

Which Kingdom?

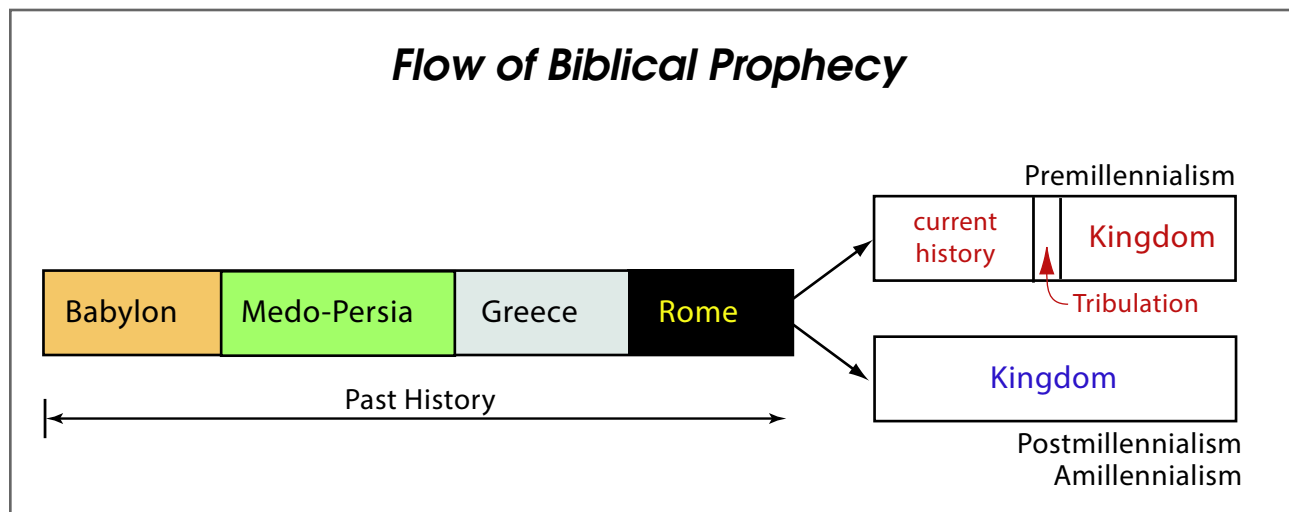
THE FIRST prophecy in Daniel was about a statue made of four different metals. The metals represented four real, earthly kingdoms of the future. The first kingdom was the Babylonian Empire. Each kingdom was defeated by a subsequent one. Each kingdom had an earthly king. Four of these kingdoms are now past history. The next kingdom will be an alliance of nations from the same territory that the four prior kingdoms occupied. When this future empire comes to power, it will seek to destroy Israel. Scripture teaches that Christ will come and rescue Israel by defeating this alliance and will then establish an earthly kingdom which will exist for 1,000 years. Those who believe this are called premillennialists. There are others who believe that we are living in that kingdom now. They are called amillennialists and postmillennialists. You may know someone who believes that there is no future kingdom of 1,000 years on this earth. Consequently, we want to examine these other views. We pray the Holy Spirit will use this to guide you into truth.

THREE VIEWS. There have been three different, major views about the future kingdom since the time of Jesus and the apostles. These views are called premillennialism, amillennialism, and postmillennialism. The common portion of these terms is the word “millennium” which refers to a 1,000 year kingdom.

