and disobedient Israel during the Tribulation (Rev. 6-19). At the end of the Tribulation Christ will return with the church and establish the millennial kingdom on earth. Following the thousand-year reign, Satan will be freed once more, whereupon he and his followers will be cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:7-10). The eternal state will follow.

The church from the beginning was premillennial in belief. The *Didache* (c. a.d. 100), Clement of Rome (a.d. 96 or 97), the Shepherd of Hermas (a.d. 140-150), Ignatius of Antioch (a.d. 50-115?), Papias (a.d. 80-163), Justin Martyr (b. c. a.d. 100), Irenaeus (d. a.d. 200), Tertullian (a.d. 150-225), and other sources indicate that the early church believed in the return of Jesus Christ to personally establish His earthly kingdom (Enns, 1989, p. 389).

Regardless of one's view from among several proposed<sup>1</sup>, the missional motivation and resulting strategy for accomplishing the mandated task before the Second Coming event will vary. This study will give an understanding as to why certain mission groups set different priorities.

Providentially, God has allowed six recognized schools of eschatology to develop over the centuries. This has resulted in real differences in how people live their lives. In many ways these views can serve the same objective. Fred Hutchison suggests, "A great army requires many kinds of soldiers. Christians from each of the eschatological schools have something to teach us and something to contribute to the struggle" (Hutchison, 2006).

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<sup>1</sup> Amillennial, Post-millennial, Preterit, Kingdom Now, or any number of modifications of these views.

Modern missions began in the post-Reformation era when post-millennialism was the worldview. This post-millennialism perspective of a Christian world under the British Empire was a Utopian dream. It was the worldview of the Anglican or English Church and all its early missionaries. Post-millennialism coincided with the British Colonialism at the peak of their power. Could the same thing happen to the American Church? Apparently this has already started to happen.

Extreme patriotism in a foreign policy is an intoxicating thing. Gavin Finley sees the development of the Dominion Theology, and I would add the Kingdom Now Theology, as examples of this passion. These will be explained later in the paper. During the years of the British Colonial Empire, the whole British church-state system believed that they were on the threshold of their millennial dream. "They felt that they were on the verge of wrapping things up worldwide for 'God and King'. Why not just bundle up the entire planet? Then the Archbishop of Canterbury could hand the world over to Christ when He came back. Jesus could make a special guest appearance at Canterbury Cathedral to hand out the awards to the British king and his church leaders" (Finley, n.a.).

One of the reasons eschatology has so much attraction is the belief that God will reveal His plans before hand. "Eschatology is the result of the historical objective revelation to the Jewish prophets of the will of God concerning the end of history. Amos believed the Lord would do nothing without revealing 'his secrets unto his servants the prophets' (Amos 3:7)" (Cairns, 1958, p. 136). Thus His church seeks to act on how they interpret what He has revealed to be the future events until the end of time and the beginning of the eternal state.

### **Importance of Second Coming on the mission of the Church**

There can be little doubt about the importance in the NT teachings concerning the Second Coming of Christ. It is referred to 300 times in the NT, which is once every 5 verses. Paul made 50 references to the Second Coming. Statistically this becomes 8 times more references to the Second Coming than to the First Coming. Whole books are devoted to Second Coming revelations (1 & 2 Thessalonians and Revelation), and whole chapters are dedicated to this subject (Matt 24-25; Mark 13; Luke 21). It was evidently intended to be a major motivation in the Christian's worldview.

Certain Christian beliefs provide special motivation to perpetuate encouragement. Anticipation of and preparation for the Second Coming of Christ is one such belief. Van Rheenen is convinced that when believers perceive their place in history anticipating the Second Coming of Christ their worldview changes. He wrote, "The reality that this world is temporary - that the Christians' real identity is in heaven -- helps disciples of Christ to understand their place in the world and propels them to speak of eternal realities... Belief in the temporary nature of this world and the working of the Holy Spirit are thus two beliefs foundational to germinal growth" (Van Rheenen, 1996, p. 149).

Philip Schaff wrote that the prominent premillennialism, which is "the most striking point in the eschatology of the ante-Nicene Age" (pre 325 AD) was "widely current opinion" of distinguished teachers from Papias to Lactantius (Philip Schaff 1996: p. 614) Historian Earle Cairns wrote, "Any fair consideration of the writings of the Church Fathers in the various English editions of their writings ... can only lead to the conclusion that the ante-Nicene church looked for the return of the Lord as a premillennial hope which could take place any time. It was an encouragement in persecution as it had been to the church in Thessalonica (1 Thess 5:1-11)

and a doctrine to be opposed to the denial by the Gnostics of a literal resurrection and an earthly kingdom during the millennium” (Cairns, 1958, pp. 138, 139).

The Great Commission as revealed in Matt 28:18-20 is the mandate for all believers and the churches until “the **end** [*sunteleia*, “completion, consummation”] of the age,” which terminates with the Second Coming of Christ. This defines the time limit for the completion of the Church’s mission. The task of making disciples of every “**nation**” [*ethnos*, “a multitude of individuals of the same nature or genus,” from which we have the English word “ethnic”] is to be accomplished before Jesus returns.

Thus the Church’s priority must be the planting of disciples within every ethnic people group on earth before Jesus comes the second time. If the Bible has authority in our lives, this was to be our chief objective in life, regardless of how we may feel about other ethnic groups or places where they may live or any personal ambitions we would seek. Excuses for not making this the number one priority in our church’s global strategy will find little response when we stand before our Lord and He asks us to give account for making disciples of every ethnic group on earth in our generation.

What I have just described is the basic worldview or paradigm of the NT Christian around which he/she is to develop his/her strategy for life. It is simple and specific. It must be noted that the Great Commission does not focus on winning everyone in any single people group to Christ as a priority, but rather the building of a group of disciples (plural) within every ethnic group in the world. To denigrate this priority to a minor aspect of personal or church life is to face an uncomfortable day when we all have to stand before the Lord Jesus to give an account for our part in the accomplishing of the Great Commission. This demands a high level of motivation, if the biblical worldview is to be given authority in our individual and corporate (church) lives.

This is a staggering fact. God has entrusted to people like us, redeemed sinners, the responsibility of carrying out the divine purpose in history. Why has God done it in this way? Is He not taking a great risk that His purpose will fail? It is now over nineteen hundred years, and the goal is not yet achieved. Why did God not do it Himself? Why did He not send hosts of angels whom He could trust to complete the tasks at once? Why has He committed it to us? We do not try to answer the question except to say that such is God's will. Here are the facts: God has entrusted this mission to us, and unless we do it, it will not get done (Ladd, 1999, p. 74).

### **Effect of anticipated Messianic First Coming on early disciples**

The Jews in Judea at the time of Christ’s birth had a future hope or eschatological anticipation of a coming Messiah who would elevate Israel to world domination and bring social justice (mixed with probable hopes of revenge). Historically, the Jews in the intertestamental period had recently led a remarkable revolt, the Maccabean Revolt, against the Seleucid ruler, Antiochus Epiphanes, in 160 BC. They had defeated the Greek army, which had dominated them for a 100 years previous. The Jewish autonomy lasted until 63 BC when the Roman general Pompey conquered Jerusalem subjecting Judea to Roman rule. The Jews anticipated a Messiah who would bring again the Jewish independence and world domination and global justice in the Messianic age.

There was an expectation for the coming Messiah, which was derived from Daniel’s prophecy. Studies of Daniel 9 suggest the conclusions that the 483 years of the 69 weeks of

Daniel's prophecy began with the issuance of Artaxerxes' decree to Nehemiah in 445 BC and ended during the year of the death of Christ, probably just before His death. Sir Robert Anderson's chronology (*The Coming Prince*, p. 128) calculated this period ending on Nisan 10, 32 AD. The precision is too remarkable to be coincidental. Could the magi have approximated the birth of the Messiah and identified the event with the phenomena of an unusual luminary body ("star") that motivated their trip from the modern Iran-area to Judah?

The Christological view, which finds the sixty-nine weeks of Daniel culminating in Christ, has been accepted by most conservative expositors. The fathers from the second to the fourth century abound in explanations which bring the culmination of the sixty-nine weeks to the period of Christ's public ministry and death. The most satisfactory solution of the Christological interpretation is that of Sir Robert Anderson, a view that fully honors the accuracy and authority of Daniel's revelation. His conclusions embrace the following points: (1) the seventy weeks of Daniel represent 490 years, divided into three parts: forty-nine years, four hundred and thirty-four years (following the first forty-nine years), and the last week of seven years. (2) There was only one decree ever issued for the rebuilding of Jerusalem—that given to Nehemiah and its date is 445 B.C., specifically the first of Nisan or March 14 of that year. (3) The city was actually rebuilt during the time of Nehemiah at the end of the prophesied desolations of Jerusalem. (4) The sixty-two weeks, or 434 years, immediately follow the first forty-nine years, and on the basis of a prophetic year of 360 days total 173,880 days, which would end April 6, A.D. 32—the probable date when Christ rode into Jerusalem in fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9 (Walvoord, 1944, pp. 34-35).

There were a few who were given the special confirmation of the Messiah's coming (shepherds, Simon, Mary and Joseph), which was followed by Jesus' trip to Egypt, then his family inconspicuously returned to Nazareth where He was sheltered for the next 30 years.

Suddenly Jesus went to John the Baptist where He was announced as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (Jn 1:29). John the Baptist twice declared that he did not know Jesus was the promised one (Jn 1:31, 33) though they were relatives. The Spirit had told John to watch for a sign of the "Spirit descending and remaining on" the One. John then declared, "I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God" (John 1:34). The day after His baptism Jesus returns nearby and John announces, "Look! This is the Lamb of God" (Jn 1:36)

Two of John's disciples began to follow Jesus. One of them, Andrew, immediately went to find his brother Simon and declared, "We have found the Messiah" (John 1:41-42). This declaration implied an anticipation of the Messiah's appearance. Another such declaration came out of Samaria, "I know that Messiah is coming" (John 4:25). At least this indicates there was an expectation of the Messiah's imminent appearance. How this expectation motivated their behavior is not evident in the Scriptures.

Sometime later Jesus asked His followers the question to make evident what everyone was thinking when He asked, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" (Matt 16:13). After four possible options were expressed none of which referred to the Messiah, showing the confusion of the general thinking of that day. Jesus asked the disciples, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter replied, "You are the Christ [Messiah], the Son of the living God" (Matt 16:15-16). Jesus declared that this was an immediate revelation to Peter, not his deduction from prophetic promises. Thus there does not appear to be a major anticipation or search for the Messiah, though they knew he was coming.

## Effects of Kingdom views during Jesus' final week of ministry

Before His death Jesus described “The day when the Son of man is revealed” (Luke 17:30) as a future event when He will return “in clouds with great power and glory” (Mk 13:26). This description parallels the OT description in Daniel’s vision where “one like a son of man” appears “with the clouds of heaven” to receive everlasting dominion from the Ancient of Days (Dan 7:13-14).

On the eve of Jesus’ crucifixion an argument broke out among His disciples in which their motivations for following Jesus were exposed. In Mark 10 Jesus had just spoken to the disciples about the suffering He would go through in Jerusalem, his death and resurrection (10:34). Sensing that the situation was coming to a climax and surely now He was going to manifest Himself to the world, two of His disciples approached Him privately about the position they would have in the new kingdom they thought He was about to establish. They humbly requested the two highest positions in the Messianic kingdom (v. 37). Jesus said they had no idea what they were asking, either the price to pay to rank this privilege or the immensity of what the kingdom entailed (v. 38).

When the remaining ten disciples heard that these two were trying to cut an insider deal with Jesus for special privileges in the kingdom, they “became indignant with James and John” (v. 41). Such anger is usually the response to losing something that one is coveting or expecting. Were they motivated to follow Jesus because of what they thought they would get a special position in the new kingdom He was surely going to establish on earth?

Jesus never denied such a kingdom would exist, but cuts to the core of their ambitions by describing the motivation He expected from His followers. He distinguished between the lust for power and authority, prohibiting it as a leadership practice (v. 42), and exalts the model of servant leadership, which He exhibited (10:43-45). In essence Jesus was correcting their eschatology and its resulting erroneous and selfish ambitions, which had motivated their critical reactions and attitudes towards each other.

In the final week of His life, Jesus told of His intent to make the offer of a salvation through a believing-grace to the Gentiles when he said, “I have other sheep [Gentiles] that do not come from this sheepfold [Israel]. I must bring them too, and they will listen to my voice...” (John 10:6). This verse implied an expansion of the Gospel that was to occur on a worldwide scale, but these Jewish disciples did not want to have any part of it, as evident in Acts 10.

Matthew relates that Jesus then told the leaders of Israel that “the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit” (21:43), a reference to a Gentile salvation offer. This struck against the anticipation of Jewish superiority and supremacy in the coming Church age that appeared to go unnoticed or reinterpreted according to their Jewish worldview, due to a lack of response or evident change of attitude on the part of His disciples. Apparently, their perspective of future events blinded them from seeing what Jesus was talking about.

As the threats of persecution and eminent death grew ever near, the disciples’ interest in a Messianic takeover consumed their thinking. They remained focused on what they calculated was going to be beneficial to them: what would be their kingdom position.

Matthew 24 begins with the question by the disciples, “Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” (Matt 24:3). Jesus then tells of the horrible things that will happen in this time periods before He returns to earth.

**Matt 24:1-14**

Considerable debate has resulted in different view of this passage. In the Dispensational views either the entire chapter describes the seven-year Tribulation Period, or the chapter is divided into two prophecies: one dealing with general characteristics of the Church Age (24:4-14) and the latter section (24:15-51) deals with the future Tribulation Period before the Second Advent. This division of Matt 24 (vs. 4-14 and vs. 15-51) is described by Walwood as general prophecies of the period preceding the “end” times and the description of the “end” times itself:

In the opening portion of Matthew 24, our Lord answered the questions which had been raised by His disciples concerning the end of the age and His own coming into His kingdom. In Matthew 24:4-14 He dealt first of all with general signs which would characterize the age as a whole. Then in Matthew 24:15-28 revelation was given of the particular signs of the great tribulation which would begin three and one-half years before His second coming (Walwood, 1972, p. 20).

There are two problems with this passage that encourage another interpretation rather than the simple reading of the text: (1) the problem of immanency, (Are there requirements before Jesus can come again?) and (2) the problem of the obligation on the Church to reach every people group, language and ethnic group with the Gospel (Does this mean that He will not return until this mission is accomplished?). This does not mean that everyone should be converted, but it does say that the gospel will be preached in every ethnolinguistic people group.

