

Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond: A Review

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About the Authors

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Robert B. Strimple is President Emeritus and Professor Emeritus of systematic theology at Westminster Seminary California. He studied at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, then taught at Eastern Christian Schools, Toronto Bible College and his alma mater of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia.³

¹ Dallas Theological Seminary, "About the Hendricks Center," accessed June 13, 2021, <https://hendrickscenter.dts.edu/about/>.

² Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., "About Kenneth Gentry," accessed June 13, 2021, <http://www.kennethgentry.com/about-kenneth-gentry/>.

³ Westminster Seminary California, "Robert B. Strimple," accessed June 13, 2021, <https://www.wscal.edu/academics/faculty/robert-b-strimple/>.

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Purpose of the Book

In his preface, editor Darrell L. Bock says that he is not aware of any other work in which proponents of three views on the Millennium (postmillennialism, amillennialism and premillennialism) have come together for a peaceful interaction on the merits and demerits of their respective views.⁵ He also lays out his hope that the interaction of the three principle authors will give the reader the necessary resources to “search the Scriptures” and determine which view is best supported by God’s word.⁶

However, Bock gives the clearest declaration of his purpose when wrapping up the book in its final pages. There he states his wish that the work could provide the needed “building blocks” to equip the reader to not only appreciate the different views, but to understand the

⁴ Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, “Craig A. Blaising,” accessed June 13, 2021, <https://swbts.edu/staff/craig-a-blaising/>.

⁵ Darrell L. Bock, “Editor’s Preface,” in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 7.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

various factors that go into them so that a student of the Bible can make a studied effort to arrive at a conclusion as to what God's word teaches on the subject of the Millennium and beyond.⁷

Summary

Bock structures the book in three sections, followed by a summary essay he has authored himself. Each section begins with an essay defending one of the three positions, postmillennialism, amillennialism and premillennialism, followed by responses by each of the other two authors. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr. represents postmillennialism, Robert B. Strimple argues in favor of amillennialism, and Craig A. Blaising presents the premillennialist view.

Postmillennialism

Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr. builds his postmillennial approach upon three theological foundations. First, based upon the fact that God declared His original creation to be "very good,"⁸ Gentry argues that "God's love for his creation prompts his concern to bring it back to its original purpose of bringing positive glory to him."⁹ Second, Gentry states that God's sovereign power guarantees that His word "will not return to me empty"¹⁰ and therefore no human opposition can keep Him from accomplishing His purposes.¹¹ Third, God has equipped His

⁷ Darrell L. Bock, "Summary Essay," in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 309.

⁸ Gen. 1:31.

⁹ Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., "Postmillennialism," in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 23.

¹⁰ Isa. 55:11.

¹¹ Gentry, "Postmillennialism," 23.

church for the task of evangelism, including (among other things) granting us the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.¹² From these foundational principles, Gentry claims that Scripture teaches that through the proclaiming of the gospel the vast majority of humanity will come to salvation during the present age, and as a result a time will come prior to Christ's return in which "faith, righteousness, peace, and prosperity will prevail in the affairs of people and of nations."¹³ Only after these events occur will Christ return in bodily form and judge all people.

Strimple, in his response to Gentry, observes that these three foundations present "no doctrines that are distinctive of postmillennialism. Certainly amillennialists (and premillennialists also affirm God's 'creational purpose,' 'sovereign power,' and 'blessed provision.'"¹⁴ While Gentry may construct his theological perspective upon these principles, there is nothing inherent in them that distinctly leads to postmillennialism as opposed to the alternatives.

Gentry further argues in support of his view from several pieces of Scripture. However, he begins the exegetical section of his chapter by stating that his intention is to "turn to some specific passages undergirding and illustrating this glorious expectation" (i.e., the postmillennial expectation).¹⁵ Strimple challenges Gentry's entire exegetical framework on this basis. Gentry, according to Strimple, is merely providing illustrative texts, not passages that affirmatively

¹² Ibid., 23-24.

¹³ Ibid., 13-14.

