

What's So Important About Pre-Millennialism? Part 2 by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr.

The Witness of Ezekiel 37 – 48

In this Ezekielian Apocalypse of chapters 37 – 48, the “whole house of Israel” is reanimated and revived in the Valley of Dry Bones (Ezk 37: 5, 11). There, as one flock under one Shepherd and one nation under one king, the resurrected faithful dead of the nation Israel are resurrected and taken back to their promised land, just as God had promised in Deuteronomy 32: 39; Psalm 17: 15; 49: 14, 15; Hosea 13: 14; Isaiah 25: 6 – 9; 26: 14, 19; Ezekiel 37: 12; Daniel 12: 1-3. Their “many days” of peace and blessedness are expanded on in Ezekiel 37: 1 – 28, as well as in Isaiah 2: 2-5; 11: 6 – 9; 24: 23; 25: 6 – 9; 60: 1 – 22; 61: 4 – 11; 62: 2 – 12; 65: 17 – 25; 66: 20 23. This will be the time when Yahweh Shammah, “The LORD is there” (Ezekiel 48: 35) living among them.

But again, “after many days,” (Ezekiel 38: 8), Judgment will come on Gog with a punishment and visitation similar to what Isaiah 24: 22 and Revelation 20: 7 – 10 depict. The termini of Isaiah 24: 22, Ezekiel 38: 8 and Revelation 20: 7 are identical. Remarkably, Ezekiel 28: 25 – 26 notes that Israel will be secured from attack and the people will live in safety and their security will be undisturbed (also Ezekiel 38: 8, 11, 12; Jeremiah 32: 36 – 44).

Other Equivalent Expressions in Other Passages

If time and space would allow, we could add Psalm 102: 13 – 22, where Messiah comes with his holy angels with glory to build up Zion. Then he will judge the world in righteousness and “give dominion in the morning.” In addition to Psalm 102, is the expression “In His days,” found in Psalm 72: 7. This too is a text noted as a great Messianic Psalm.

There is also that group of four bright Messianic Psalms in Psalms 96, 97, 98, and 99, ending in the remarkable Psalm 100. Here every land in the world is called upon to make a joyful noise unto the Lord as he concludes the work in history he said he would do.

Conclusion

But notwithstanding all this data (and much more) on the terms for the

“Thousand Years,” “Multitude of Days,” “Many Days,” “In His Day,” the case for Pre-millennialism is almost completely missed if one does not focus on the everlasting promise of God made to his people Israel.

Pre-millennialism is defined not merely as the future time in the Rule and Reign of God (the kingdom of God), bounded by the resurrection of all believers on the front end and the resurrection of the unbelieving wicked dead on the other end, during which period Satan is bound, but loosed for a brief time at the end of the millennium before he is cast forever into the abyss. It is more precisely the time when God finishes in space and time what he promised historically to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David and his line. It is therefore a whole philosophy of history with implications for the Christ and culture hiatus that must find its resolution in the Lord of all creation and all value and beauty.

Principally the Abrahamic promise (Genesis 12: 2 – 3) had three parts: (1) the promise of a Seed, the coming Messiah, (2) the promise of the land as a gift to Israel, but owned by God, and (3) the promise of the “Gospel” in which all the families of the earth would be blessed (Paul equated this aspect of the promise with the “Gospel” in Galatians 3: 8).

It is impossible to read, teach, and preach on the prophets of the Old Testament without bumping into the promise of a return of Israel to her land again and again, something like one verse out of every eight verses in the prophets!!! This is what makes the return of Israel to her land once again in the future the most important and key part of the premillennial doctrine.

Some will attempt to say that Israel forfeited that promise when she disobeyed, but what she forfeited was only the right each of those disobedient persons or generations had to participate in the blessing promised. Nevertheless, Israel still had to transmit the promise even though some would not enjoy its benefits. Transmission of the promise is one thing; participation in the blessings of the promise is another thing altogether!

To say that the Church replaces Israel is not only a form of supersessionism, but it is also without exegetical merit as I have argued elsewhere.^[1] Yes, Gentiles are included in the term “People of God” (just as the Jewish people who believe are part of the “People of God”), but the term “Israel” never loses its unique national, geopolitical, or ethnic flavor. This is not because God has favorites or that he is chauvinistic, but rather because God is faithful and true to his word. Once again, note clearly that there is a divine philosophy of history, in which God does complete within space and

time what he proposed earlier on in redemptive history.

What is lost, some will ask, if we demote Pre-millennialism to a secondary doctrinal status? Isn't it true that the majority of Christians today do not recognize it as taught in the Bible – especially in a reformed or covenantal understanding of the text? And if they do not recognize this doctrine, isn't it also true that most think this teaching is reduced to only one teaching passage?

But we have shown that it is widely represented in the Biblical text. Moreover, most will also concede that pre-millennialism was the majority view of the Christian Church in the first three or four Christian centuries. It was the influence of Origen's allegorizing tendencies, St Augustine's change of his mind on this doctrine, and of the collaboration of Eusebius, Bishop of Nicomedia, with Emperor Constantine in their desire to capture the geo-political sides of the discussions of the Kingdom of God that brought the major change into the life of the Church.

But what is affected the most is the doctrine of redemption and God's promise-plan for the ages. It becomes a much more difficult matter to teach the Kingdom of God with its two ages, two advents, two resurrections and two ends without these key texts. Moreover, most will need to shy away from teaching the whole counsel of God, especially as it is found in the prophets. Also, the very warp and woof of salvation, which Paul says in Romans 1: 16 instructs us that it is impossible to talk about so great a "salvation" without at the same time noting that this Gospel is the power of God for salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. Romans 9–11 then, becomes not a parenthesis or an intercalation that interrupts the main flow of the story of redemption; on the contrary, one cannot talk about the gospel or our salvation without constantly intermingling the Jew/Gentile question. Like it or not, the Jewish question will be the ragged edge on which many will be tested and found deficient from an truly exegetical standpoint of the clear witness of Scripture.

I urge Christ's Church to go slowly in its rush to jettison the pre-millennial position or to avoid teaching about the future return of Israel to the land God promised her. It can only lead to other problems down the road: problems with correctly exegeting numerous passages from the prophets about Israel's future; problems with the nature and extent of the "Gospel," problems with a view of history; problems with the definition of the Kingdom of God; and problems with being ashamed of the whole redemptive program of God that is for the Jew first and then for the Gentile/Greek.

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[1] Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "An Assessment of Replacement Theology: The Relationship Between Israel of the Abrahamic-Davidic Covenant and the Christian Church," *Mishkan*, 21(1994): 9-20.