***First, The Problem of Immanency***

The first issue of immanency has a variety of definitions. There is no question that Jesus is going to return to earth just as He left (Acts 1:11, “... will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven”). The writer of Hebrews wrote, “Yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry” (10:37). However, there was a time gap implied in several parables, and the instructions that were given to Peter stating that he would be old when he died (John 21:18-19) thus it would not occur in his lifetime.

Immanency does not mean that there are no prophecies to fulfill before He returns, or tasks that must be accomplished before the Second Coming. Rather it is the real expectation that at any moment Jesus could interrupt everything, thus all believers should live “denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, ***looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ***” (Titus 2:11-13, emphasis added). This is an attitude of hope and a mindset of accountability that keeps us focused on our mission in life.

To say that “nothing” has to occur before Jesus comes again is not absolutely accurate. When asked “what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” (Matt 24:3) Jesus responded with a series of general events, many of which appear to be accelerating in our present history: deceivers, wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, legal battles and persecutions against Christians and lack of respect for the law (Matt 24:4-12). All of these take time to occur and then to reoccur getting worse and worse. Walwood makes a distinction in the prophecies in Matt 24:

Most expositors agree, however, that Matthew 24:4–14 is of different character and not necessarily signs of the end itself. A careful exegesis of this passage (Matt 24:4-14) will demonstrate that it deals with events which are not signs of the end, but only signs of progress. H. A. Ironside expresses a popular point of view that Matthew 24:4 are general

characteristics of the entire age, and that Matthew 24:9 emphasize the particular signs of the end of the age. This is an admissible interpretation as the two sections are separated by verse 8, which distinguishes the beginning of sorrows and those which follow the beginning. However, taken as a whole, while the order of the predicted events in Matthew 24:4 is climactic and increases in intensity and corresponds to the end of the age, the history of the last 1900 years clearly supports the view that all of these things have in large measure characterized the entire age even though these same characteristics may be present in intensified form as the age moves on to its conclusion. The interpretation will be followed here that Matthew 24:4 deals with *general signs*, that Matthew 24:15 are *specific signs*, and that Matthew 24:27 deals with the future second coming of Christ as described in greater detail in Revelation 19:11 (Walwood, 1971: p. 209).

### ***Secondly, The Great Commission to be accomplished***

Ironically one of most neglected aspects of the Second Coming is the expectation that the Church will fulfill the Great Commission before Jesus returns. Before giving specific prophecies concerning His Second Advent, Jesus declares that “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matt 24:14). A simple reading of the text means that the Church will finish the task of making the gospel available to every “nation” (Gk. *ethnos*, “ethnic group”). It is impressive how this clear statement gets put off, watered down or denied. The most common denial of the statement is to push this fulfillment into the next age or the Tribulation Period after the rapture, which quenches any serious effort to accomplish the task now.

The reader has surely heard, as has the writer, that the world must be entirely evangelized in this age and the task belongs to the Church. This view is prevalent even among many who do not hold that the whole world must be saved before Christ can return to the earth. Much of the error, if not the root of it, lies in a misinterpretation of Matt 24:14 ... This has consistently been applied to the Church by numbers of people. Such a wrong meaning of the verse can arise from but one thing: a failure to consider the context. The context reveals unmistakably that Israel is being spoken of. The time is the time of Jacob’s trouble or the Great Tribulation. It is then that Israel will be God’s Paul, multiplied thousands of times, to tell the story of the gospel of the kingdom to all the nations. Who these heralds are, is revealed to us in Revelation 7. They are 144,000 out of all the tribes of Israel. The result of their testimony is also set forth: the great unnumbered multitude from every kindred, tribe, tongue, and nation. When God wants world-wide missionaries, He will again take up Israel. They will be a host of Jonahs back on their right jobs. Note it as a Scriptural truth: whenever God wants things done on a national scale or desires a national testimony, He always chooses Israel (Feinberg 1936: 313).

Of course nowhere did Jesus say that the “whole world must be saved before Christ can return to the earth,” Jesus did say that the message must be proclaimed in every people group. Furthermore, nowhere in the Revelation does it say that the 144,000 Jewish converts will preach to all the “nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues” (7:9). That is totally supposition. However, never in the history of the Church are we closer to accomplishing this task than we are today. A closer look at Matt 24:14 will give a better perspective.



### ***Understanding Matt 24:14***

When the disciples asked, “when will these things be?” (24:3), Jesus gave a series of global signs that would become increasingly worse as the time approached and one objective that would be increasingly successful: the believers would preach the gospel of the kingdom “in all the world as a witness to all the nations” (24:14). As Ladd noted, “This verse is one of the most important in all the Word of God to ascertain the meaning and purpose in human history” (Ladd, 1974, p. 130). Ladd goes on to assert that the heavenly book which will expound the meaning of human history will be entitled *The Preparation for and the Extension of the Gospel among the Nations* (ibid., pp. 133-34). “This is both the meaning of history and the mission of the Church. To give ourselves whole-heartedly to anything else is to miss the essence of both!” (Russel 1994: 7).

Premillennialists differ as to whether the task of world evangelism will be accomplished before the millennium or before Christ returns prior to the Great Tribulation. Christ Himself said that the gospel of the kingdom will be preached among all nations, and then the end will come (Matt 24:14). Many evangelicals take this to mean that Christ cannot come until the task is finished. In this sense only the need to spread the gospel to all nations or people groups hinders the Lord’s return. They do not expect to be surprised by Christ’s return; they hope to facilitate it by obeying the missionary mandate (Pocock 1988:443).

If nothing else was ever spoken in Scriptures concerning the mission of the Church this should have been the passion of every believer regardless of his eschatological persuasion. Only the misapplication of some of the Dispensational views seems to quench the impact of these verses, particularly when it is seen as being accomplished by the 144,000! Most other prophetic views see this vision as the mission of the Church; however, some of their hermeneutics to arrive at this conclusion is suspect at best.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, the importance for the motivation from the evidence of prophecy is seen in Frank Jansen’s article *When Theology, Missiology and Futurology Clash*: “Most of the revivals in the last 150 years have each had eschatology as a major focus, if not as their main theme. Many organizations and whole denominations believe that this time is the end and that the advent of Christ’s return is imminent. In the past some have neglected their education or addressing the ills of society due to a sense of urgency to evangelize. Some have even borrowed huge amounts of money and mortgaged their homes to invest in evangelization for the purpose of bringing back the King” (Jansen, 1995, p. 3). Though such poor decisions are not wise, they indicate a high level of motivation to finish the task Jesus set forth for the Church.

However, Matthew 24:14 apparently did not make up a significant part of the priorities of these early disciples. For decades they remained in Jerusalem and did nothing to bring the Gentiles to faith. Jesus could not have been clearer that the Gentile world was His objective, but this vision was definitely not in their eschatology or ecclesiological framework. From their reaction over the first ten or twenty years (Acts 11:19; 15:19), apparently they did not catch their personal responsibility to take the gospel to the Gentiles until the immanent threats to Jerusalem in the 60’s.

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<sup>2</sup> An example of this would be making the “two witnesses” (Rev 11) a symbol of the Church’s witness to the world (Swete, p. 134; Plummer, p. 290).

Ralph Winter, head of the U.S. Center for World Mission, lamented: "For some reason, Christians often make little connection between discussion of prophecy and future events, and discussion of missions" (Winter, n.a., p. 1). Earlier, following the 1966 Congress on the Church's Worldwide Mission held in Wheaton, Illinois, Arthur Glasser had said it even clearer: "Books galore are being written on being delivered from the tribulation, but nothing significant on the relation between Christ's return and the Church's worldwide mission" Glasser, 1972, p. 48). Culbertson quotes Horance Fenton Jr. of the Latin American Mission and the framers of the Frankfurt Declaration in 1970, stating that they are in complete agreement the complete context of Matthew 24 has Jesus saying that "this prophesied preaching of the gospel would take place *before* His return, not after" (Culbertson, 2002)

The question that must be answered is whether Matthew 24:14 refers to the present mission of the Church or someone else in other period in time? The application of this verse is generally applied to one of the following three primary interpretations or a variant of them:

1. Jesus was referring to the first-century, pre-A.D. 70 evangelization of the known world (Preterist view).
2. Jesus was foretelling a brief period of world evangelization which will occur following the rapture of the Church (Premillennialist view).
3. Jesus as referring to the present over-all world-wide missionary activity of the Church (Premillennialist, Postmillennialist and Amillennialist view).

### ***Problem of the One-generation view***

Those who would agree that Jesus likely had in mind a time frame limited to one generation or less ("... **this generation** will not pass away until all these things take place," Matt 24:34) have three possible schools of interpretation from which to choose:

1. Preterist: The belief that Matthew 24:14 was fulfilled by first century of the generation of Christians in the period following Pentecost and before Jerusalem fell to Roman general Titus in 70 A.D. This view, which would see Matthew 24:14 and Matthew 28:19-20 strongly linked together, will be considered later. Wesley saw this fulfillment in the first-century where Paul asserted that the gospel "is already begun to be preached to the whole world" in Col 1:23 (Wesley, 1950, p. 744).
2. The belief of a within-one-generation fulfillment at the end of time, which fits into a dispensational understanding of the Scriptures, which asserts that Matthew 24:14 refers to events which will occur in the brief Tribulation period following the rapture of the Church. This is the completion-view that make the 144,000 the Tribulation evangelists that finish the task given to the Church. As might be expected, proponents of this point of view envelop Matthew 24:14 in the dramatic symbolism in the book of Revelation (Culbertson, 2002).

However, a third view is worth consideration:

3. The view that the "**generation**" (*genea*, "family, multitudes of a race, age of generations of a people," THAYER) refer to the nation of Israel, that is, that the generations of Israel will witness these events. Thus, Israel will be a participant in these signs and will not disappear before they are fulfilled.

### ***An exegesis of Matt 24:14***

Beyond a doubt the exceptional expansion of the gospel throughout the world in the past two-hundred years, and more exceptionally in the past fifty-years has exceeded anyone's

expectation. The number of unreached and unengaged people groups in the world is down to 1,600 significant people groups which SIL (Summer Institute of Linguistics, technical branch of the Wycliffe Bible Translators), CrossWorld, New Tribes Mission and other agencies are targeting to finish by 2025. This text is extremely relevant in contemporary mission strategy.

"...**gospel** of the kingdom"-(*evangelion* a technical term for *good news* about a victory from the battlefield, i.e., VICTORY IS WON!). The "good news" of "the **kingdom**" (*tes basileias*-“the kingdom power, authority or realm of a king”) describes how Christ has total authority now. Later Jesus would spend forty-days teaching them “about matters concerning the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3), which provoked a similar question as in Matt 24, “Lord, is this the time when you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?”(1:6). The Kingdom is the main theme of Jesus' teachings and the Apostle Paul’s teaching (Acts 8:12; 19:2; 20:25; 28:23,31) and runs like a scarlet tread through the entire New Testament (sometimes referring to the present participation in the kingdom: Col 1:3; 4:11; Rev 1:9), but mostly describing its completion in the future (Acts 14:22; 1 Cor 6:9-10; 15:24, 50; Gal 5:21; Eph 5:5; 2 Tim 4:1, 18; Heb 1:8; James 2:5; 2 Pet 1:11; Rev 12:10). Some of the references refer to the present and future kingdom aspects (1 Thess 2:12; 2 Thess 1:5; Heb 12:28), especially the non-tangible aspects (Rom 14:17; 1 Cor 4:20). Jesus is the King of kings, Who has “all power and authority” now (Matt 28:19). Jesus, as Messiah or King, is the subject of the gospel preaching to be delivered to the entire world. The “good news” is that He reigns and is bringing about His heavenly kingdom now in preparation for His earthly kingdom to come.

“...**will be preached**” (*kerusso*, “announce formally and with the authority of a ruler”). A *kerux* is a herald, a spokesman with authority from the king. The messenger is not the important focus; it is his message that is important. *Kerusso* is not a teaching or a discussion of the truth. It is a proclamation and a statement of the facts. “This has happened!” Jesus is alive and He is the Lord with all power and authority now. In the original language this verb is placed in the position of emphasis. It is used 60 times in the NT as the means of communicating the message of God’s Word. This is expected to be done in multiple languages.

“... in the **whole world**,” (*en hole te oikumene*, “the inhabited earth”). The interesting word here is *oikumene* that comes from *oikos*, “house or home.” This word implies that the whole of humanity is treated as one family (“From one man he made every nation of the human race to inhabit the entire earth ... so that they would search for God...” (Acts 17:26-27). This is the “end-game,” where it is all heading: this is what God is doing in throughout the world. World evangelism is not an option. “It ought to be done, it can be done, and it will be done!” as D. L. Moody said.

"... as a **testimony**” (*eis martyrion*, “a declaration of the evidence or proof of something true”). The word is from the legal language, although in Church history it got its name from the costliest of testimonies, the *martyr* – to stand firm on the truth until death. The *martyria* is a first-hand personal witness about what has happened. It is not a scholarly observation or a debatable opinion. This says nothing about the goal of the conversion of everyone within a people group, but rather is granting the opportunity to everyone in every ethnolinguistic group to understand the gospel as a priority. It must be credible, understandable and relevant to the hearer.

The essential missionary task is to establish a "viable indigenous church planting movement" that carries the potential to renew whole extended families and transform whole societies. It is "viable" in that it can grow on its own, "indigenous" meaning that it is not seen as foreign, and a "church planting movement" that continues to reproduce intergenerational fellowships that are able to evangelize the rest of the people group.

Many refer to this achievement of an indigenous church planting movement as a missiological breakthrough (Winter & Bruce A. Koch, 1999, p. 517)

"... all the **peoples**" (*pasin tois ethnosin*, "races, Gentiles, from the same genus;" thus is a "people group" or an ethnolinguistic people). The rallying cry for the AD 2000 Movement was *A Church for Every people, and, The Gospel for Every Person*. Jesus himself became the true *martyrion* for all mankind so that none should perish. The first task is to make the gospel available to every people group, then exhaustive evangelistic-church planting thrust throughout every people group. It is not mass numbers of converts in one people group that is the biblical priority, rather it is making available the gospel to all peoples.

"... the **end** shall come" (*eksei to telos*, "termination of a process, the limit at which a thing ceases to be"). This word indicates the conclusion of a process or a period of time. Either this objective will be the conclusion of the Tribulation period through the reaching of the last unreached people group (which does not fit Revelation 4-19), or it will be the conclusion of the Church Age. The exegetical evidence points toward the latter option. Progressively it has the meaning of a goal completion or the end of a process. In classic Greek it is used to describe reaching the full development, as in becoming an adult, no longer being a child. It also has the meaning of closure, for instance death. Primarily in Greek philosophy the word stands for completion, to be complete, to reach a goal.