¹⁴ Robert B. Strimple, "An Amillennial Response to Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr.," in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 68.

¹⁵ Gentry, "Postmillennialism," 31.

demonstrate postmillennialism. As Strimple observes, “The reader is left looking in vain for the specific biblical passages that *teach* it, that *prove* it!”¹⁶

For example, one passage relied upon by Gentry is Isaiah 2:2-4. Chapter 2 begins by introducing itself as a word given to Isaiah “concerning Judah and Jerusalem.”¹⁷ According to Gentry, this represents “the whole of the people of God, just as ‘Israel and Judah’ do in Jeremiah 31:31, where the new covenant specifically applies to the international church in the New Testament.”¹⁸ Verse 2 then states, “And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.”¹⁹ Gentry argues that the nations flowing into the LORD’s house is said to occur “in the last days,” not at some point after the last days. These “‘last days’ begin with the coming of Christ in the first century. They cover the remaining days of temporal history until the second coming of Christ, which will be ‘the end.’”²⁰ Thus, the process of all the nations coming to Christ must occur during the period between His first coming and His eventual return.

Blaising, however, states that this passage “does not speak of a gradually developing situation. ... There is no thought at all in this passage that these are temporary conditions to be

¹⁶ Strimple, “An Amillennial Response to Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr.,” 69 (emphasis in original).

¹⁷ Strimple, “An Amillennial Response to Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr.,” 69.

¹⁸ Gentry, “Postmillennialism,” 36.

¹⁹ Isa. 2:2 (KJV).

²⁰ Gentry, “Postmillennialism,” 36.

replaced by some timeless spiritual order.”²¹ While Isaiah speaks of events that will come to pass in what he describes as “the last days,” there is no indication in the text that he is speaking of a gradual process that occurs over thousands of years. This is merely Gentry’s postmillennialist presuppositions being imposed upon the text. The words of the passage alone, taken in their appropriate context, do not single out a postmillennial interpretation. The best Gentry can hope for is to argue that Isaiah is consistent with postmillennialism, not that it affirmatively supports his position.

Gentry also seeks to rely upon the parables of Matthew 13, including the parable of the weeds (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43) which he claims shows that “despite the incredible growth of its citizenry, the historical manifestation of the kingdom will always include a mixture of both the righteous and the unrighteous.”²² However, Blaising counters that “the Lord describes both the wheat and the weeds as growing together until the harvest.”²³ Jesus does not merely say that some weeds continue to exist, but that they are growing right alongside the wheat up until the day of judgment. This is not consistent with the picture painted by postmillennialism.

Gentry is also a bit confusing in his definition of precisely when he believes the Millennium begins. At one point in his chapter, after discussing the era of peace and prosperity that will come once the overwhelming majority of the world has come to Christ, he states that the Lord’s return will only come after an era of these “‘millennial’ conditions.”²⁴ This would make

²¹ Craig A. Blaising, “A Premillennial Response to Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr.,” in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 76.

²² Gentry, “Postmillennialism,” 39.

²³ Blaising, “A Premillennial Response to Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr.,” 77.

²⁴ Gentry, “Postmillennialism,” 14.

it appear that he believes the millennium begins once these conditions have been achieved. However, in his discussion of Revelation 20:2 he claims that the binding of Satan referred to in that verse is a reference to Christ binding Satan in the first century and that while it “does not result in the total inactivity of Satan,” it still “restrains his power by Christ’s.”²⁵ He then suggests that it is this first century binding that marks the beginning of the millennium when he says “this binding increasingly constricts Satan throughout the Christian era (i.e., the ‘one thousand years’).”²⁶ Gentry advances two different times as to when his understanding of the Millennium allegedly begins.

Postmillennialism also requires at least some level of knowledge as to when Christ will return. While it is true that even a postmillennialist would not necessarily claim to know the specific date, he would be in a position to say that Christ is not going to return soon. After all, if the vast majority of the world has not come to Christ, then according to postmillennial theology His return cannot be imminent. A person who adopted this mindset would feel less immediacy in their need to accept Christ because the judgment is assuredly not about to happen. This, though, runs directly contrary to the teachings of Jesus. Regarding His return Jesus said, “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of Heaven, but My Father only. ... Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”²⁷ Jesus clearly wants His followers to live their lives as if He could be returning at any moment.

