

A Defense of (Reformed) Amillennialism

(Part IV)

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Matthew 24

(Again)

The risk that an editor takes when he launches a series of editorials is that the series will be interrupted. Reasons for the interruption are varied — and sometimes compelling.

The danger includes that the interruption will be extended for some time and several issues of the magazine.

By the time the editor resumes the series, the reader has forgotten the earlier articles in the series.

This danger with all its fullness has overtaken the editor of the *Standard Bearer*.

In the January 15, 1995 *SB* appeared an editorial, “Jewish Dreams,” rejecting the earthly kingdom of postmillennialism as the hope of the Christian. The March 1, 1995 issue of the magazine contained two letters critical of the editorial, as well as a defense of the editorial by the editor (“A Letter and Response on ‘Jewish Dreams’”).

The March 15, 1995 *SB* also contained a letter that was sharply critical of “Jewish Dreams.” The author of this letter was Gary DeMar, leading advocate of the postmillennialism of the Christian Reconstruction movement. The heart of the letter was a defense of postmillennialism on the basis of Question 191 of the Westminster Larger Catechism. To this letter also, the editor responded (“Another Letter and Response on ‘Jewish Dreams’”).

DeMar’s letter, bristling with challenge, became the occasion for the series of editorials on “A Defense of (Reformed) Amillennialism.”

Lest I be guilty of failing to do what little I can to stop the decline from the truth of amillennialism, I intend to devote future editorials to a biblical, confessional defense of amillennialism against the erroneous doctrine of postmillennialism. These will have the “Christian Reconstruction” movement especially in view (*SB*, March 15, 1995, p. 296).

The series, therefore, concerns the biblical doctrine of the last things, a prominent and vital subject in our day. It is also controversial as the recent exchange with Dr. Gary North indicated.

The first installment appeared in the April 1, 1995 issue of the *SB* (pp. 317, 318). That editorial showed the radical differences between amillennialism and postmillennialism. It quoted with approval the declaration by the Christian Reconstructionist Gary North that premillennialism, postmillennialism, and amillennialism are theologically incompatible. God cannot be pleased with all three. At least two of them should be discarded as heretical, if not today, then before Christ comes in final judgment (p.317).

The editorial charged postmillennialism with the sin of leaving “the people (of God) unprepared for the struggle that lies ahead for the church, the fiercest struggle that the church has ever faced. It renders the people oblivious to the gathering storm at this very moment” (p.318).

The second installment ran in the April 15, 1995 *SB* (pp. 341-343). This editorial dealt with one of the biblical passages that are fundamental in the controversy, Revelation 20, the only passage that mentions the “millennium.” The editorial took note of the explanation of Revelation 20 by Presbyterian exegete J. Marcellus Kik and by the Christian Reconstructionist David Chilton. It demonstrated that the phrase, “thousand years,” is a figurative description of the entire age of the new covenant during which particularly the martyred saints are raised in their souls at the moment of death to live and reign with Christ in heaven.

Revelation 20 is no support to postmillennialism, but rather a refutation of that error. The saints do not gain earthly victory in the world; rather, they suffer and are beheaded. History does not come to its end with the earthly triumph of the church; rather, Satan is loosed, and the hordes of the ungodly attack the church and the saints. The hope held before the people of God is not a carnal kingdom on earth; rather, it is our living and reigning with Christ in heaven at death (p. 343).

The third installment is found in the May 1, 1995 *SB* (pp. 365-367). The topic of this editorial was “Apostasy and Persecution.” With reference to Gary DeMar’s *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church* (American Vision, 1994), it pointed out that postmillennialism, especially the Christian Reconstructionist brand, puts the great apostasy and great tribulation of the New Testament Scriptures *in the past*. Against this false and dangerous teaching, the editorial argued from Scripture and the confessions that the apostasy of II Thessalonians 2:3 and the great tribulation of Matthew 24:21 are still to be expected by the church, although both are also present realities. It quoted the powerful statement in chapter 11 of the Second Helvetic Confession (1566):

And from heaven the same Christ will return in judgment, when wickedness will then be at its greatest in the world and when the Antichrist, having corrupted true religion, will fill up all things with superstition and impiety and will cruelly lay waste the Church with bloodshed and flames (Dan., ch. 11).

The fourth installment appeared, in sequence, in the May 15, 1995 *SB* (pp. 389, 390). The title was, “A Defense of (Reformed) Amillennialism (4): Matthew 24.” So far the

hazard that threatens editorial series was avoided. It was after this installment that disaster struck.

As for the content of that fourth installment, its subject is so important to the controversy, and so closely related to the article that must follow, that, rather than summarize it, I must reprint it in part. What follows then is the last part of the fourth editorial in the series. This concerns the postmillennial interpretation of Matthew 24.

The happy predictions of postmillennialism for the church in the world are overthrown by 2,000 years of history.

Postmillennialism's denial of apostasy, antichrist, and persecution is refuted by historical events.