Thus the "end" cannot be the beginning of a new period or epic. In the context of the Second Coming it makes no sense to say that after the "end" of the Church has begun, "the end shall come" or at the "end" of the Tribulation Period every ethnolinguistic people group will be reached with the gospel. It only makes sense when the "end" means the end of the Church age (the period that was about to begin when Jesus spoke these words). It makes no sense to say that this refers to the "end" of the second time period (the Tribulation), which will begin after the next time period (the Church) ends. It is not a question of whether Jesus could have come at any time during the history of the Church; rather it is evident that He has not come for some reason. The only biblical reason that surfaces to explain His delay in return is the fact that just under 2,000 ethnolinguistic people groups have not yet heard the gospel message of the gospel; however, there is a viable strategy underway in 2008 to accomplish the task by 2025, should the Lord tarry.

In the Matt 24 context, the original question was, "what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the **end** of the world? (24:3) (*sunteleia*, "completion, consummation"), a cognate of the same word in 24:15. This is the same word in the Great Commission of Matt 28:20, which commission of making disciples of all "ethnic groups" was to be completed before the completion of the Church Age, "the end of the age." It sounds like it is talking about the same "end."

### ***Finishing what the Church has started***

On the other hand, some Dispensational views foresees the failure of world evangelization, which later someone will need to "finish up" after the Church is taken away at the rapture. What the Church presumably will fail to do during the Church Age will be accomplished in the Tribulation supposedly by the 144,000 and the special angel messenger. They see Matthew 24:14 as speaking of a "tidying up" of things to make sure "the ends of the earth" spoken of in Matthew 28:19-20 will be reached. This view presumes that the Church will fail to fulfill the Great Commission. Others understand Jesus to have been foretelling a totally

separate and distinct kind of gospel preaching effort, some even describing a different Gospel message, which concept is “condemned” in Gal 1:8. No one can be saved by “another” gospel.

The author once engaged a transparent conversation with a pastor of a large church who admitted that he has had little concern for missions because he was told that God will finish the task in the Tribulation Period anyway, so it is not “really that big a priority for the Church.” In the meantime billions of souls go into a Christless eternity waiting for some future visit by one of the 144,000. Well-known authors insinuate this same apathy for the task in the following quotations when referring to the period between the Rapture and the Second Advent of Christ from Matthew 24:14:

Harold Lindsell wrote, “Many hold that the evangelization of the world will be completed following the rapture of the Church before the Great Tribulation” (Lindsell, 1955, p. 45).

Blakstone wrote, “The witness may not be completed until after the Church is taken away and this other heavenly messenger (Revelation 14:6) proclaims the everlasting gospel” (Blackstone, 1908, p. 134).

This application of the Dispensational view has some serious implications for a theology of missions. It becomes a convenient answer to the presumed failure of the Church to accomplish the Great Commission as Jesus defined it, but God's will is not limited by or determined by the inability or disbelief of the believers during the Church Age. God will always accomplish His will however long it may take. However, such a post-rapture interpretation of Matthew 24:14 does not infuse a sense of urgency into the mind-set of believers awaiting the return of Christ. In fact, it quenches the entire focus for completing the Great Commission. It becomes a “self-fulfilling prophecy” of failure. One wonders how prevalent is this escapist mentality.

### ***Problems and solutions***

The notion that the Church is failing or will fail in its reiterated mandate to make the gospel available to every tongue, people, tribe and nation is not a given. The weakness of the Church to finish its mandate during the past two-hundred years since the beginning of the missionary movement (beginning at approx. 1800) perhaps has been due to the emphasis on mass evangelism or the evangelization of the receptive people groups as a priority. Thus 98% of the missionary force is focused on the nominal Christian populations leaving only a small force and a minimum budget to target the thrust of the Great Commission and Matt 24:15. A major or at least balanced priority should be to build communities of disciples in every ethnolinguistic people group on earth. We were never commanded to convert every person within a specific people group. Once the gospel is planted in every people group, then the focus should become the mass evangelism and discipling of as many as possible within each people group until Jesus comes. First things first, or at least a simultaneous or balanced focus.

Only an extreme minority of the mission effort sees this vision, but this group is growing. Many of the unreached and unengaged groups have unwritten languages. Maybe a thousand or more linguists are needed to reach these final groups. Many are in isolated tribal areas, live in poverty-stricken, primitive or jungle areas, make up populations in Restricted Access Countries, and numerically can be relatively small populations. The last groups are the most difficult to reach, requiring our best talents, most courageous workers and best trained personnel that we have ever been mustered for the task of world evangelism. But there is no option. This is not our priority. It was given to us by our Lord.

To understand the task that the Church is to finish, the “end game” or vision is described in Revelation 5 and 7, Richard Yates, writing in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, states, “The existence of a

multitude of believers from every conceivable ethnic group on earth, as John saw in his vision, has never been realized. Even today a large portion of the world's population consists of non-Christians who have never heard the gospel. Of the approximately 16,000 ethnic people groups in the world today, 6,845 are classified as unreached or least reached. Of the 6.36 billion people in the world [in 2006], 40.5 percent live among unreached people groups. So the gathering of redeemed people from every ethnic group is still to come" (Yates, 2006, p. 88). Garrett describes the final task: "Of the 12,862 peoples of the world, 2,161 or 30 percent of the global population, have little or no access to the gospel" (Wills, 1998, p. 669).

"It took 18 centuries for dedicated believers to grow from 0% of the world's population to 2.5% in 1900, only 70 years to grow from 2.5% to 5% in 1970, and just the last 30 years to grow from 5% to 11.2% of the world population. Now for the first time in history, there is one believer for every nine people worldwide who aren't believers" (Winter & Bruce A. Koch, 1999, p. 509)

Referring to Matt 24:14, Ralph Winter wrote, "We shouldn't really be surprised to see the thrilling advances of the gospel all over the world. That is exactly what Jesus said would take place... A close look at the end of this verse says a lot about what we should watch and work for at the end of the age. Jesus says that as the missionary task is completed, there will be a witness to all the nations" (Winter & Bruce A. Koch, 1999, p. 511).

With the contemporary technology, the growing world vision of the global Church where Third World missionaries now form the majority of the missionary force and the new partnership concepts of cooperating groups wisely sharing resources and personnel to finish the task, it is now a realistic goal that the last people group can be reached by 2025. Every effort should be extended in this crucial task, now that we are so close to finishing the Great Commission.

### ***Pre-millennialist problem and solution***

The pre-millennialist view – that the global proclamation will occur following the rapture of the church – is largely built on inferences and suppositions. For example, the mention of two groups of (1) the 144,000 converted Jews, and (2) the vast number of believing martyrs coming out of the "great tribulation" in the same chapter, but nowhere does the text require that the two groups are in anyway related.

Revelation 7:4-8 describes the sealing of 144,000 Jews *on earth* from each of the 12 tribes of Israel, who are described in 14:1-5 as being redeemed, virgins, standing with Jesus on "mount Zion" accompanying Him "wherever He went." The fact that Revelation 7:9-17 describes a large multitude of believers from "all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues" *in heaven* that came out of "great tribulation," does not give any evidence or indication that the 144,000 Jews were responsible for their evangelization. They appear to be unrelated groups.

However, if we assume that these are 144,000 Jewish evangelists with a mission to finish the Great Commission, there would remain some major technical and logistic problems for them. A whole series of miracles would have to happen so that within a brief 3 ½ year period several thousand tribal and monolingual people groups would hear the gospel for the first time and respond promptly. These Jews would have to have an extremely rare positive attitude toward Gentiles, especially isolated unengaged people groups. Next they would require an almost instant high level of linguistic ability to break-down the different languages, most of which have never been analyzed by a linguist. Then they would have to learn the language, expressions, culture

and, of course, they would have to learn the New Testament<sup>3</sup> sufficiently to be able to explain the gospel message as contextually as possible. This is usually a 5 to 10 year process with gifted linguists, not to mention an enormous amount of resources to get to the 2,000+ locations, find the people (many are difficult to locate), solve the logistics of transportation (all the missionary pilots are gone) and supplies to accomplish this mission.

To accomplish this supposed task in a very short period of time would require a whole series of miracles that are nowhere suggested in the text. The gift of languages could be presumed, but is never suggested, nor is the gift of languages ever used for this purpose. It was a sign (1 Cor 14:22) to the Jews, but never was the means to explain the gospel message.

Even more challenging would be the discovery of where these people groups are located, getting to them, gaining a hearing among them, convincing them of a “foreign” religion, and securing a genuine conversion in a very brief period of time. This is so miraculous that it would match the Hero TV-series. Then they would have to return to Jerusalem to accompany Jesus on Mt. Zion (Rev 14:1).

A much better explanation for this vast number of converts would seem to be the results of those who were close to people who became believers in the last days of the Church Age. Perhaps they considered accepting the gospel before the rapture occurred, but the sudden disappearance of their believing family or friends (visa viz, “Left Behind Series”) will so shock them into the reality of the biblical truths, which they could have heard before the rapture occurred, that they cry out to Christ for their salvation.

If there are any implications of this view for pretribulation advocates, it is this: Avoid being complacent about completing the Great Commission. Do not rely on a future group of witnesses to finish the job. Aside from whether world evangelization precedes the Lord’s return, believers are admonished to “live holy and godly lives as [they] look forward to the day of God and speed its coming” (2 Pet 3:11–12, NIV). What is it that could hasten the Lord’s coming? Apparently it is a combination of personal and corporate holiness in the church, an attitude of eagerness about the Lord’s return, and involvement in that for which history now continues—the evangelization of the lost (Pocock, 1988, p. 444).

This view would presume that the Church was successful in accomplishing the Great Commission before the rapture by getting the message of the gospel into every language group with some disciples, at least, to spread the message throughout the entire people group. Even with a small number of genuine believers before the rapture, the understanding of the gospel could be disseminated throughout the people group. All the more reason this must become the priority of the Church in these last days. This view makes more reasonable and biblical sense.

### ***Preterist view eliminates future fulfillment***

On the other hand, the Preterist view sees a pre-70 AD fulfillment. This view sees Matthew 24:14 as being fulfilled by the extraordinarily aggressive evangelistic outreach which characterized the first few years of the Church's history following the Day of Pentecost.

The proponents of the Preterist view have looked to the word *oikoumene* (“the world”) as being the key to understanding what Jesus meant. Both John Wesley and Adam Clarke held to

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<sup>3</sup> These Jews accepted Jesus Christ after a personal encounter with Christ, which convinced them that He was the Messiah, but, at best, they would be like Apollo, needing additional instruction in the New Testament revelations.

the position that the use of this particular word in the original Greek limited Jesus' meaning to the Roman Empire. That would mean the task was completed throughout the Roman world in the first or second century (Wesley, 1950, p. 113; Clarke, 1967, p. 818).

Methodist theologian Milton Terry rephrased Matthew 24:14 in the past tense this way: "After the Gospel of the Messianic Kingdom had been preached in the whole Roman world, for a witness to all the nations of the same, the end of that age came" (Terry, n.d., p. 553). This view would find support in verse 34, "This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled." It sees the word *telos* ("end") referring to the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus in 70 A.D.

Culbertson (2002) states that the Preterist view is comparable to the Realized Eschatology of Oxford and Cambridge professor C.H. Dodd and likewise the Symbolic Eschatology of men like Paul Tillich (Harvard University and University of Chicago) and Neibuhr. Earlier many leaders of the Reformation, Martin Luther and other early Reform leaders held to the Matthew 24:14 view that the mandate already had been fulfilled. Lutheran missiologist James Scherer, subscribed to "the belief that the apostles had already essentially completed the task of preaching the gospel to all nations" (Scherer, 1964, p. 64).

Proponents of this pre-70 A.D. fulfillment quote Paul as writing by 62 AD that the gospel "has been preached to every creature under heaven" (Colossians 1:23 RSV). Acts 2:5 and 8:4 are used as support, as well as Paul's quotation of Psalm 19:4 in Romans 10:18, "Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world." However, a better solution to the Colossian 1:23 verses is better seen in the nuance of the aorist tense as being the "**inceptive**" **aorist**": the gospel "was beginning to be preached..."

If the Preterist view is correct then one must ask, was the gospel preached in the Americas during the Apostolic age, as the Book of Mormon teaches that Jesus Himself proclaimed the gospel in the New World after His resurrection? If this is preposterous, then the phrase "in all the world" must refer just to the "Roman" world (as the decree of Caesar Augustus that went to "all the world," in Luke 2:1). But this by no means can refer to "ever tongue, tribe, people and nation" however much one may want to spiritualize the meaning.

According to the Preterist view, "the end" referred to this passage is seen as the end of the Jewish age, which is supposed to have ended with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. This represented the end of the Old Covenant period and the beginning of the New Covenant. This is a difficult argument to uphold biblically, since Jesus said He established the New Covenant on the eve before His crucifixion in 32 AD and the Church was inaugurated fifty days later.

Though the gospel was certainly preached throughout the empire, it was decades before it was ever preached to the Gentiles. Acts 10 recorded the first occurrence of Gentile evangelism approximately ten years after the Ascension, but even as late as Acts 11:19 they were still preaching only to the Jews throughout the Roman Empire. This verse is dated at approximately 45 AD. A few men from Cyprus and Cyrene broke the racial barrier and began to speak to the Hellenists (Jews and Gentiles) in Antioch causing no small consternation in Jerusalem church.

It was only after 49 AD (Acts 15) that the church at Jerusalem officially sanctioned the preaching of the gospel to the Gentile world and the acceptance of Gentiles into the Church. This would leave barely 13 years to preach to all the Gentile nations before the writing of Colossians in 62 AD, when, according to the Preterist interpretation, the task of preaching to the entire world supposedly had been accomplished.

Of course this extra-biblical "history" is undocumented except for Paul's amazing evangelistic trips into the Gentile world. However, there is no hint any other apostle (all of whom were declared to be apostles to the Jews: Gal 2:7-8) ever attempted Gentile evangelism during



this period. On one occasion when Peter ventured into Gentile environments he was reprimanded by Paul for being hypocritical with the Gentiles, giving preference to Jewish visitors (Gal 2:11-14 ff.). Peter did not have the attitude at this date (52 AD?) to have been successful in penetrating the Gentile world with the gospel, so it is doubtful that the other apostles were any better. This chronology likewise brings into serious suspicion the Roman Catholic tradition that Peter founded the church at Rome in 42 AD.

It is much more likely that the other apostles did not risk going to the Gentile world until the final decade before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD when the Romans were threatening to destroy the city.