²⁵ Ibid., 52.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Matt. 24:36, 44 (NKJV).

However, the postmillennial expectation tells Christians that they need not worry, because His return cannot be anytime in the immediate future.

Besides these biblical discussions, Strimple and Blaising also point to a serious historical problem with postmillennialism. As Strimple puts it, “The universal sway of the kingdom of God cannot be expected from missionary effort alone; it requires the eschatological interposition of God.”²⁸ Or stated more pointedly by Blaising, “By virtue of its insistence that the interadvent kingdom will necessarily progress and advance to the level of a worldwide Christian order, postmillennialism owes us an explanation of the history of the last two thousand years.”²⁹ If the world is moving toward a near total successful evangelization to the Christian faith, we certainly do not see sufficient evidence of it even after 2,000 years. Given all of these considerations, despite his best efforts Gentry provides the least compelling presentation of his case.

Amillennialism

Robert B. Strimple builds his amillennial position upon his understanding of Christ as the “true Israel.” Isaiah 41:8 states, “But you, Israel, are My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, The descendants of Abraham My friend.”³⁰ Thus, Isaiah clearly speaks of his “servant” as being Israel, a group of people, i.e., the descendants of Abraham. In the very next chapter, though, Isaiah appears to speak of God’s servant as being an individual, not a group. “Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon

²⁸ Strimple, “An Amillennial Response to Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr.,” 65.

²⁹ Blaising, “A Premillennial Response to Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr.,” 75.

³⁰ Isa. 41:8 (NKJV).

Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.”³¹ Matthew makes it explicitly clear that this passage from Isaiah is a prophetic reference to Jesus.³² According to Strimple, continued reading in Isaiah shows “movement back and forth, and the cause for puzzlement – clear statements that the nation Israel is the Lord’s Servant, but also veiled hints that the Servant is an individual.”³³

Strimple argues that while the nation of Israel was called to be God’s Servant and a light to the world, it was unfaithful and failed to fulfill its purpose. Therefore, God “brought forth his Elect One, his Servant, his true Israel.”³⁴ This conclusion carries implications for how we should then view Christian believers. “Since Christ is the true Israel, the true seed of Abraham, we who are *in Christ* by faith and the working of his Spirit are the true Israel, the Israel of faith, not of mere natural descent.”³⁵

The prophet Jeremiah spoke of a new covenant that was to be made with Israel.³⁶ The author of Hebrews speaks of this new covenant as if it was already in place at that time.³⁷ However, the Jews by and large were not enjoying the benefits of the New Covenant at the time Hebrews was written. Strimple argues that this is because the “Israel” referred to by Jeremiah was the true house of Israel, a house to which all Christian believers belong by virtue of their

³¹ Isa. 42:1 (NKJV).

³² Matt. 12:16-21.

³³ Robert B. Strimple, “Amillennialism,” in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 88.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 88-89 (emphasis in original).

³⁶ Jer. 31:31-34.

³⁷ Heb. 8:1-13.

relationship with Christ.³⁸ As such, Strimple sees no need for a future mass conversion of the Jewish people.

Blaising challenges Strimple's use of the term "true Israel." According to Blaising, "'Israel' is never used of the church per se despite the application of Israel typology to the church in many passages. Hence, Strimple's expositional use of the phrase *true Israel* is technically incorrect and misleading."³⁹ A close examination of Strimple's reasoning shows that he never produces a piece of Scripture that identifies believers as "Israel," but rather depends upon a tenuous path of reasoning in which Israel is God's Servant, Christ is God's Servant, we are in Christ, therefore we must be Israel. Blaising's rebuttal appears to correctly point out that Strimple could be said to be elevating typology to identity. The mere fact that one thing is a type of another does not mean the two are identical.