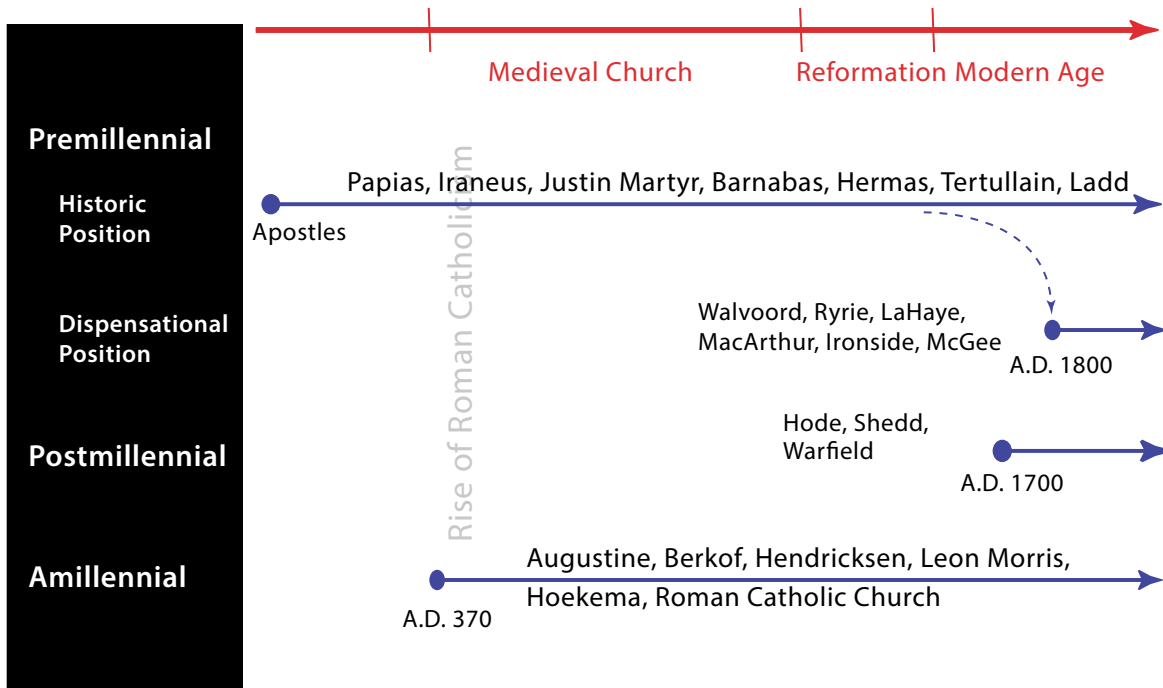
Premillennialists believe in a future, literal, earthly 1,000 year kingdom on this earth with Jesus Christ reigning as king. Amillennialists and postmillennialists believe only in a spiritual kingdom which exists now. Postmillennialists believe that Jesus will not come until the world has morally improved or has been Christianized. Consequently, this encourages them to motivate governments to pass laws

which require “Christian” conduct. As the world improves morally, they teach that Jesus will finally come. We will look at the differences between these views later.

Now let’s ask, “What has the Christian church believed about the future from the time of the apostles?” The answer is actually rather simple. There has been only one view that the apostles taught. It is premillennialism. There is an older form called Historic Premillennialism and an updated form called Dispensational Premillennialism. They are almost the same. Dispensational Premillennialism adds a rapture, or the removal of all Christians, before the tribulation period begins. Historic Premillennialism does not. That is the major difference.