If “the end” in Matthew 24 is taken only as a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem, then the mandated preaching referred to in Matthew 24:14 cannot refer to the present mission of the Church. The only application for contemporary theology of missions would be as an example to follow with no end or purpose to fulfill.

### ***Dual-fulfillment view***

Some authors see the Matt 24:14 passage as a dual-fulfillment. This view is in line with the Inaugurated Eschatology School of interpretation, which is applied to some prophetic passages of the Old Testament. Nazarene Theological Seminary professor Ralph Earle noted this and urged the application of this same “telescopic feature” in the interpretation and understanding of Matthew 24. “These predictions of Jesus referred first to A.D. 70, but in their final and full significance, they reach forward to the end of this age” (Earle, 1973, p. 56).

Almost all of those who would hold to the dual-fulfillment aspect of Matthew 24:14 would see the second aspect of the fulfillment as occurring in the present missionary outreach of the Church, rather than a Tribulation second-aspect fulfillment. The implications for developing a theology of mission of the dual-fulfillment should be viewed as the mission of the Church age.

Missionaries are not the only ones who see the fulfillment of Matt 24:14 in the contemporary missionary pioneering work. This view is compatible with both the inaugurated and the teleological schools of eschatological interpretation. Also it would certainly be the preferred understanding of the post-millennialist as well as other eschatological views.

### ***Premillennial view of Tribulation Missionary Activity Spiritualized***

For some dispensationalists the Matt 24:14 passage can be seen as either a pre-rapture sign (if Matt 24:3-14 are seen as immanent or pre-Tribulation events, followed by prophecies of the Tribulation Period (24:15-51), or other dispensationalists take the entire chapter is taken to refer to prophecies of signs during the Tribulation Period.

The proponents of the Post-Tribulation or even Mid-Tribulation Rapture theorists spiritualize certain aspects of the Revelation to make them describe the missionary efforts of the Church Age. In his *New Testament Theology* book, University of Nottingham professor Alan Richardson relates Matthew 24:14 to the horsemen of Revelation 6 and 19, asserting that “the missionary activity of the Church itself is one of the signs of the end” (Richardson, p. 27). Saying it even more clearly George Eldon Ladd, a post-tribulation-premillennialist said, “The conquering white horse parallels Matthew 24:14, and pictures the victories to be won by the preaching of the gospel in the world” (Ladd, 1974, p. 623).

Cambridge professor H.B. Swete sees a connection between Matthew 24:14 and the two witnesses described in Revelation 11. Then he goes on to affirm that “the witnesses represent the Church in her function of witness-bearing” (Swete, 1951, p. 134). And, really, the phrase that the

beast "shall make war" against the two witnesses is considered to be strange wording if it is applied to only two specific individuals. Groups make war against other groups, not individuals. Conflicts between individuals are described with different terminology, thus Swete sees the war between the Beast and the missionary Church.

As for the angel in Revelation 14:6 who preaches "to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people," Henry Halley in his popular *Bible Handbook* argues that this passage could well be a "picture of our modern era of world-wide missions" (Halley, 1965, p. 727). He also sees a connection between Revelation 7 and Matthew 24:14. Here, he injects the further possibility of a dual-fulfillment aspect, saying that Revelation 7 refers "to the process of evangelization going on in the Roman Empire before it fell, or in the whole world throughout the whole course of history" (Ibid., p. 714).

Others have seen the two martyred witnesses of Revelation 11 as being those who will fulfill the worldwide proclamation prophesied in Matthew 24:14. In trying to identify the two witnesses, some have suggested it means Old Testament personages such as Moses and Elijah who come back to earth to preach for the 1,260 days mentioned in Revelation.

There are even writers like Methodist dispensationalist W. E. Blackstone who attempts to cover all the bases. In his exegesis of Matthew 24:14, Blackstone throws in every possible preaching/proclamation agent, setting up a veritable parade of participants. Blackstone foresaw the Church as the present agent in the fulfillment of Matthew 24:14. Then, following the Rapture, he believed the fulfillment of Matthew 24:14 will continue with the preaching being done by tribulation saints, to be followed by converted Israel. "Lastly," Blackstone said, "it is to be a heavenly messenger" (Blackstone, 233).

It has been amazing to this writer the extent that some writers and commentaries will go to in order to avoid the simple declarative statement that Jesus expects the Church to accomplish the task of evangelizing the last people group on earth before He returns. Why does it make more sense that the Tribulation saints in three years will accomplish what the entire Church has not finished in 2000 years? We are so close; surely it makes sense to focus our energies on finishing the primary task that is so evidently on the heart of God.

### **The problem of "this generation"**

For many the key to the passage is "**this generation** will not pass away until all these things take place," (24:34). Some have declared this to be one of the most difficult passages to interpret in Matthew. After giving a series of possible explanations, the NET Bible study notes suggest that the *generation* may refer to "the generation that sees the signs of the end" (v. 30), who will also see the end itself. In other words, once the events of the return of Christ starts, "all the events connected with it happen very quickly, in rapid succession."<sup>4</sup>

Dispensationalists often take the "you" in the Olivet Discourse to refer to a generation that will be alive at the time of the Second Advent. For instance in Matthew 24:33 the "you" is for those who will be following Christ in the coming Great Tribulation. "So, you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door" (Toussaint, 2004, p. 488). In reference to Matt 24:34, "till all these things *take place*..." Troussaint writes:

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<sup>4</sup>Biblical Studies Press: *The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible*. Biblical Studies Press, 2006; 2006

“It takes the verb γένηται as an **ingressive aorist**. The same verb is found in all three Synoptics and is translated “takes place” (Matt. 24:34; Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32). As an ingressive aorist it emphasizes the beginning of the action with the meaning “begin to take place” [as in Col 1:6]. All those things would begin in that generation and find their ultimate completion at the Second Advent. This fits with the idea of not being deceived by the events mentioned in Matthew 24:4–8. The Lord specifically referred to these as “the beginning of birth pangs” (v. 8). Interestingly, although Mounce does not accept this interpretation, he suggests it as a possibility and gives no refutation of it” (Toussaint, 2004, p. 486).

Regardless of how these events unfold, it is obvious that God’s desire and plan is to reach every ethnolinguistic group with a clear gospel witness before He returns. There is no excuse for not making this a priority in the churches and personal lives of all believers. The mental and theological gymnastics to pass this responsibility off to another age and group, and worse, accepting the failure of the Church to fulfill her God-given task is unacceptable. The honor of our Lord is at stake. If He declared that this is the mission that His Church would accomplish every believer should sense his personal responsibility for making sure this happens.

### **Last Supper and Second Coming**

The night before the Last Supper on the eve of His betrayal Jesus declares that the sacrificial worship of the woman with the alabaster vial of perfumed oil (Matt 26:7ff; Mar 14:3ff), will be part of the church’s message to the world in Matt 26:13, “I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her.” It was stated as an additional characteristic of an assumed mission or priority of the Church Age to follow, i.e., preaching the gospel to the whole world. It is stated as an assumed fact that the gospel will be preached in all the world as He said it would be.

The Lord’s Supper was instituted on the eve of His crucifixion with the instruction that it was to continue until Jesus comes again. This would assure that the Church would memorialize the death our Lord and look forward to the Second Coming together to never lose this focus: He is coming again and we have a mission to finish.

### **Jesus’ emphasis following the resurrection**

On five different occasions Jesus reiterated the Great Commission within a brief time of forty days. Three of the five (Matt 28:19; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8) specifically state that the objective of His followers would be to make the gospel available to every “nation” (*ethnos*, “ethnolinguistic people groups”). Mark is even more specific, “Go...preach the gospel to every creature” (16:15). Every effort, personal commitments and strategic means must be utilized to finish this task. If there is any biblical reason or logic as to why Jesus has delayed His return to earth, He is graciously waiting for the Church to take seriously His mandate and desire to communicate what He did on Calvary’s cross for every individual sinner. Only gradually did the Early Church pick up on the significance of these final challenges. Only in the last fifty years has the Church discovered how many languages even existed.

## Peter's final encounter

One of the final encounters Jesus had with his disciples was to assure Peter that He accepted his repentance, but more importantly was to keep his priorities straight. The discussion centered on a prophecy that Jesus gave concerning the manner of death by which Peter would glorify God, implying a premature martyr's death in his old age, that is, Peter would die before the Second Coming of Jesus in his old age. This was so discouraging that Peter wanted to know if the same fate awaited the Apostle John. Whether this meant that Peter would not experience the Second Coming in his lifetime or that he would die (probably a martyr) meant that the Second Coming was at least Peter's life-time away.

<sup>21</sup> So when Peter saw him [John], he asked Jesus, "Lord, what about him?" <sup>22</sup> Jesus replied, "If I want him to live until I come back, what concern is that of yours? You follow me!" <sup>23</sup> So the saying circulated among the brothers and sisters that this disciple was not going to die. But Jesus did not say to him that he was not going to die, but rather, "If I want him to live until I come back, what concern is that of yours? You follow me!"

**(John 21:22-23)**

The main point of the narrative is that the apostles were to be more concerned about their daily ministries and finishing the Great Commission than with when the Second Coming would occur or who would be alive when it did occur and what benefit they would experience at that time. What one thinks and believes about priorities and values determine one's behaviors.

Approximately sixty years later and thirty years after the death of Peter, the Apostle John would suffer torture and exile, but would live to see what no man has yet seen, the entire panorama of the Apocalypse or the Return and earthly kingdom of our Lord. He then recorded it all in the Book of the Revelation for all generations as the concluding NT revelations for the Church Age. For Peter the lesson was clear: do not be as concerned about when the Second Coming will occur, as much as fulfilling your duty to "follow" Jesus. Make finishing your task for the kingdom your priority and do not be concerned about what God's providence permits for others.

"Today, there are six times more people on earth who have never even heard of Christ than were alive when Jesus gave that commission [Mark 16:15]. We still have 1.68 billion people who even now have no access to the gospel. At least 4.51 billion people, therefore, constitute the unfinished task" (Willis, 1998, p. 668).

## Effect of Second Coming in Acts

Oddly the Second Coming is not referred to in the Book of Acts after 1:11, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking up into the sky? This same Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will come back in the same way you saw him go into heaven." Though there is a reference to the Second Advent and the events preceding the end of the Tribulation and beginning of the millennium in Acts 2:17-20, it was used as an example for understanding the phenomena of speaking in tongues.

Even without the Book of Revelation, these early Jews knew well the events to precede the Second Advent of Christ, from their "last days" studies in the OT. Peter was not deceived into thinking that the Day of Pentecost, 32 AD, was the fulfillment of Joel 2. Peter said, *touto estin to*, "this is the **thing** (neuter article) ..." but not in the sense of fulfillment of the prophecy,

because he continues to describe the context of Joel 2, which had nothing to do with the experience of that Day of Pentecost. The prophecy concerns the end times just before the Second Advent. However, the experience of Pentecost was the same “thing” but only the aspect of the outpouring of the Spirit. Even this was totally different. This outpouring was only on the 120 faithful in the upper room, but in Joel it will be on “all flesh” at the beginning of the millennium.

Knowing that the other events did not happen, they knew the Second Coming was not related to the Day of Pentecost. Pentecost was the same kind of activity of the Spirit though on a much smaller scale in comparison to what will happen in the future at the initiation of the millennium.

Paul’s message of the gospel was generalized in the phrase, “the kingdom of God” (8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23; 28:31), which tended to encompass every aspect of Christ: past, present and future. Luke was recording primarily the events of Paul’s evangelistic trips and his evangelistic message, which was centered on explaining the redemption accomplished through the death of the Messiah. The Second Coming emphasis would be evident in the epistles.

### **Effects of Second Coming in the early churches**

How did eschatology motivate the Apostles and the Early Church? The positive evidence comes from Paul’s testimony of what he lived for and the negative evidence stems from Paul’s correction of wrong concepts which inevitably motivate incorrect behavior. The emphasis on the Second Coming of Christ in 1 Thessalonians resulted in some misunderstanding of the Second Coming that resulted in church discipline in 2 Thes 3:6: the believers were selling everything, quitting their jobs and being idle waiting for the Lord to return. When Christ did not come as they supposed, they were penniless and dependent on the church.

Tom Constable of Dallas Theological Seminary wrote, "Doctrinal error concerning the day of the Lord had led to disorderly conduct in the church" (Constable, 1985, p. 723). One of the tests of an acceptable view of eschatology is the behavior that it motivates. If one’s view of the Second Coming does not motivate a person to godly living and zealous service for the King then there is a likelihood that the view is in error.

Paul described the thrill of living until Jesus returned to earth as the “blessed hope” (Tit 2:13) when those alive at His return will be “changed, in a moment, in the blinking of an eye, at the last trumpet ... we will be changed ... this mortal body must put on immortality” (1 Cor 15:51-53). We are to live hopeful and encouraged in the light of the soon return of Christ (1 Thess 4:13-18); this hope has a purifying motivation in a believer (1 Jn 3:3).

Paul lived in the light of the Judgment Seat of Christ. The greatest reward that Paul looked forward to was to share the blessings of being in the presence of the Lord with those who came to Christ during his ministry (Phil 4:1; 1 Thes 2:19).

Those who love His appearing will be specially honored (2 Tim 4:8). Part of the blessedness of this hope is the purpose of the Judgment Seat itself, which gives ample reasons for loving His appearing. There is no fear of exposure and judgment since all the believer’s sins have been judged on the cross of Christ. Rather this judgment is to uncover all the “motives of men’s hearts” with the objective being that **God wants to praise His children and servants** (1 Cor 4:5).

Was Paul’s passion to “preach where Christ has **not been named**” (Rom 15:20) and his goal to “preach the gospel in the regions that **lie beyond you** and not boast of work already done

in another person's area" (2 Cor 10:16) derived from Jesus' mandate to take the gospel to every people group?

Peter gave several applications from the meaning of the Second Coming of Christ. As a motivation Peter told his followers that if they applied biblical principles to their lives there would be great benefits in this life and the life to come.

Likewise Peter saw the eventual return of the Lord Jesus as a key to the motivation of all believers in <sup>NET</sup> **2 Peter 3:12**, "while **waiting for and hastening** the coming of the day of God? Because of this day, the heavens will be burned up and dissolve and the celestial bodies will melt away in a blaze!" There is little sense in putting your hope for meaning and significance in this world because it will all be destroyed. Rather the believer is to focus on "hastening the coming of the day of God."