A key verse in dispute as to whether the Jewish people will experience a mass future conversion is Romans 11:25 which states, "For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in."⁴⁰ According to Strimple, "the concern in that 'until' phrase is not with a new situation that will exist after the end of the present age but rather with the situation that will exist before the end, *and all the way up to* the end of the present age."⁴¹ Thus, Paul is not saying that Israel will be hardened and at some future date God

³⁸ Strimple, "Amillennialism," 89-90.

³⁹ Craig A. Blaising, "A Premillennial Response to Robert B. Strimple," in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 146 (emphasis in original).

⁴⁰ Rom. 11:25 (NKJV).

⁴¹ Strimple, "Amillennialism," 117.

will lift that hardening, resulting in a mass conversion. Instead, Paul intends to convey that this hardening of Israel shall persist up until the day of Christ's second coming.

Both Blaising and Gentry, however, disagree with Strimple's exegesis. Blaising notes that in verse 26 Paul uses the future tense ("will be saved") to describe a future reality for Israel. Thus, he clearly envisioned a change in Israel's status.⁴² Gentry argues that Strimple's claim that the term for "until" (*achri hou*) refers to a state that exists up until the end is not borne out by Scripture. He refers to Luke 1:20, for example, in which Zacharias is told he will be unable to speak "until" his son is born and named "John." Clearly this use of *achri hou* envisioned a future change in circumstances.⁴³ Gentry also, however, cited Luke 17:27, in which people "ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all."⁴⁴ This instance of "until" actually seems to support Strimple's interpretation, as the eating, drinking and other activities of these people continued up until their end at the flood. They did not experience a change of circumstances and stop eating, drinking, etc. They were killed. Thus, it appears that *achri hou* may be used in either the sense urged by Strimple or that by Gentry. Either way, Strimple's interpretation of Romans 11:25 is not *necessarily* true.

Just as Strimple does not believe that interpretation of the new covenant spoken of by Jeremiah requires a partial fulfillment in the past and a more complete fulfillment in the future,

⁴² Blaising, "A Premillennial Response to Robert B. Strimple," 148.

⁴³ Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., "A Postmillennial Response to Robert B. Strimple," in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 138.

⁴⁴ Luke 17:27 (NKJV).

he also does not accept any temporal gap between many of the events that premillennialists separate. He claims that the New Testament rules out a millennial kingdom by identifying Christ's second coming, the resurrection of believers, resurrection of nonbelievers, judgment, end, new heaven and earth, the start of God's final kingdom and the "blessed state of the redeemed" as all being part of one concurrent "cluster of end-time events."⁴⁵

In attempting to defend his position, Strimple offers up his interpretation of Revelation 20:1-3, the passage that even most premillennialists will agree is the only time Scripture explicitly mentions the thousand-year reign. Those verses state

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while.⁴⁶

The binding of Satan occurs at the beginning of this thousand-year period. Strimple claims that this is a reference to Christ's binding of Satan at the cross. "At the cross Satan is bound – but not absolutely. ... He is bound in one respect only, namely, 'to keep him from deceiving the nations [the Gentiles] anymore.' The age of salvation for the Gentiles has arrived."⁴⁷ Blaising disagrees and believes Strimple has neglected the context of Revelation 20. "With respect to the judgment on Satan in Revelation 20:1-10, contextual interpretation shows that John's vision is not about

⁴⁵ Strimple, "Amillennialism," 100.

⁴⁶ Revelation 20:1-3 (NKJV).

⁴⁷ Strimple, "Amillennialism," 123.

the binding of the devil at the time of Jesus' crucifixion but about an imprisonment at the Second Advent, which halts his activity of deceiving the nations."⁴⁸

A key problem with Strimple's amillennialism is his lack of criteria for when temporal terms are to be given more of a literal interpretation and when they are to be considered purely spiritual or figurative. For instance, he relies upon John 5:28-29 which says, "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation."⁴⁹ In interpreting this passage Strimple relies heavily upon the term "hour" and the fact that both the resurrection of the righteous and unrighteous are said to occur during that short time frame.⁵⁰ This begs the question, though, of why Strimple insists that the term "hour" be taken so close to its literal meaning but is willing to spiritualize a "thousand years." Of course, the reverse is also true. Those who argue for a temporal separation between the two resurrections must explain why "hour" in John 5:28 should not be given its general meaning.