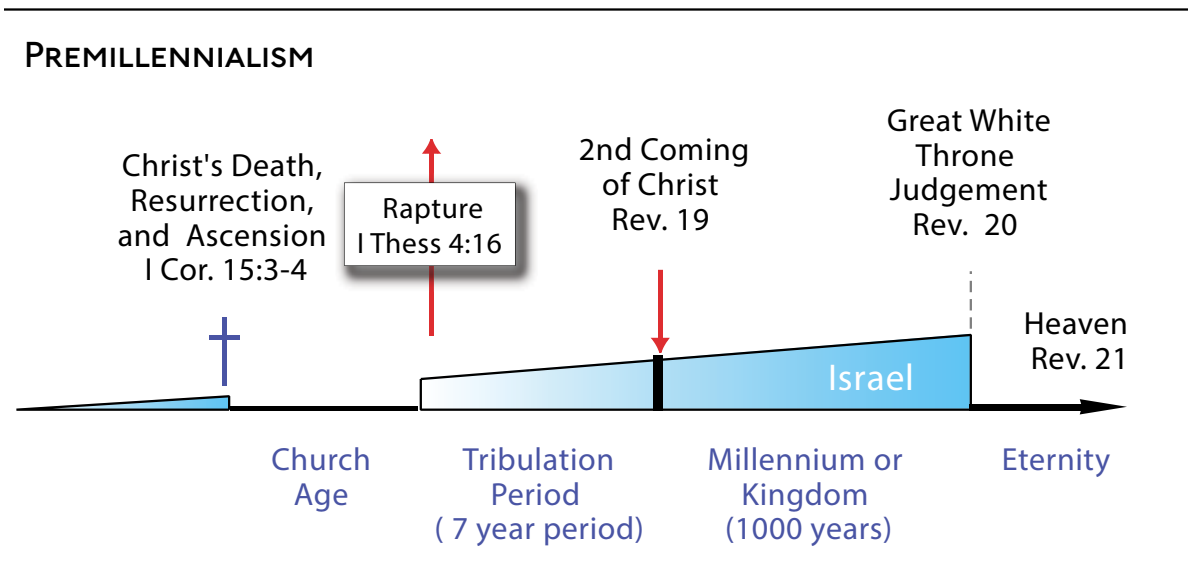
Historical Overview

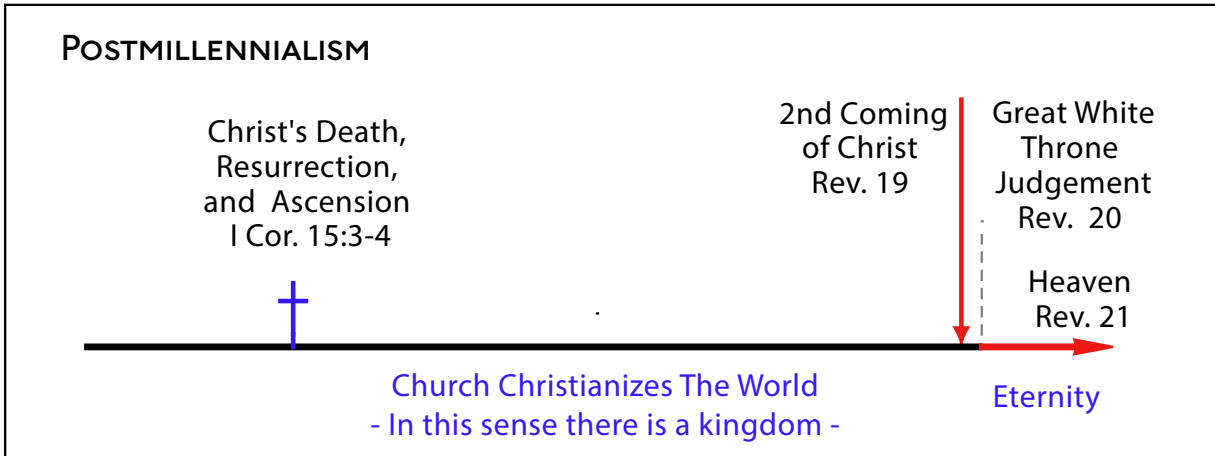


Today the most common views are premillennialism and amillennialism. Amillennialism was the dominant view under the Roman Catholic Church prior to the reformation. Premillennialism is now the most commonly accepted view among Protestants. It is a return to the New Testament view. This concludes the overview of the history of these views. But history cannot prove that premillennialism, amillennialism,

and postmillennialism are biblically correct. As a result, we will look at what scripture says about each one.

POSTMILLENNIALISM - WORLD IS GETTING BETTER. Postmillennialism became popular near the end of the reformation or about A.D. 1700. This view teaches that as the world continues to improve morally, eventually Jesus Christ will come and establish the kingdom. This was a very popu-





lar view among Christians until World War I and II. After these wars occurred, it became obvious that the world was not getting better and better. Now fewer people accept postmillennialism. It is very close to amillennialism.