The word "**hastening**" (*speudo*, "desire earnestly, cause to happen soon" FRIBERG; "promote zealously or strive eagerly" LIDDELL-SCOTT) is a present active participle, which means to "constantly and habitually be ..." doing everything to bring about or to accomplish before the Second Coming of Christ. If the Matt 24:14 passage does have a temporal condition attached to the Second Coming, then the sooner the condition is met, the sooner the result of His return is accomplished. The condition does not say that He will come **WHEN** the last people groups is reached, but that He would not come **UNTIL** they hear the gospel. If the rapture were to occur after the gospel was firmly planted within each group, then after the rapture there would be many within the people group that had heard but had not believed yet.

### **Effects of Second Coming in Church/Mission History**

We know more about what the Early Church believed from the writings of the Church Fathers than we do about the actual motivation of individual believers in that period. However, the interest in a Biblical thousand-year reign of Christ on earth and related events of the Second Advent marked the writings of the ante-Nicene Church Fathers. "Study of ancient Church history reveals that until 325 the Church, faced with an unfriendly Judaism and with a hostile Roman state, studied eschatology for comfort and hope" (Cairns, 1958, p. 137). They lived for a better kingdom.

Philip Schaff wrote that the prominent premillennialism, which was "the most striking point in the eschatology of the ante-Nicene Age," was the "widely held current opinion of distinguished teachers from Papias to Lactantius" (Schaff, 1996, p. 614).

Cairns concludes that "any fair consideration of the writings of the Fathers in the various English editions of their writings, edited by Philip Schaff, can only lead to the conclusion that the ante-Nicene Church looked for the return of the Lord with a premillennial hope which could take place at any time. It was an encouragement in persecution as it had been for the church in Thessalonica (1 Thess 5:1-11)" (Cairns, 1958, pp. 138, 139).

The more prosperous circumstances of the Church, ushered in by the freedom of religion granted by Constantine in the Edict of Milan in 313 and his favoritism to the church by state subsidies, exemption of the clergy from public duty and military service, and the legal setting of Sunday as a day of rest, caused many Christians to cease thinking of the Roman state as Antichrist or his forerunner and to expect that the social and territorial expansion of the church since Christ's First Advent was the kingdom. The church became at home in the world as members gained material possession and prominence, such as Eusebius enjoyed in being at the right hand of Constantine at the Council of Nicaea. ...

The earlier church fathers, such as Papias, who had held to a premillennial hope, were castigated for their errors. Church and state were two arms of God to serve Him in His developing kingdom. Jerome insisted that the saints would not have an earthly premillennial kingdom and wrote: "Then let the story of the thousand years cease" (*Commentary on Daniel*, on Dan 7:25) (Cairns, 1958, pp. 140-141).

During the next thousand years or so, beginning between 325 to 590, and until the Reformation this early premillennialism was gradually transformed into what was essentially a postmillennialism in which the present age became the millennium, which was to precede the return of Christ (Cairns, 1958, p. 140). It became the official policy of the state-church to bring about the universal millennial utopia of a church controlled world state at any cost and by any means.

No study of eschatology during the medieval period can ignore the writings of Augustine. The transfer of the future millennial hope to the present millennial domination during the Church Age can be found in the philosophy of Augustine as revealed in his great work, *The City of God*. There he identified the kingdom of God with the hierarchical Church of his day, an identification which the Roman Catholic Church has held resolutely ever since. He had evidently once held to chiliasm or premillennialism of the earlier type, which those "that are really spiritual" opposed (Augustine, *City of God*, XX, 7). He spiritualized the Second Advent as taking place continually within the Church (*ibid.*, XX,9). The first resurrection is spiritualized into the conversion of the soul (*ibid.*, XX, 6).

It appears that Augustine looked for Christ's coming after the present millennial age in which the church was to become increasingly influential transforming the societies of the world. This political-judicial-religious kingdom became the agenda of the Middle Ages.

While his view is not absolutely clear, "it seems to have more affinities with Roman Catholic and contemporary postmillennialism than with amillennialism. There was no place in his eschatology for the Jews or a future earthly kingdom. He can be credited with the final shattering of the premillennial system of the ante-Nicene church, and his views on eschatology became the accepted view until the Reformation and, in some respects, even after that great event. The absence of premillennialism in the Middle Ages is as prominent as the absence of postmillennialism in the ante-Nicene Church" (Cairns, 1958, pp. 141-142).

Post-millennialism is the belief that Christ will return "after" the thousand-year reign (Rev 20:4). God's will is achieved by improving the world rather than destroying it. The churches can hasten the millennium through evangelism, prayer, and reform. Post-millennialists combine a prophetic eschatology with an essentially optimistic and progressive view of history. Pre-millennialism, in contrast, has an apocalyptic eschatology in which Christ returns to judge the earth "before" the thousand year reign takes place. Pre-millennialists expect history to get worse and worse until the destruction of the world clears the way for God's new heaven and new earth. The church's task is to convert as many people as possible before the final cataclysm (Koester, 1995, p. 137). The extrapolation of the transformation of the global society into a Christian kingdom was the theme of much of the Medieval Ages and the justification for the use of intimidation, military forces, Inquisitions, torture and genocides (e.g., crusades against Muslims, Jews and Huguenots) by the Catholic Church to forcefully build the millennium. This is the religious motivation behind the "Holy Roman Empire." It was their eschatology that motivated their actions.

With the loss of the Premillennial worldview the focus of the Church became more political and social than spiritual transforming through the gospel. People could be forced to adapt to the social obligations of the Church thus the Church was to rule with a “rod of iron.”

Because of this importance placed on salvation and the church, premillennialists are concerned about her formation and concentrate on that rather than on the redemption of societies that are nowhere said in the Word to be the objects of redemption. The Bible envisions the salvation of peoples, not countries. The Bible sees believers acting as salt, agents that slow the putrefaction of the world to allow for the work of calling out Christ’s body (Pocock, 1988, p. 446).

### **Effects of Second Coming doctrine during the Reformation Period**

As a carry over into the Reformation the Medieval eschatology vacillated between postmillennialism and amillennialism. Both of these systems are built around an allegorical hermeneutic thus interpreted by the most likely comparison to history or the “spiritual” imagination of the writer/speaker for what is most convenient at the time. I have often wondered if the loss of the broader political power of the Roman Church, which was largely postmillennial, did not lead the Reformers to shift their views towards amillennialism where all millennial views were spiritualized and interpreted to mean anything other than a literal fulfillment. Pocock writes of his concerns for this eschatological development and its effect on the Protestant Church:

There are disturbing possibilities in amillennialism into which some of its adherents have fallen. These possibilities include the identification of the church with the kingdom to the extent that in societies where the church predominates, both society at large and the church in particular have become confused, mixed multitudes. Evangelism has faltered and complacency has set in. This has been especially true in Europe and Latin America, and has occurred in large segments of Christendom under both Roman Catholic and Protestant situations. In both cases the eschatological position is amillennialism. State churches and amillennial eschatology have historically gone together (Pocock, 1988, pp. 446-447).

At the risk of seeming mono-focused, the centuries of debate and the thousands of pages of arguments concerning which view of eschatology is correct has generally overlooked the primary issue in regards to the Second Coming. However and whenever Jesus comes is not as important as the issue of finishing the task of world evangelism before the end comes. By the emphasis in Journals, books and research over the past hundred years it is better to be “correct” about your eschatological view than right about reaching the last ethnolinguistic “nation,” “tongue, tribe and people [group]” before Jesus comes again.

### **Effects of Second Coming in the early Mission Movement, esp. postmillennialism**

One of the reasons that early Protestant and Evangelical missionaries were so bold to advance the gospel into primitive and often hostile countries was their Calvinistic (God had predestined this to happen) and Postmillennial theology (God was building His kingdom), thus nothing could stop this from happening. There was a sense of being on the winning side in spite of the odds and difficulties, a sense of being instrumental in bringing in a golden age of the gospel conquering the world and the assurance of the submission of the heathen to the greatest story ever told.



If a Christian kingdom was to be built around the world then social ills must be faced and brought under the submission of biblical principles. Thus the early missionaries were radical change agents of their day stopping slavery, the killing of wives in funeral pyres along with their deceased husbands, throwing babies to crocodiles, polygamy, child prostitution and innumerable other inhumane social practices of the early nineteenth century. Their theology drove their actions of change.

Nancy Koester's thesis is that one of the major driving impulses behind the American Christianity was the notion that there was the belief in a golden age of the gospel domination of the world that could be brought about by a free democratic people where men could chose God's way of living. Koester shows how the foundation of the American ideal was a postmillennial dream.

After the [Revolutionary] war the new American republic came to be seen as the primary agent of redemptive history. Only a free nation could guarantee religious liberty. Without political freedom people might not be able to understand the gospel, much less receive it. Thus the advance of republican government seemed essential for the spread of the gospel and the dawn of the millennial day. As Nathan Hatch observes, 'this vision of history moving toward a republican millennium' linked the gospel 'inseparably with a libertarian political order.' The further political liberty and republican government extended throughout the world, the closer history would move toward the thousand-year reign foretold in Rev 20:4. Thus by the 1830s Alexis DeTocqueville saw that 'for Americans the ideas of Christianity and liberty are so completely mingled that it is almost impossible to get them to conceive of the one without the other.' America would lead the way toward the millennium as Christianity and democracy advanced together (Koester, 1995, pp. 140-41).

Here is John Wesley's conception of what the coming of Christ meant: "the extension of Christ's spiritual kingdom in the hearts of men by individual conversion such as was taking place in his own day. This he expected to go on in still greater power till the world should be regenerated by the saving power of the Gospel which was doing its work in his own time."

This conviction led Wesley to declare, "Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they be clergy or laymen, such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven upon earth." (Reasoner, 2007).

The postmillennial hope of a Christian world motivated the early Methodists and their movement spanned most of the eighteenth century. "No other revival has lasted so long nor has had such a widespread international influence. From 1773-1790 the American population increased 75% and during the same period Methodism increased 5,500%. By 1850, the Methodists were the largest Protestant church in American and one-third of all church members were Methodist" (Reasoner, 2007)

In the early nineteenth century Second Awakening before the Civil War the dominant eschatology among Protestants in America was post-millennialism. This view of the future demanded both reforming and patriotic motivations. "This was an era when enlightenment ideals of progress and the perfectibility of human institutions seemed to complement biblical visions of the future, and many Protestants strove to usher in the millennium by their own individual and collective efforts. Post-millennialists believed that God works 'by the established laws of nature, physical and human' and that God works through 'people and their institutions to regenerate the kingdoms of this world'" (Koester, 1995, pp. 141-42).

Charles G. Finney (1792-1875), founder of Oberlin College and the premier revivalist of his generation, preached a strident post-millennialism: converts were to strive for both personal sanctification and social reform for the nation. Finney expected the millennium to come as soon as Christians secured enough conversions and achieved sufficient reforms.

Indeed, many Finney followers organized their energies in revival, abolition, and temperance crusades, which they believed would hasten the millennium. There would be a gradual shift towards the latter two themes as time progressed. "Finney envisioned the millennium as an age of benevolence or active good-will toward others. Human beings as moral agents could either speed the progress of the millennium through active benevolence or postpone it through stubborn selfishness. Finney vigorously applied enlightenment faith in benevolence, progress, and humanitarianism to the moral issues of the day and coupled this with a revivalist's passion for conversion. Finney's campaign for a sanctified social order represents the high ideal of post-millennialism in America" (Koester, 1995, p. 142)

According to Koester, the Civil War was a turning point for eschatology in this country. During the war itself, northern Protestants "hopelessly confused the weapons of the saints with the Union's military power and awaited the first signs of the millennium in the exploits of the Army of the Potomac."

As the pre-millennial views began to have more influence after the war, the circumstances began to create doubts about the postmillennial order of events getting better and better. Koester states, "In the defeated south, it became harder than ever to believe that history was progressive; while in the north, political scandal and growing poverty in the industrialized cities meant, among other things, that the reign of Christ with the saints was nowhere in sight" (Koester, 1995, pp. 142-43).

Meanwhile Dwight L. Moody (1837-1899), the premier revivalist after the war, spoke the language of pre-millennialism when he preached that earth was a "wrecked vessel" and God had given him a life boat and the mandate, "Moody, save all you can"

By the close of the nineteenth century, postmillennialism was no longer the dominant eschatology of American Protestantism, but hopes for perfecting society through human efforts did not just vanish. Instead, they flowed in to the new liberal Protestantism, particularly the social gospel ideal of the coming kingdom. The social gospel espoused a prophetic, this-worldly eschatology (as opposed to an apocalyptic, transcendent one) in which the mission of the church was to make social institutions reflect Christian values (Koester, 1995, p. 143).

The social focus of postmillennialism gave birth to liberalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The growing demand for credible education which included the new radical views of the Documentary Theory and evolution in the major denominational seminaries produced missionaries who carried the liberal agenda throughout the world in major denominational seminaries. Meanwhile, the fundamentalist movement was birthed out of the premillennial resurgence (though this could be argued visa versa).

### **Effects of Second Coming in Awakenings, Pentecostalism, Fundamentalism, Evangelicals**

The change in eschatology had an effect on all aspects of the theological perspective and world mission views of the evangelical Church particularly in N. America, then it would spread throughout the world. With the post-Civil War revivals (sometimes called the Third

Awakening), the Holiness Movement was expanded across all denominations. After an inevitable lull in mission emphasis during the War and the aftermath recovery, soon America began to focus on the end-time events and the need for completing the Great Commission along with her European missionaries.

The [Civil] war and the subsequent effects of rapid urbanization and industrialization caused others to be more pessimistic about the future of the world. These abandoned a postmillennial eschatology—that saw a renewed united church ushering in the kingdom of God on earth—in favor a premillennial eschatology. They saw their task as a faithful remnant warning of further judgment. The appeal for renewal and unity of the church was replaced by a call to leave denominational structures in order to form a true restored New Testament Church (Faupel, 2000).

As the Holiness Movement shifted from a postmillennial to a premillennial world view the main argument against the criticism of the growing liberal movements were dispelled by the proof of fulfilled prophecies

Many persons of pre-millennialist persuasion contributed to a new coalition called fundamentalism, a combination of emphases on individual salvation, personal holiness, a particular set of doctrines, and an apocalyptic, dispensational eschatology. Meanwhile persons of post-millennialist persuasion could switch to pre-millennialism (which many did) or re-invest their hopes for social progress in the new protestant liberalism, seeking the salvation of social institutions through an activist, this-worldly eschatology. Those who believe that the church’s primary responsibility is to help shape the social order are, at least to some extent, working out of the post-millennial heritage filtered through the social gospel (Koester, 1995, p. 144).