Premillennialism

While premillennialism comes in different forms, Craig A. Blaising identifies the core beliefs that define the overall view. Primarily, premillennialism is "the belief that after Jesus

⁴⁸ Blaising, "A Premillennial Response to Robert B. Strimple," 152.

⁴⁹ John 5:28-29 (NKJV).

⁵⁰ Strimple, "Amillennialism," 101.

comes, he will establish and rule over a kingdom on this earth for a millennium, that is, for a thousand years.”⁵¹ When Jesus comes,

He will raise the dead in two stages. First, he will raise some to participate with him in the millennial kingdom. After the Millennium (the thousand-year period) is over, he will raise the rest of the dead and institute the Final Judgment. Then will come the final and eternal destinies of the saved and the lost.⁵²

In defending premillennialism, Blaising begins with a historical survey in which he argues that the demise of premillennialism after the time of Constantine was connected to the rise of a “spiritual vision” model of eternal life, influenced by classical philosophy, in which those who are saved will exist in a “nonearthly, spiritual place as spiritual beings engaged eternally in spiritual activity.”⁵³ He contrasts this with a “new creation model” based upon biblical texts which speak of “a future everlasting kingdom, a new earth and the renewal of life on it, of bodily resurrection . . . , of social and even political concourse among the redeemed.”⁵⁴

Gentry, however, disagrees with Blaising’s historical conclusion. He claims that as “Blaising explains the paradigm shift he deems destructive of premillennialism . . . , he makes some observations that undercut his own case.”⁵⁵ For instance, Gentry points out that even Blaising concedes that several premillennialists have utilized a spiritual model.⁵⁶ If a spiritual

⁵¹ Craig A. Blaising, “Premillennialism,” in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 157.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 161, 170.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 162.

⁵⁵ Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., “A Postmillennial Response to Craig A. Blaising,” in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 232.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

model is not inconsistent with premillennialism, then Gentry challenges how it can explain premillennialism's demise.

Blaising spends a portion of his chapter giving a brief outline of the different varieties of premillennialism. Classical dispensationalism sought to resolve the tension between the spiritual vision and new creation models by claiming there were two forms of salvation, a spiritual eternity in heaven for the church and an everlasting physical existence on the new earth for Israel.⁵⁷ Progressive dispensationalism exchanged "classical dispensationalism's systemic dualism for a holistic approach."⁵⁸ Historic premillennialism sought to advance a form of premillennialism that was not dispensational⁵⁹ whereas historicist premillennialism contends certain numbers in Daniel and Revelation refer to years, claiming "days in biblical prophecy equaled years in the history of the church."⁶⁰

As to specific biblical references to the Millennium, Blaising does not deny that the only such reference is in Revelation 20. However, as he explained earlier in the book, "it is not odd that only here does the Lord give us the truth of a millennial kingdom between the Second Coming and the Judgment Day; rather, this is consistent with the fact of progressive revelation."⁶¹

⁵⁷ Blaising, "Premillennialism," 183.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 186.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 187.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 190-91.

⁶¹ Blaising, "A Premillennial Response to Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr.," 79.

Blaising argues that the narrative from Revelation 11 through 21 creates an ongoing plot line in which each event builds upon the one before it and leads into the one after. For example, in Revelation 12, “John records a vision of the birth of Christ and his ascension into heaven.”⁶² The apostle then proceeds to focus on events that occur during a three-and-a-half-year period of time. These events include oppression from the devil along with the devil giving authority to the beast and speaking through the false prophet. These events lead directly into the narrative of Revelation 19 in which Christ returns and crushes the beast and false prophet.⁶³ Clearly, these chapters must be describing events in their chronological order in order for them to make sense. Christ’s coming “brings to an end their period of authority, which has been highlighted so deliberately up to this time.”⁶⁴

This is the backdrop leading into Revelation 19:11-21:8. As Blaising describes it, this portion of John’s book details “visions that concern the coming of Christ and its consequent effects, namely, the unfolding judgment on the wicked and the fulfillment of blessing on the people of God.”⁶⁵ As such, they directly build upon the narrative leading up to them. However, the Millennium is included among these visions. Thus, any attempt to relocate the Millennium to any time other than after Christ’s return is to remove it from its textual context.

