

A Defense of (Reformed) Amillennialism

(Part VI)

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Matthew 24

(Continued)

Matthew 24, 25 is Jesus' answer to the question of His disciples in 24:3. The question was, "When shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" The question combined the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and the end of the world at Jesus' second coming. Jesus' answer likewise combines these two events. The reason for the combination of these two events in the great discourse by our Lord on the last things (eschatology) is that the destruction of Jerusalem was a historical type of the end of the world.

Throughout Matthew 24:4-31, Jesus gives instruction to His church concerning the end of the world, and the things which the church must expect before the end of the world, under the figure, or type, of the destruction of Jerusalem.

Inasmuch as the destruction of Jerusalem was the type of the end, everything that Jesus has taught in the preceding verses can be said in verse 34 to "be fulfilled," that is, happen, in A.D. 70. "All these things," happen *typically* in A.D. 70. But these things do not happen in A.D. 70 *exhaustively*. They do by no means happen in *reality* in A.D. 70. The reality of all these things will happen when Jesus comes in the body at the end of the world.

It is the same with the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world as it is with the fulfillment of the other great prophecies of the Scriptures. Balaam's prophecy in Numbers 24:12-25 of the king out of Jacob was fulfilled historically in David, the son of Jesse. The mention of the various heathen nations that the king would subdue shows this. All the things of Balaam's prophecy happened in the life and reign of King David.

But only typically. Not exhaustively. Not as to the reality.

The real happening of these things - the fulfillment — is in the kingship of Jesus Christ.

Similarly, the promise to Abram that his seed would receive the land from the Nile to the Euphrates was typically fulfilled in the glorious kingdom of Solomon (Gen. 15:18; II Chron. 9:26).

But not in reality.

The reality is the present extent of the spiritual kingdom of Jesus Christ, which worldwide kingdom is yet expanding and will be perfected in all the universe at the coming of the Christ.

The peaceful kingdom of Psalm 72 is, throughout the Psalm, both the earthly kingdom under Solomon and the spiritual kingdom of Jesus the Messiah. More precisely, it is the spiritual kingdom of Messiah foreshadowed in the earthly kingdom under Solomon.

The Reformed Tradition: Ridderbos and Calvin

This explanation of Matthew 24:1-35 in terms of type/antitype, or figure/reality, is that of the solid Reformed tradition.

Exactly concerning the difficulty, how Jesus could say in Matthew 24:34 that “this generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled,” the Dutch Reformed exegete Herman Ridderbos wrote:

By “all these things” (rendered by Ridderbos as “*dit alles*,” ‘all this’ - DJE) ... (is) to be understood ... the entire complex of the happening of the last time, including the coming of the Son of Man. In this connection one must again take into consideration the combining character of the representation of the future set forth here.... The startingpoint of this whole discourse is in the destruction of the temple. And because this, according to the nature of prophecy, is seen in one and the same realm (“*in een vlak*”) with the great future of the Lord, it can be said that the generation which would be witness of this destruction shall not pass “till all these things be fulfilled.” Here, therefore, the great future is again designated in a complex, undifferentiated way. In the light of the fulfillment it is evident that “all these things” (“*dit alles*,” according to Ridderbos - DJE) do not come all at once and, therefore, would be seen merely in part by the then living generation.... The exegesis (of Matt. 24 -DJE) must also here adopt the historical viewpoint, that is, must proceed from the prophetic form of eschatology. See also the commentary on 24:14 (*The Gospel according to Matthew*, vol. 2, Kok, 1954, pp. 157, 158, in *Korte Verklaring*; the translation of the Dutch is mine).

This was also Calvin’s interpretation of Matthew 24:34. Because Calvin’s interpretation is both clear and compelling; because it represents the Reformed tradition, indeed, the

tradition of the Reformation; and because it destroys the novel interpretation by Kik and the Christian Reconstructionists, it deserves to be quoted in its entirety:

Though Christ employs a general expression, yet he does not extend the discourses to all the miseries which would befall the Church, but merely informs them, that before a single *generation* shall have been completed, they will learn by experience the truth of what he has said. For within fifty years the city was destroyed and the temple was rased, the whole country was reduced to a hideous desert, and the obstinacy of the world rose up against God. Nay more, their rage was inflamed to exterminate the doctrine of salvation, false teachers arose to corrupt the pure gospel by their impostures, religion sustained amazing shocks, and the whole company of the godly was miserably distressed. Now though the same evils were perpetrated in uninterrupted succession for many ages afterwards, yet what Christ said was true, that, before the close of a single *generation*, believers would feel in reality, and by undoubted experience, the truth of his prediction; for the apostles endured the same things which we see in the present day. And yet it was not the design of Christ to promise to his followers that their calamities would be terminated within a short time, (for then he would have contradicted himself, having previously warned them that *the end was not yet;*) but, in order to encourage them to perseverance, he expressly foretold that those things related to their own age. The meaning therefore is: "This prophecy does not relate to evils that are distant, and which posterity will see after the lapse of many centuries, but which are now hanging over you, and ready to fall in one mass, so that there is no part of it which the present *generation* will not experience." So then, while our Lord heaps upon a single *generation* every kind of calamities, he does not by any means exempt future ages from the same kind of sufferings, but only enjoins the disciples to be prepared for enduring them all with firmness (*Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, vol.3, tr. William Pringle, Eerdmans, 1949, pp. 151, 152).

Calvin's explanation of the related 14th verse of the chapter ("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") is the same. Calvin flatly denies that the reference to the end is exhaustively and exclusively a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem, as is the contention of Kik and the Christian Reconstructionists. Calvin points to the obvious fact that is basic to the right understanding of the entire passage, namely, Jesus' "blending" of the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world as figure and reality.

This is improperly restricted by some to the destruction of the temple, and the abolition of the service of the Law; for it ought to be understood as referring to *the end* and renovation of the world. Those two things having been blended by the disciples, as if the temple could not be overthrown without the destruction of *the whole world*, Christ, in replying to the whole question which had been put to him, reminded them that a long

and melancholy succession of calamities was at hand, and that they must not hasten to seize the prize, before they had passed through many contests and dangers. In this manner, therefore, we ought to explain this latter clause: “The end of the world will not come before I have tried my Church, for a long period, by severe and painful temptations” (pp. 129, 130).

The interpretation of Matthew 24:34 by J. Marcellus Kik and the Christian Reconstructionists as demanding that everything set forth in Matthew 24:4-31 took place exhaustively and really in the destruction of Jerusalem is a radical departure from the historic Reformed explanation of the passage.

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