The testimony of Hudson Taylor and George Mueller gave confidence of how God could and did supply every financial need that faith ministries and missions encountered in the task of world evangelization. The Holiness movement created the search for the power of the Spirit to empower special ministries, especially world missions.

From its beginnings, Pentecostalism placed emphasis on missions as a result of the experience of Spirit baptism evidenced by speaking in tongues. People came to Pentecostal centers from other countries and went back with the baptism [of the Spirit]. “From Azusa Street<sup>5</sup> and other centers... ‘apostolic faith’ missionaries were sent out to places as far away and diverse as China, India, Japan, Argentina, Brazil, Palestine, Egypt, Somalilia and Liberia, Angola, and South Africa--all within two years [of the Azusa street revival of 1906]” (Anderson 2007:10).

Pentecostals are sympathetic to Wesleyan-Arminian theology, but Pentecostal theology is not properly understood if thought of as a subset of Wesleyan-Arminian thought. Classical Pentecostal theology is characterized by a “constellation of motifs” sometimes referred to as “the fourfold Gospel.” This *constellation* of beliefs consists of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ; baptism in the Holy Spirit evidenced by speaking in tongues; the ready availability of divine healing; and the premillennial, imminent return of Jesus Christ (Buschart 2006: 245).

The later Holiness movement was a mixture of groups. Many of the Wesleyan-Methodist groups were quick to accept the Pentecostal expression after 1900. The first great revival of the new Pentecostal Movement was sparked in a small African-American mission church on Azusa

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<sup>5</sup> The first historic Pentecostal revival meeting occurred at the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Los Angeles, led by William Seymour, an African American preacher, beginning in April of 1906 until about 1915.

Street in Southern Los Angeles. The two-fold driving motivation behind this movement was (1) the passion to share the blessings of the Pentecostal experience and (2) the urgency of the imminent return of Christ.

With these two motivations the "missionaries from Azusa Street were circling the globe by 1907 with their new message of spiritual power. It has been estimated that this revival movement reached twenty-five nations within two years...the Azusa Street revival became a catalyst in the emergence of a new kind of Christianity that would transform the global religious landscape in the twentieth century" (Anderson 2007:9).

The premillennial views were popular among the British Evangelicals in the late nineteenth century, especially among the Plymouth Brethren, Adventists, Jehovah Witnesses and Irvingites. As the postmillennial views lost credibility in the N. America, some accepted the premillennial views, but most adapted their hermeneutics to accept the Amillennialist views.

The move away from the mainline denominations due to liberalism resulted in a number of Fundamentalists groups noted for their separation from anything they considered contrary to Scriptures. A typical characteristic of this movement was the sense of urgency in evangelism and missions sparked by the sense of the imminent return of Christ in the premillennial sequence of events.

The Evangelicals emerged out of the Fundamentalists movement, especially after WWII. Typically they would be premillennial but not exclusively. This ambivalence would open their theology to the Charismatic movement (a focus on a Pentecostal-like experience by other denominations). Many of the Charismatic groups would eventually shift back to a modified-postmillennial view, declaring that we are in the midst of the millennium at this time.

### **Effects of Second Coming in non-Pentecostals churches**

The evangelical postmillennialism died with the two World Wars. However, the social transformation objectives of the postmillennial hope continued through a liberal agenda. Koester writes, "By the close of the nineteenth century, post-millennialism was no longer the dominant eschatology of American Protestantism, but hopes for perfecting society through human efforts did not just vanish. Instead, they flowed in to the new liberal Protestantism, particularly the social gospel ideal of the coming kingdom. The social gospel espoused a prophetic, this-worldly eschatology (as opposed to an apocalyptic, transcendent one) in which the mission of the church was to make social institutions reflect Christian values" (Koester, 1995, p. 143)

Many of the pre-millennialist persuasion united to a new alliance of churches called fundamentalism, which was a combination of focuses on individual salvation, personal holiness, a particular set of doctrines, and an apocalyptic-dispensational eschatology. At this crossroad "persons of post-millennialist persuasion could switch either to pre-millennialism (which many did) or re-invest their hopes for social progress in the new protestant liberalism, seeking the salvation of social institutions through an activist, this-worldly eschatology. Those who believe that the church's primary responsibility is to help shape the social order are, at least to some extent, working out of the post-millennial heritage filtered through the social gospel" (Koester, 1995, p. 144)

J. Frank Norris (1877-1952) was the leader of the fundamentalist movement in Texas attacking the liberalism at Baylor University. The Southern Baptist denomination eventually ousted Norris and he established himself as an independent Baptist in Fort Worth, Texas. "Norris adopted Fundamentalist theology and premillennialism. He used it as a test of orthodoxy. Norris's two

papers, *The Searchlight* and *The Fundamentalist*, referred to premillennialism ‘in almost every issue.’ Norris organized the Premillennial Missionary Baptist Fellowship (which would become the World Baptist Fellowship).<sup>6</sup> He urged President Harry Truman to recognize and support Israel.

It was inevitable that [Southwestern] seminary students in Fort Worth were exposed to the idea. McBeth wrote that ‘the refusal of Southern Baptists to embrace premillennialism, or to write that view into their first major confession of 1925, was one reason for the final split between Norris and the SBC.’ Norris’s premillennialism was associated with the position of an outsider. Norris forced discussion of premillennialism, but the seminary’s leaders and faculty refused to be diverted and kept the educational agenda focused on other interests, notably evangelism and missions” (Pitts, 1999, p. 7). A vast Fundamental independent Baptist movement was begun.

### Effects of Premillennialism on missions

The credibility of the premillennial position was enhanced above all by the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. Premillennialists taught that the Bible prophesied the restoration of Israel. Many saw this as the beginning of the last “generation” (Matt 24:31). The temple would be rebuilt, and Israel would become the site of a great war. This must all transpire before the return of Christ. The sense of being in the last generation before the Apocalypse gave great impetus to a worldwide missions thrust, which was evident after WWII. Numerous attempts to date the exact year of the rapture, which all failed, and thus began to erode the expectation and confidence in the immanence of the rapture.

As the Fundamentalists separated from Liberal denominations from 1920 on they formed separate and independent denominations, church associations, Bible Institutes and Christian colleges and mission agencies. Prophecy conferences soon paralleled evangelistic revivals throughout the country. Premillennialism virtually became a cardinal doctrine. Many Fundamentalist mission agencies continue to make the belief in a premillennialist or a pre-tribulation-premillennialist doctrine mandatory, though a loosening of this restriction is growing.

After WWII several thousand mission agencies were formed with specialized ministries and/or geographic targeted area for church planting and other ministries. Most of these agencies’ statement of faith declared a premillennial view of the Second Coming, which often was reiterated in publications and mission conferences to declare the urgency for world evangelism as soon as possible.

Contemporary events that reinforced the premillennial views were often presented as evidence for proving premillennialism. Jansen describes the amazing increase in world events that are all too similar to those described in Matthew 24:1-13. These signs are increasing in magnitude and frequency such as earthquakes, floods and disasters. He writes,

“...16 major [disasters] in the 1960’s, 29 in the 1970’s, 70 in 1980’s, a number that tends towards more than doubling in the 1990’s. California alone will suffer more disasters than

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<sup>6</sup> The Baptist Bible Fellowship of independent Baptist Churches split off of the WBF in 1950. The BBF moved to Springfield, MO., and started the Baptist Bible College, where Jerry Falwell attended college. A recent controversy over Bible translations, contemporary music, secondary separation and other issues led to the formation of the Global Independent Baptist Fellowship. Falwell likewise left the BBF to join the Southern Baptist Convention battle return to orthodoxy.

the whole world did in the 1960's. (A disaster is defined by the UN as an event that has killed at least 10 people or affected at least 100). More than one million were killed by cyclones in the last 25 years, and almost half a million by floods. The waves of the North Atlantic have increased an average of 25% since the 1950's. Hunger and pestilence are rampant. HIV/AIDS is expected to reach 40 million infected people by AD 2000 and its estimated cost worldwide is 500,000,000,000 (US dollars) per year. In addition, 1.3 million have died from drought" (Jansen 1995.3).

However it is not all bad news that generally describes the present age. Jensen describes the great opportunities and advances for the Church in contemporary events.

- \* Never before has there been revival and Church growth like in our time.
- \* Never before has the Church been globally present in every nation,
- \* Never before has the Church been as multiracial as today.
- \* Never before has the Word of God been available for 93-95% of mankind.
- \* Never before have so many nations had their own freedom as today. The number of UN nations has grown from 50 to 184, primarily an increase in democracies where people have a better prospect for self-determination than ever before.
- \* Never before has the world been safer from the threat of a nuclear holocaust.
- \* Never before has life expectancy risen so high, or infant mortality so low; increased educational attainment and improved nutrition are happening at unprecedented pace, - three times faster in the developing countries of today than it once happened in the developed world.
- \* Never before has so much humanity enjoyed better physical conditions than today. In 1960, 70% of humanity resided in dismal human conditions: only 32% suffer such conditions in the 1990's.
- \* Never before has the global domestic product (GDP) increased from \$3 trillion to \$22 trillion -7 times-while the world population has barely doubled. The per capita income has increased three times.
- \* Never before has most of the world had immediate access to more communications i.e., telephone, television and fax.
- \* Never before has modern travel been able to bring us to almost any spot on earth in shorter time than it took Charles Lindberg to cross the Atlantic (33 hours).
- \* Never before has technological ingenuity, medical breakthroughs, and space exploration been as astronomical, doubling our knowledge every 3 years.
- \* Never before has global military spending been as low; dramatically low even after years of increased spending
- \* Never before have three quarters of the world's population lived under relatively pluralistic and democratic societies. (Jansen 1995.3)

When Fundamentalism took over the SBC in the 1980s, the anti-establishment became the establishment. Premillennialism, traditional companion to Fundamentalism, was no longer on the fringe. Fundamentalism had embraced dispensational premillennialism in its early stages as historians of Fundamentalism Ernest Sandeen and George Marsden have shown. Sandeen argued that the two ideas on which the Fundamentalist movement rests are premillennialism and the inerrancy of the Bible. George Marsden wrote that Fundamentalism was more complex; he identified its social as well as theological sources. Nevertheless, he also found premillennialism to be central in the movement. "Fundamentalists in the 1920s made their attack on the religious liberal establishment through the issues of Darwinian evolution and biblical inerrancy. These two

issues remained central for resurgent Fundamentalism in the SBC of the 1980s. Premillennialism was part of the Fundamentalist package that many Baptists accepted. Millennialism began to flourish in new ways among Baptists” (Pitts, 1999, p. 8).

Few churches or denominations have structured themselves around the theme of world evangelism as the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA). A. B. Simpson wrote the core values and philosophy of the denominations through his prolific writing and biblical research. When referring to the passage of Matt 24:14 he stated that the “end” was connected to the Great Commission by the Lord Jesus Christ. “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” (Matthew 24:14). A.B. Simpson was focused resolutely on this biblical mandate. Simpson preached “that our Lord’s return was imminent; it awaited no future event, and was dependent only on the completion of world evangelism” (Reynolds, 1992, p. 10).

For a more current view of the connection between the missionary mandate and premillennialism, Keith Bailey summarized the views as follows:

The return of Jesus Christ is premillennial. The literal manifestation of Christ’s rule over the nations of the world and His reign over Israel will not come about until His Second Coming. For now, the Church here on earth persists in the task of world evangelism while she waits for the coming of her Lord (Matt. 24:14). From the perspective of the Bible, the soon coming of Jesus Christ is a strong motivation for world missions. (Pierson, 1988, p. 98).

Pierson likewise linked the second coming of Christ with the missionary zeal of the Church. “The fact is itself an argument and an appeal that, so soon as the Lord’s coming ceased to be felt to be imminent, and was projected indefinitely into the distance, the remarkable evangelism of primitive days which fed on this truth, declined and decayed, and has never been revived” (Pierson, 1988, p. 98).

Franklin Pyles describe the dispensational focus of A.B. Simpson, “Every single point of his end-time thinking had a definite impact on his plan to preach the gospel across the world. And, at the same time, his missionary theology guided his eschatology, for if a point of prophecy had no impact on missionary strategy, he had little concern for it.” At the end of his essay, Pyles observes, “The current divorce between our missionary practice and our eschatology can be overcome by again asserting the strengths of premillennialism: A real kingdom will soon be inaugurated on this earth by the personal presence of Jesus Christ” (Pyles, 1994), p. 32).

In their statistical surveys of Baptist ministers’ opinions in the late 1980s, Nancy Ammerman, Helen Lee Turner, and James Z. Gatz fortunately included questions about views on millennialism so that we have a way to gauge the presence of premillennial thought among Southern Baptist pastors. Ammerman found that while 41 percent disagreed or were unsure about premillennialism, a substantial majority of 59 percent agreed or agreed strongly that “the Bible teaches a premillennial view of history and the future.” “Clearly the tide had turned; outsider became insider. Acceptance of premillennial thought is now a majority position in the thought of Southern Baptist ministers. The Southern Baptist Convention has changed by embracing Fundamentalism. Its ministers have redefined not only their views of Scripture and women but also of millennialism” (Pitts, 1999, p. 9).

As the Charismatic dominance of the evangelical church and mission forces emerged a new eschatology was being developed. The Dominion theology sought to transform society into a theocracy applying biblical principles to the judicial and social aspects of our culture, particularly to protect the rights of evangelicals to be free to evangelize and protect the lives of

the innocent. The Charismatics, although sympathetic to this Dominion cause, sought to extend the authority of the Church even further.

### **Effects of revival of Postmillennialism Dominion and Kingdom Now theology**

The forerunner of the Pentecostal/Charismatic movements was John Wesley. Although the terms “premillennial” and “postmillennial” do not appear in the writings of John Wesley, his implicit postmillennialism became explicit in the next generation of Wesleyan theologians. This optimism of grace continued across two hundred years. “No Wesleyan systematic theologian has been premillennial. In 1998 Gary Cutler issued a challenge to prove that any Wesleyan Holiness institution officially taught pre-millennialism before the 1920s” (Reasoner, 2007). To understand the focus of post-millennialism the follow definition is offered:

Post-millennialism is the belief that Christ will return "after" the thousand-year reign (Rev 20:4). God's will is achieved by improving the world, rather than destroying it. The churches can hasten the millennium through evangelism, prayer, and reform. Post-millennialists combine a prophetic eschatology with an essentially optimistic and progressive view of history. Pre-millennialism, in contrast, has an apocalyptic eschatology in which Christ returns to judge the earth "before" the thousand-year reign takes place. Pre-millennialists expect history to get worse and worse until the destruction of the world clears the way for God's new heaven and new earth. The church's task is to convert as many people as possible before the final cataclysm (Koester, 1995, p. 137)

Different forms of postmillennialism have been the major goal of most Protestants, which has led to a Dominionist theology. While the evangelicals caught up in this Dominionist mindset would deny that they have shifted to a postmillennial theological position they actually have. In fact they have joined forces with Calvinist Reconstructionists<sup>7</sup> and theonomists.<sup>8</sup> These Covenant or Reform Theology Christians from some of the older denominations have embraced a similar form of Dominion Theology. They believe that the Kingdom of God is in the church now (primarily as an Amillennial view), but will be birthed in the world some day. They also believe that this present church age is a spiritual millennium. They will see it brought into being by the present church leadership before the Messiah returns. This is essence of Dominion<sup>9</sup> Theology.