Both Gentry and Strimple dispute Blaising’s conclusions concerning Revelation 20, both based on challenges to his progressive revelation framework. Gentry argues that Blaising’s

⁶² Blaising, “Premillennialism,” 210.

⁶³ Ibid., 211.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 212.

reliance upon progressive revelation means that the book of Revelation must add to our understanding of previous prophetic passages. He even provides multiple quotes from Blaising in which he concedes this point.⁶⁶ This leads Gentry to ask,

Why, then, may not this '[coming] to life' (20:4) be a surprising recasting of a prior revealed truth? That is, in light of John's expansion on previous revelation in remarkable ways, why may he not dramatically portray the vindication of sorely tested martyrs as if such were a coming to life?⁶⁷

Considering that Gentry claims "Revelation's main point is to prophesy the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70,"⁶⁸ he would not have difficulty with the narrative plot line insofar as the events of Revelation 20 would need to come after Christ's ascension alluded in chapter 12. However, the description of the living saints of 20:4 still occurs after Christ's return in 19:11-16, an event that clearly had not yet occurred by A.D. 70. Further, nothing in the context of chapter 20 hints at such an overwhelmingly figurative interpretation or suggests that the living and reigning of these saints is actually referring to some kind of divine vindication of their cause carried out during the destruction of Jerusalem. This certainly is not a conclusion derived from the text but rather appears to be a case of Gentry attempting to fit the text within his postmillennial presuppositions.

Strimple's disagreement begins from the premise that if the premillennial framework had not been revealed by God until John received his revelation, as Blaising's progressive revelation requires, then it was not yet revealed when Christ walked the earth and was teaching His disciples. This in turn means that

⁶⁶ Gentry, "A Postmillennial Response to Craig A. Blaising," 251-52.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 252.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 245.

Jesus and all the apostles interpreted the Old Testament without benefit of the explicit revelation that a thousand-year kingdom on this earth would intervene between the resurrection of believers at the second coming of Christ and the resurrection of unbelievers, the Final Judgment, and the eternal state, because that revelation was given for the first time to John in the vision of Revelation 20.⁶⁹

This leads Strimple to ask, “Can we say that the non-premillennial reading of the Old Testament by Jesus and his apostles is not a sufficient guide to *our* reading of the Old Testament?”⁷⁰

Strimple’s question illustrates two errors in his thinking. First, the fact that neither Jesus nor His disciples are ever recorded in the gospels as mentioning a premillennial future does not mean that their understanding was “non-premillennial.” The absence of a thing is not equivalent to its negation. “Non-premillennial” suggests that Jesus’ understanding was directly contradictory to that of the premillennialists. While Strimple attempts to support this claim, his argument falls short of proving that earlier references rule out premillennialism. Second, Strimple’s dismissal of progressive revelation coming in the book of Revelation on the ground that it had not yet been revealed at the time of Christ would similarly rule out any additional revelation as having come in any biblical book after the gospels. None of Paul’s epistles, Peter’s writings, not even the book of Acts were written at the time of Christ. Following Strimple’s reasoning, if anything in these books touches on any of the same topics taught by Jesus, we must ignore the later writings and focus solely on what can be found in the gospel texts. This argument ignores the fact that God inspired the entire Bible, not merely the gospels, and that “All

⁶⁹ Robert B. Strimple, “An Amillennial Response to Craig A. Blaising,” in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 267.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* (emphasis in original).

Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”⁷¹

Summary Essay

In the final segment of the book, Darrell L. Bock sets out not so much to summarize the arguments previously presented as much as to bring to light the overarching areas of agreement and disagreement, and to identify the various key factors that influence the conclusions one may draw in interpreting biblical passages concerning the Millennium. He begins by pointing out that all three authors “affirm the ultimate victory of God – a victory that has fundamental significance for all Christians in expressing the hope that is part of the gospel.”⁷²

Bock also highlights three areas in which all the contributors agree. First, “All are committed to the Scripture as the ultimate authority in this discussion.”⁷³ Second, all three exhibited fellowship, even while they disagreed.⁷⁴ Finally, all three alternatives presented foresee “the eventual victory of Christ to the glory of God.”⁷⁵

For the remainder of his section, Bock discusses the factors that undergird the disagreements and the influences that can lead us to adopt one viewpoint or another. For instance, we all come to these questions with certain preunderstandings, meaning that “certain

⁷¹ 2 Tim. 3:16.

⁷² Bock, “Summary Essay,” 279-80.

⁷³ Ibid., 284.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 285.

approaches to questions often draw us in favorably almost by default, not because we have examined the issues carefully, but because we are already predisposed to accept a certain orientation over another.”⁷⁶ Questions arise as to how Old Testament texts that speak of Israel should be interpreted in light of the New Testament. Amillennialists and postmillennialists tend to see Old Testament prophecies about Israel as referring to the church whereas premillennialists take an approach that sees at least some level of fulfillment in the Jewish people.⁷⁷

Bock also raises the important question of how we should handle typology in the Old Testament. For example, one must decide

whether the typology coming out of the Old Testament points to a pattern that the New Testament completes in total fulfillment, so that the Old Testament imagery is eclipsed, or whether the New Testament use reflects a pattern of activity that is realized in a fresh way in the new era without necessarily excluding the old imagery for the future, or whether it is a mixture of both, depending on what is discussed.⁷⁸

Perhaps most importantly as concerns Revelation 20, the amillennial and postmillennial positions argue that due to the book’s obscurity, “one should form the structures of one’s eschatology from the thrust of Scripture before we get to this book.”⁷⁹ Premillennialists, in contrast, point out that no other book in the Bible focuses as much on future eschatology as does Revelation, so in spite of its difficulty it should be given careful attention.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 290-91.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 297.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 297-98.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 298.

In the end, Bock encourages the reader to strive toward an understanding of God's word on these matters. A sign of a mature Christian is when one knows why one believes what he believes and how that belief differs from the convictions of others. At the culmination of the work, Bock states his purpose and his hope that it was fulfilled, namely that "this book has helped you appreciate why different positions exist and has laid the building blocks to help you to appreciate all the elements that go into determining a scriptural resolution to the question of the Millennium and beyond."⁸¹

Reaction

First and foremost, this book served to provide me with much more depth to my understanding and appreciation of the different perspectives on the Millennium. This subject is not one that is often preached from the pulpit on Sunday mornings. However, if "[a]ll Scripture is given by inspiration of God"⁸² then no portion of that Scripture should be relegated to the far corners of our minds, barely meriting our attention. The authors have given me motivation to continue a search through the Scriptures to better understand what God has revealed.

Second, the presentation of the various arguments and counterarguments demonstrated a level of grace that is often lacking in human disagreements, but which should be the goal of all Christian interaction. The members of the church will not always agree. We are, after all, imperfect, fallen beings. However, if we are to be one unified body, all working together as

⁸¹ Ibid., 309.

⁸² 2 Tim. 3:16a.

members of Christ's kingdom, then even when we disagree we must do so with respect. Not only is this best for the health of the body of Christ, but it can serve as an example to those around us who may see Jesus through our behavior.

Finally, the book reinforced my commitment to continue making Scripture the ultimate authority in all that it addresses. While it is true that God has spoken to us through His general revelation (Romans 1:20), far more is revealed in the special revelation of His word. All three authors, despite their differences, sought to support their position by appealing to God's word as the foundation for their argument. Any other base would be an unsuitable foundation upon which a Christian theologian should stand.