Amillennialism, on the other hand, rings true to history, past and present. To refer only to this one vital element in the controversy, the true church has always been and is today the remnant according to the election of grace. When and where has the true church ever been the majority? It was the remnant in apostolic times; it was the remnant at the time of the Reformation; it is the remnant today. Why, even in Israel/Judah, it was the remnant.

Awareness of developments in the world in light of the prophecy of the Holy Scriptures is not, however, the main reason for the astonishment of the Reformed Christian at the dream-world of postmillennialism. His amazement at postmillennialism's rosy forecast of the earthly future is mainly due to the contrary testimony of the Bible.

What of the apostles' prediction of departure from the faith in the last days in II Thessalonians 2:3; II Timothy 3, 4; II Peter 2; and I John 2:18, 19?

What of the apostle's warning of a coming Antichrist in II Thessalonians 2?

What of the apostle's alerting the saints to an impending tribulation as an element of those things that must shortly come to pass before the coming of the Lord, in the book of Revelation, e.g., 3:10; 6:9-11; 7:9-17; 11:1-12; 12:17; 13; 14:9-13; 15:2; 16; 17; 19:2, 19-21; and 20:4, 7-10?

The answer given by the postmillennialist, particularly the "Christian Reconstructionist" (such as Gary DeMar, who asked for this biblical defense of amillennialism), to all of these astonished questions by the Reformed Christian is that all of the prophecies of apostasy, Antichrist, and tribulation have already been completely fulfilled. They are *past* events. The church of A. D. 1995 does not need to concern herself with them. Nothing of them is yet future. All was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70.

Postmillennialist Gary DeMar writes, "It is unbiblical to use the term 'Antichrist' for a present-day or future political ruler. The proper context is theological and pre-A. D. 70" (*Last Days Madness*, p.204).

The same author has written that the church must “recognize that the Great Tribulation is a past event.” For “the tribulation had reference to the Jews, the people of Judea.” It was “the destruction of Jerusalem” (*Last Days*, pp. 119, 110).

The exegetical basis of “Christian Reconstruction’s” grand vision of a “Christianized” world - the victory of the gospel in history - is largely the interpretation of Matthew 24 by J. Marcellus Kik. The Presbyterian’s interpretation of Jesus’ eschatological discourse has been reprinted in a book titled, *An Eschatology of Victory* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971), pp. 53-173.

Kik explains the chapter in such a way that verses 4-31 refer exclusively to the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome in A. D. 70. Nothing in these verses refers at all to Jesus’ second coming and the events that immediately precede His coming. The abomination of desolation in verse 15 refers only to the desecration of the temple by the “idolatrous ensigns” of the invading Roman army (p.104). The “great tribulation” of verse 21 refers only to the suffering of the Jews at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem. The false Christs and false prophets of verse 24 refer only to the pretender-Messiahs and false teachers among the Jews at that time.

The “coming of the Son of man” in verses 27 and 30 is not the visible, bodily return of Christ, but His revelation in the preaching of the gospel by the apostles. The gathering of the elect by the angels in verse 31 is the spiritual saving of the elect through the gospel. “Angels” are human preachers.

The preliminary signs in the heavens of verse 29 are not the literal darkening of the sun and moon, prior to Jesus’ second coming, but the going out of the figurative light of the Jews as a nation in A. D. 70. “The sun of Judaism has been darkened” (p.128). The shaking of the powers of the heavens in verse 29 “refers to Satan and his angels” (p. 133).

The basis for this understanding of Matthew 24:4-31 according to Kik and his “Christian Reconstruction” disciples is Jesus’ word in verse 34: “Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.” Kik explains this word as meaning, very simply, that every single prophecy of Christ in verses 4-31 was fulfilled, exhaustively, in the lifetime of the generation that was alive at the time of Jesus’ instruction. All was exhaustively fulfilled in A. D. 70 in the destruction of Jerusalem. Nothing foretold in verses 4-31 pertains to the second coming.

The key to Matthew Twenty-four is verse 34.... Every thing mentioned in the previous verses were (*sic*) to be fulfilled before the contemporary generation would pass away.... The first thirty-four verses of Matthew 24, along with verse 35... deal with the destruction of Jerusalem (pp. 59, 60, 67).

Gary DeMar agrees:

The events rehearsed in the Olivet Discourse are signs leading up to and including the destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70. These chapters have nothing to do with when Jesus *will* return at the final judgment. There are no observable signs leading up to His bodily return (*Last Days*, p.151).

This interpretation of Matthew 24 is basic to the postmillennial denial of apostasy, Antichrist, and great tribulation for the church in the future. For in the light of this explanation of Matthew 24, the postmillennialist goes through the entire New Testament rigorously applying all prediction of such things to the destruction of Jerusalem.

Fundamental to this interpretation of Matthew 24 is Kik's explanation of verse 34, the "key" to the chapter. If Kik is wrong here, his whole postmillennial conception of the earthly future collapses like a house of cards.

"This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled."

Does Christ teach that every last particular in the preceding verses was fulfilled exhaustively in A. D. 70?

We shall see.

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