Among the evangelicals and 'New Charismatics' here in America over the past 50 years we are seeing the powerful new 'Latter Rain' or 'Kingdom Now' movements. These are rising up to actually join hands with the old denomination Restorationists.<sup>10</sup> Dominionists are birds of a feather in matters of church-state politics. The "Kingdom Now/Latter Rain" movements have much the same sort of beliefs and expectations as the old line

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<sup>7</sup> A religious movement that calls for all Christians to put their faith into action in all areas of life, especially to make politics as Christian as possible by the Christian Right wing and to bring all nations under the authority of Christ (Great Commission).

<sup>8</sup> Theonomy is the application of the general principles of the Old and New Testament's moral law and commands in family, church and civil government.

<sup>9</sup> Politically active Christians who seek influence, if not control, over secular civil government in spiritual issues (i.e., abortion, abolition). Dominion Theology believes that all society should be governed by God's laws.

<sup>10</sup> A religious movement that grew out of the Second Great Awakening in which God was supposedly restoring primitive Christianity to the contemporary Church. Because of this emphasis on apostolic and prophetic restoration some in the Second Great Awakening thought they had received new revelations, thus Mormonism, Adventism and other groups were born in these meetings.



Dominionists regarding the victorious destiny of the evangelical Church in taking over the world. Both believe that the evangelical Church can pull this off in this age and before Messiah comes. Christian Utopians and take over agents are burying their differences. They are joining ranks together for a major political power play in the halls of big government. They are becoming extremely powerful. Many are becoming very wealthy as well as the work the church-state interface (Finley, n.a.).

There is a lot of talk in the American churches about “taking dominion” and “bringing in the kingdom.” This is more than being “salt and light” in our society in an effort to transform it politically or through public opinion. This is an expanded form of the post-millennialist language. This view is presuming that we are in the kingdom now, but it is more than a spiritual kingdom (amillennialism), thus all the promises and reigning authority belongs to those who claim it for the Lord now.

Furthermore, a new paradigm shift is well underway, mostly in Charismatic churches, called Kingdom-Now Theology. This is no small paradigm shift. Kingdom-Now theology is a major change in the eschatological foundation of the Church and its subsequent worldview. Most evangelicals, in the past century at least, have typically been pre-millennialists. Many mainline Protestant denominations have claimed amillennialism or a spiritual kingdom now. They share the conviction that Jesus is coming again and salvation is offered during this period of grace called the Church Age. The primary focus of these theologies was to motivate personal evangelism, attempting to see as many saved and as many churches planted as possible before the rapture.

Did the premillennial call become like “crying ‘Wolf!’”? It seems that somewhere the churches lost their sense of immanency both for evangelism and missions. Mega-church building and Pentecostal-type worship experiences became the passion. Prophecy conferences and prophetic messages became fewer and, in fact, even serious Bible teaching was replaced with “felt need” messages which were based on Bible verses that fit into a psychological theme to improve yourself. Spectator and entertainment religion to draw crowds became an end in itself.

With the popular focus on the individual believer and his needs (personal and family) there was little time left to reiterate a Second Coming perspective, much less the importance of unreached peoples in remote parts of the earth. Without this doctrinal foundation the biblical worldview in many evangelical churches they became me-centered. Churches that could satisfy this need attracted crowds and grew. The only outside interest became political and national moral issues. If a gage could measure the interest level in the American Christian’s mind, there is little doubt that the plight of the unborn, unwanted child is far more important than the more than a billion unreached, unengaged people in a few thousand ethnolinguistic groups that no one cares about.

In most contemporary or seeker-sensitive-type churches, the move to go beyond the congregation’s personal needs to a distant people’s needs would only be reached if there was extraordinary leadership. An example of such missional leadership can be witnessed in First Baptist Church, Woodstock, GA., led by Dr. Johnny Hunt, president of the SBC, who personally leads groups of men from his church and other pastors on annual mission trips and has seen more than a hundred church members give their lives to reach unreached people groups. His church has personally taken on the responsibility to coordinate and mobilize a vast team for reaching several unreached people groups.

Without this model leadership the biblical urgency of reaching “every tongue and tribe...” before Jesus comes is seldom mentioned in local churches, thus became a lost priority buried among more local urgent needs. This writer has seldom ever seen a prayer item in a local church for even one of the several thousand unreached people groups. You get what you pray for.

The new Post-millennialism has a different eschatology. This theology tends to be growing especially among Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. “The popular doctrine of the end-time we now see emerging holds that the Church will rise up and set things right! Christians will ‘rise up’ and be the ones to take over the planet. If we pause and think about this for a moment the issue becomes clear. What they are proposing is a 'last crusade!'” (Finley, n.a.)

To give an idea of how the earlier Postmillennialists had calculated the estimated time it would take for the evangelical *army* to transform the world through the gospel into the ideal of the kingdom where Christ would reign spiritually in a Christian world we can see the serious calculations of Jonathan Edwards in the First Awakening. Koester quotes James McDermott's book, *One Holy and Happy Society: The Public Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, when he wrote “that it would take one half-century for Christianity ‘in the power and purity of it’ to win over the Protestant world, and another half-century to gain the ascendancy ‘in that which is now the papist world,’ a third half-century to subdue the ‘Mohammedan world and bring in the Jewish nation,’ and another whole century to convert the heathen world to the Christian faith, placing the millennium about 250 years beyond his own lifetime” (Koester, 1995, p. 138)

### ***The political agenda of the postmillennialists***

Postmillennialism has had a limited number of Southern Baptist advocates in the twentieth century. Dale Moody notes that B. H. Carroll was the last ardent Southern Baptist postmillennialist. Carroll was pastor of the First Baptist Church, Waco, Texas, professor at Baylor University, and instrumental organizer in founding Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Carroll optimistically taught that the kingdom of God would be established by evangelism, missions, and social reform (Pitts, 1999, p. 6).

Premillennialists continue to fight for influence. Liberty University has developed a Center for Premillennial Studies. The respected Dallas Theological Seminary, Capital Bible Seminary and Liberty Baptist Seminary were founded on the dispensational premillennial theological foundation. The influence of these and other major seminaries and the writings of their professors extend far beyond their constituency. However, the urge to change our society and mold our culture forcefully and externally has wedded the premillennial groups to the old postmillennial objectives.

As the N. American culture turns more liberal and anti-Christian the church is forced to exert its influence on every venue in order to keep its liberties and basic core cultural values of morality. Now the cultural change objectives are taking priority over the urgency of world evangelization, especially of the last people groups, and the sense of immanency is replaced with priority of the philosophy of the next elected official. Often these shifts in priorities are inevitable: if Christians do not get involved their right to exist may diminish. Thus the postmillennial social change has become the priority of the premillennialists as well.

### ***Kingdom Now Strategy***

A new Kingdom-Now paradigm is emerging, not just to change the culture, but to take over the culture as “kings and priests.” This movement is approaching the world scene from an

entirely different perspective: conquer the demonic power through extensive prayer and build a critical mass of believers through mega churches and mass evangelism to obligate a moral mandate in every country in the world.

These *crusader* Christians now coming on the scene believe that they have a mandate from God. The agenda is very clear. They plan to take over the political powers of this world for Christ. Quite obviously they want to bring in the *Kingdom Now!* The issue is not world evangelization, but world moral domination. To their way of thinking Jesus is not coming back until they “finish the job!”

This “theonomic” form of postmillennialism was initially presented by J. Marcellus Kik and expanded into an all encompassing ethical system known as “theonomy” or “reconstructionism” by R. J. Rushdoony. The objective of the Church was to restore a theocracy on earth by emphasizing the continuity of the OT law (civil, ceremonial and moral) along with the NT commands. Once established globally, this victorious Church will be the means through which God will advance His kingdom, bind Satan and quench all evil in the world. Theonomic postmillennialism emphasizes that it is God who exercises dominion through His Church by enforcing His law in every land.

This new Dominionist form of Postmillennialism, called the Kingdom-Now, is almost exclusively Pentecostal. They believe that the contemporary charismatic revival, often referred to as the “Latter Rains,<sup>11</sup>” is God’s instrument to bind Satan<sup>12</sup> and allow the Spirit-filled Church to claim material possessions and wealth, which had been a characteristic of the kingdom of Satan. Once the Church in general accepts its role and potential for dominion, through the power of the Spirit, it will be able to establish the kingdom of God on earth in its complete prophetic millennial form. The emphasis is on each individual learning to exercise dominion in the Spirit over Satanic powers if he is going to take part in the advancing of the kingdom.

Key leaders in establishing this movement have been Kenneth Copeland, Kenneth Hagin and Pat Robertson. This is the theology behind the I.H.O.P. and the Strategic Level Spiritual Warfare movements and many other Pentecostal Dominionist movements that continue to erupt worldwide.

The new postmillennialist is quite serious about changing the world in the face of formidable obstacles and enemies. It goes considerably beyond what the Lord Jesus gave the Church in the Great commission.

Do these Utopian post-millennialist Christian Dominionists really believe that they will succeed in their quest? Most assuredly they do. They believe that when the established unified World Church has straightened out everything on the planet then the Second Coming of Christ will come. Only by that time His coming will be just be a formality. They will then be the princes of peace. They will have everything wrapped up. Jesus Christ will merely be coming back to officiate at their church sponsored awards ceremony in Jerusalem. The Victorious Church will set up their Christian Television

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<sup>11</sup> A Pentecostal movement that explains the 20<sup>th</sup> century Pentecostal outpouring as a fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy, identifying the “former” rains spiritually with the outpouring at Pentecost in 32 AD and now the Latter Rains beginning in 1900 with the Pentecostal movement until the end of the age. Building on this teaching, deductions are made concerning the restoration of apostles and prophets, continual revelations, millennial powers manifested as Sons of God, the restoration of the world as God’s kingdom, which is to be ruled by Christ’s corporate body in preparation for His Coming and the chaining of Satan for 1000 years.

<sup>12</sup> The movement is called the Strategic Level Spiritual Warfare movement started by Peter Wagner.

cameras on the Mount of Olives and whistle for Jesus to come back. He will dutifully return and start handing out rewards to *Five fold ministry* Dominionist church leaders. They will then be truly sanctified to rule the planet. This view of a 'Church Triumphant, United, and Overcoming' is a real strain on those who believe the story which is taught in the Holy Scriptures. There is a pugnacious, sometimes even arrogant, new mindset emerging in western Christianity today. The call to politico/military action here is quite different from the traditional evangelical zeal to see the Gospel preached around the world. It goes far beyond our traditional missionary work of sending in food to the starving, medical assistance to the sick, establishing orphanages, digging wells etc (Finley, n.a.).

An example of this philosophy on the international scale would be Sunday Adelaja, (b. 1966) a Nigerian who went to Ukraine on a journalism scholarship, heard the gospel in a TV crusade and was saved in 1986. Today Sunday is Eastern Europe's most influential pastor of the 26,000-member Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God for all Nations church, started in 1994. This Pentecostal church meets in more than 30 locations throughout Kiev and is changing the nation's social and political views. His message is "God saved you so that you can transform your world—you are a world-changer." This motivation for personal potential has mobilized his congregation.

As a result of Sunday's influence in January, 2005, when President Viktor Yushchenko was inaugurated into office he began with public prayer, kneeling before an altar with his wife and children. He appointed believers as government ministers for the first time. Sunday attributes these moves to God beginning to take the Ukraine into His kingdom.

Sunday tells the North American church, "If a young man from Africa could build the largest church in Europe without money, Bible school, or seminary training, imagine the potential of a North American."<sup>13</sup> Sunday Adelaja plans to take over the whole of the Ukraine.<sup>14</sup>

'Taking dominion' is the 'in' word at the cutting edge of the American church these days. Finley states, "These militant Christians are not just speaking of a spiritual dominion. To the Puritan mind the earthly agenda in America is every bit as important as the Gospel and the missionary agenda abroad. Dominionist and 'Kingdom Now' thinking is not unlike Victorian thinking during the years of the British Empire. It is similar to Jesuit thinking in the 1500's when Spain was the superpower in Christendom and the politically active Jesuits were taking over the French Church. Dominionism sees the Christian Gospel being backed up by the state using the sword or military power" (Finley, n.a.)

## Fundamentalists and the Unreached Peoples

In the midst of all the innumerable theological, social and political upheavals at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the global focus has faded into an obligated but obscure department of most churches. Dr. Johnny Hunt in his first address as President of the SBC called it a "drift from the Great Commission." The unreached people have become the forgotten people. Churches have supported missionaries financially, because it was good publicity to advertise that the church is "mission-minded." However, there is little or no mission strategy except to attempt to spread a little percentage of their budget around the world by supporting as many missionaries

<sup>13</sup> Sunday Adelaja spoke at Liberty University in the fall of 2008.

<sup>14</sup> Expressed in a personal interview and testimonial with the faculty of Liberty University in the Fall, 2008.

in as many countries with as little as possible. The Great Commission is quenched in a twenty-dollar offering.

Meanwhile, the last frontier, which is defined as the unreached and unengaged peoples, a majority of whom has little, or no, access to the gospel of Jesus Christ, goes unnoticed. In reality, most of these people have little contact with anything related to Christianity such as a Bible, the Jesus film, a nearby church, or a single Christian in their language or a neighboring language group. In fact, most have little to do with civilization or the geo-political nations of the world. They live isolated in their part of the world with few people even knowing they exist, much less caring about their needs. They remain lost.

In the postmillennial worldview, these were “insignificant” peoples that would have little to do with changing the societies of the world, thus, by and large, they were overlooked in the Christian world conquest. However, those who took seriously the specific commands to carry the gospel to every single “nation and kindred, and tongue and people” (Rev 14:6), could not ignore them if they were to be obedient and participate in “hastening the coming of the day of God” (2 Pet 3:12).

There are 2,161 ethno-linguistic peoples that comprise thirty percent of the world's peoples who have no access to the gospel. However, “of these 2,161 peoples, 187 are megapeoples, each comprising over a million population, some of which number up to forty million. They make up 94 percent of the World A<sup>15</sup> population” (Willis, 1998, p. 674).

Why is this distinction between *the peoples* and *the nations* significant for missions? The example of Nigeria illustrates the necessity of this distinction. In the one *nation* of Nigeria, there are over 300 *peoples* or *people groups*. “While the gospel may have been preached within the country of Nigeria, it has not necessarily been preached to all the *peoples* of Nigeria. *Countries* are fragile things that come and go (e.g. the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia). However, “*people groups* are enduring things that generally transcend changing political entities (e.g. the numerous *people groups* within the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia). Apparently, it is these hundreds of enduring things called *people groups* that Jesus wanted reached with His gospel” (Russell, 1994, p. 7).

The word *closure* refers simply to the idea of finishing. In the 1970s, the Lord began to open the eyes of many to the fact that the “irreducibly essential mission task of a breakthrough in every people group was a *completable* task. At the time, “over half of the world's population lived within unreached people groups. Even so, a small group of mission activists had the faith to believe that a movement could be mobilized to focus attention on the unreached peoples, which for a time were called *hidden peoples*, then the essential mission task could be completed within a few decades. In faith, they coined the watchword *A Church for Every People by the Year 2000* to capture the essence of the *completable* nature of the mission mandate” (Winter & Bruce A. Koch, 1999, p. 517). Although it was not accomplished it set in motion a movement to reach the last groups on earth.

“Of the total population living in the last frontier, 38.6 percent are 16 years of age or under. Their annual per capita income is \$544.80. At least 75 percent of the women and a little more than 50 percent of the men are illiterate. For the literate only 66 of the 2,161 peoples have

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<sup>15</sup> World A classification of the world population include all the unreached or unevangelized peoples (World B are those who have heard the message of the gospel, but have rejected it; World C are those who have accepted the gospel and claim to be Christians).

the whole Bible in their language, 82 have the New Testament and 176 have some Scripture portion” (Willis, 1998, p. 675).

It was in the Lausanne Conference in Switzerland called the *International Congress on World Evangelization*, brought 2,300 evangelicals from 150 different nations together to discuss the status of world evangelization and to pledge their renewed commitment to spreading Christianity throughout the world. “In 1974, we were stunned by the revelation that three out of four of the non-Christians in the world were beyond the reach of same-culture evangelism. Today, only one out of every two non-Christians is beyond reach!” (Winter & Bruce A. Koch, 1999, p. 523). It was at this Congress that Ralph Winter declared the definition of “nations” as being every “ethnic people group,” which had not been the conscious objective or priority of many of the mission agencies or world mission leaders up to that point.

### **Biblical Second Coming Motivations**

Pre-tribulation evangelicals are prone to think that the return of Christ is near at hand. There are no prophetic events that must be fulfilled prior to the sudden and secret return of Christ. Therefore, “the Pre-trib Christian is apt to think that improving society is a lost cause. ‘It is all going to burn,’ is one of their favorite slogans. One might content himself to see a few souls saved before it is too late and to leave the doomed world to Satan. Indeed, from the turn of the century until the late 1970's, Pre-trib Evangelicals largely withdrew from politics” (Hutchison, 2006).

All of the major millennial models merit respect and none deserves to be scoffed at. At the same time, all of the models have glitches, so a measure of humility and forbearance is called for in debates between Christians about the last days. One thing is certain: The model one ultimately chooses will influence how he sees his life in this world, his view of the church, and his attitudes towards government, politics, public morality, and the culture war (Hutchison, 2006).

The postmillennial vision of victory inspired William Carey: “Though the superstitions of the heathen were a thousand times stronger than they are, and the example of the Europeans a thousand times worse; though I were deserted by all and persecuted by all, yet my faith, fixed on that sure Word, would rise above all obstructions and overcome every trial. God’s cause will triumph!”

Time and again, in the face of crushing defeats, disappointments, diseases and disasters, Carey reiterated his unwavering eschatology of victory: “The work, to which God has set His hands, will infallibly prosper ... We only want men and money to fill this country with the knowledge of Christ. We are neither working at uncertainty nor afraid for the result ... He must reign until Satan has not an inch of territory!” When at last Krishna Pal (their first convert) was baptized, Carey declared: “The Divine grace which changed one Indian’s heart, could obviously change a hundred thousand!” (Hammond, n.a.)

The premillennial worldview lacked the drama and immanent glory of a global kingdom, rather one that was too future to be the prime motivation. The focus of the premillennialist has been the immanency of the rapture, the “blessed hope” (Titus 2:13). “For the missionary the premillennialist imperative was to push ahead with evangelism on the widest possible front before the Second Coming occurred” (Porter, 2004, p. 194).

Premillennialist Alan Ladd, wrote, “I do not know when the end will come. And yet I do know this: When the Church has finished its task of evangelizing the world, Christ will come

again. The Word of God says it. Why did He not come in AD 500? Because the Church had not evangelized the world. Why did He not return in AD 1000? Because the Church had not finished its task of worldwide evangelization. Is He coming soon? – if we, God's people, are obedient to the command of the Lord to take the gospel into all the world” (Ladd, 1999, pp. 74-75).

The second coming is a doctrine that motivates, according to both Simpson and Pierson. Pierson wrote,

Because the blessed hope of our Lord's return has so refining an influence on character it is the very mold and matrix of missions. Its whole tendency is to make us unselfish, to relax our grasp upon material treasures and carnal pleasures; to fashion us "not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life." It makes all time seem short and the whole world seem small; dwarfs the present age into insignificance and lifts the peaks of the age to come into loftier altitudes, on a nearer horizon, in a clearer view. It so magnifies the approval of the coming Lord as to make present compensation for service and sacrifice appear trifling (Pierson, 1988, p. 98).

Pierson also spoke of the Lord's return as a motive to mission. “This was, no doubt, the foremost of all motives, hopes and incentives, which moved early disciples to zeal and activity in missions; and to revive this hope-to make it practically the mighty motor to us that it was to them, is to provide a new impulse and impetus in the work of a world's evangelization” (Pierson, 1895:414).

This hope, beyond mere incentive, provided disciples with a reason to finish the task as quickly as possible. “So soon and so long as that hope was dim, and Christ's Coming was pushed in the far-off future, the Church began leisurely working, then flippantly playing at missions, as though vast cycles of time lay before us to witness to the world. Revive this hope of the Lord's Coming and it begets hourly watching, ceaseless praying, tireless toiling, patient waiting” (Pierson, 1988, p. 100).

### **Downside of Premillennialism**

John Darby (1800-1882), a Plymouth Brethren considered the father of modern Dispensationalism, taught a pre-millennialist doctrine that encouraged profound changes in the outlook of Evangelical thought. “It was, for the most part, highly pessimistic; it discouraged believers from becoming too involved in the quotidian of science, politics, and business; it dismissed overseas missions, and it minimized the importance of the visible church” (Carter, 2001, p. 227). Different groups put different emphasis on their distinctive while generally holding to a premillennial end time perspective, but the motivation is quite different for the premillennialist. The Southern Baptists tend to minimize this motivation because of the confusion of different views and the variety of views held by important constituency.

In a survey of thirty-three Baptist theologians published in 1990 by Southern Baptists, neither the Introduction nor the Conclusion to any of the books mentions the word “millennial” once. This evidence suggests that millennialism of whatever type is a marginal, not a central doctrine for Southern Baptist self-identity. It can also suggest a wide and important gap between the ideas held by the elite theologians on the one hand and the masses of the laity on the other hand. Although the views of millennialism have shifted among Baptists in the South during the twentieth century, the core identity of the Baptist tradition seems relatively untouched by changing opinion about millennial interpretation. In short, millennial views at the end of the day are not the criteria by which Baptists tend to shape their self-definition (Pitts, 1999, p. 10).

## Judgment Seat of Christ: basis of our motivation

For the premillennialist the goal is not the glory of being a king of a country or a territory now, then to present your conquered territory to Christ when He comes, but rather the focus is the anticipation of standing before the Throne of Christ and after one's life is evaluated to hear the words as in the parable of the talents, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt 25:21). This response from Jesus' lips will be worth it all. Living in the light of the Judgment Seat of Christ with His kingdom-to-come is quite different than living in the supposed kingdom-now.

The time to receive in full the promised joys is still in the future, at Christ's return. (MacArthur, 2002, p. 73). Jesus promised, "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done" (Rev. 22:12). The Lord will officially render that reward individually to every believer at the judgment seat (*bema*) of Christ (Rom. 14:10; 1 Cor. 3:12-15; 2 Cor. 5:10; cf. Matt. 12:36; 2 Cor. 9:6; Gal. 6:7, 9; Eph. 6:8; Col. 3:24-25).

The apostle knew that the promise of Christ's return to rapture and reward the church is the essence of believers' purifying hope. He explains the event in 1 Thess 4:13-18 as the hope that produces comfort. Believers' knowing that when Christ comes to reward His people, they will have their works evaluated before the judgment seat (2 Cor. 5:10), is motivation to holy living (MacArthur, 2002, p. 90).

Perhaps the most significant aspect of this judgment is to understand the significance of 2 Cor 5:10<sup>NET</sup>, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be paid back according to what he has done while in the body, whether good or evil." The word "**bad**" (*phaulon*, "trivial, petty, careless, indifferent, worthless, of no account," LIDDELL-SCOTT and THAYER) is not a moral "badness" (for the believer all sins have already been judged on the cross of Christ), but how "*useless or worthless*" we were for Christ's purpose He left for us to accomplish. On the other hand, the word "**good**" (*agathos*, "serviceable, beneficial, valuable, helpful, profitable"), though it can refer to moral qualities, in most contexts as here, the meaning is the *usefulness* or *benefit* that a person's life has contributed to task of fulfilling the Great Commission.

This is not a feared event for the believer because the stated objective of the evaluation of the life of every believer in 1 Cor 4:5<sup>NET</sup> is that "each will receive recognition from God." The word "**recognition**" (*epainos*, "praise, commendation, an expression of high evaluation") is usually reserved for the praise given to God by men and angels, but here it is God praising the efforts of men and women who served Him in this life, who made a difference with the gospel.

The end result of this evaluation will be a future responsibility in the earthly kingdom of Christ, and, evidently, on into eternity. Making this life count for Christ has enormous implications that we cannot even imagine. This, then, becomes the motivation for the premillennial believer: to personally carry out the Great Commission through the personal sacrifice of one's life for a personal expression of gratitude and the honor to be permitted to serve the King of kings strategically fulfilling His mandate.

## Unreached People Group mandated Priority

Jesus said, "Therefore go and make disciples of every *nation* (*ethnos*, "Gentile people group, or ethnic group")" (Matt 28:19). It is amazing how many people quote this saying, "Go and make disciples..." period. The objective is not to make disciples, but to make disciples of



every ethnic group on earth. It is not massive numbers that Jesus is after, but rather every people group. It is not just evangelism that Jesus seeks, nor innumerable churches, but rather evangelism and church planting IN EVERY PEOPLE GROUP, before He comes again.

The job is large, but relatively small for the enormous body of believers around the world. There are approximately 670 churches in the world for every remaining unreached people group! We need only a small percentage of dedicated believers to be mobilized and equipped. Judging the remaining task by the potential work force makes it quite small and within reach by comparison to the forbidding prospect faced by our forefathers (Winter & Bruce A. Koch, 1999, p. 523).

Missionary Roger E. Doriot, Papua Indonesia Field Coordinator and linguist for CrossWorld and The Seed Company<sup>16</sup> recently spoke to Liberty University students to challenge them for the unfinished task of the remaining 2,200 languages with a Scripture portion in their language. Many of these groups are cut off from the outside world by political, social and religious forces that make the task difficult. However, by utilizing skilled linguists to train bilingual national translators (MTT, "Mother Tongue Translators"), they are convinced they can accelerate the task and complete the language learning and translation of the remaining people groups by 2025, if they can recruit enough partners and linguists. We have never been so close.

### **Concluding remarks on the Second Coming and the Missionary Task**

Mike Pocock of Dallas Theological Seminary declared, "The only reason Christ had not returned in New Testament times was the patience of God toward the unconverted: "[He] is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Pet 3:10). Moody, possessed by this same concern, was a major motivating force behind the formation of the Student Volunteer Movement that ultimately sent thousands of missionaries to the field (Pocock, 1988, p. 442).

"Anticipation of our Lord's return is a summons to action. We must cast off anything that blocks the flow of the Holy Spirit and commit ourselves to being about the Father's business. World evangelization now is the responsibility around which our lives should be centered. Whatever our gifts, we are all needed in the witness of the gospel" (Coleman, 1999, p. 191).

Identifying and penetrating the remaining, unreached peoples -- the great challenge of "discipling all the nations" -- still lies before us. God will reveal the glory of His kingdom among all peoples. We are within range of finishing the task with more momentum than ever before in history. Be a part of it -- "Declare His glory among the nations!" (Winter & Bruce A. Koch, 1999, p. 524)

Certainly this is not a time for despair. The King's coming is certain. And in preparation for his return we may be the very generation that will see the greatest movement of revival since the beginning of time (Coleman, 1999, p. 192)

"Premillennialists have regarded this item as a key point in their life and service for Christ. They are certain from Scriptures that Christ will return bodily and in such a way and time

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<sup>16</sup> An organization dedicated to complete the Bible translation in the heart language of people without God's Word in a massive cooperative effort to bring to bear all the resources, skills, and personnel around the world to finish the task of reaching the last unreached people groups.

as to surprise many (Acts 1:11). He will come “as a thief in the night” (1 Thess 5:2). The implications of the coming of Christ are that time in this age is limited and that what believers are expected to do has an aspect of urgency to it” (Pocock, 1988, pp. 441-442).

Dr. Russell, a Professor of New Testament Language and Literature at Talbot School of Theology at Biola University in La Mirada, California, wrote these concluding remarks, “We must ... support the new emphasis on frontier missions that is focused on those Unreached People Groups that were not being reached by many of our past efforts. These new missions and new initiatives by older missions are helping us take seriously Jesus' desire to preach the gospel to All The Peoples of the world. Without this complementary effort, we may lapse into disobedience to our Lord's command for universal penetration of all the world's people groups. In other words, it is a both/and approach to missions that continues to deepen and enrich our traditional efforts and to underscore enthusiastically our new efforts. Of course, this places greater strain on both our faith and our resources. But do we really have the option of doing otherwise if we are to obey the King's final command and to hasten His return in Messianic glory? We must be fully focused on proclaiming the gospel to ALL PEOPLES!” (Russell, 1994, p. 8)

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