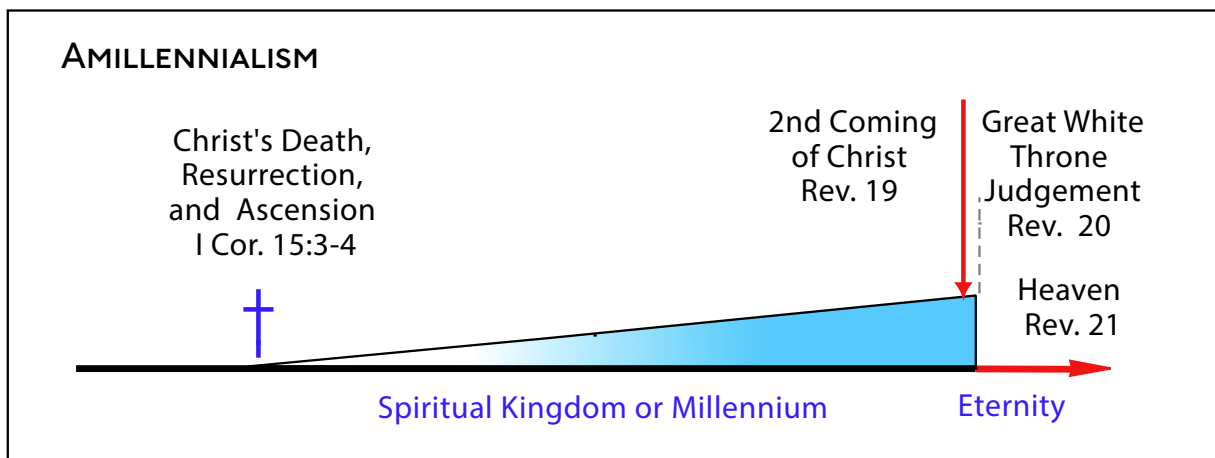
AMILLENNIALISM - WE ARE IN THE KINGDOM. Amillennialism came into existence around A.D. 370 as the Roman Catholic Church was establishing itself. The Roman Catholic Church taught that the church was God's kingdom on earth. This view says that the church is God's real kingdom which is expanding and conquering the world. They teach that God's kingdom is growing and conquering the hearts of men while the world is becoming worse. Postmillennialists believe the world is getting better. This is where amillennialism and postmillennialism differ.

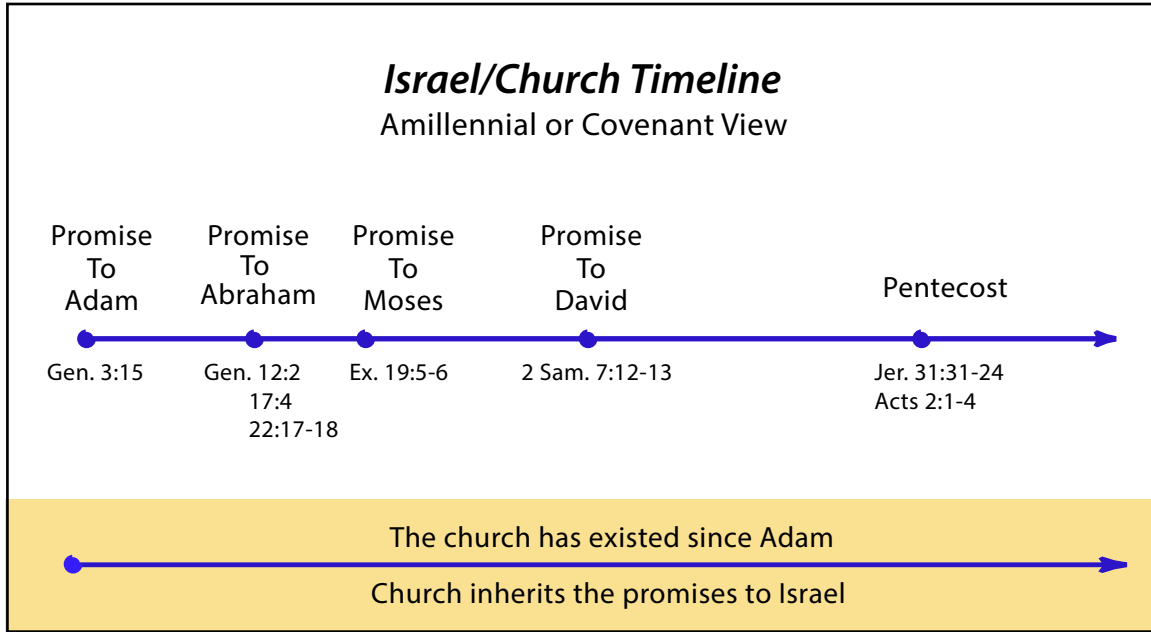
Amillennialism is consistent with the desires of the Roman Catholic Church. The church wanted to dominate and control the world. Proof is found in medieval history, the Inquisitions and Crusades. Amillennialism was the most popular view from A.D. 370 until about 1700. Amillennialism was

the main theological viewpoint of the future because the Roman Catholic Church was the dominant church during that era. There were no competing views since the Roman Catholic Church was in almost total control.

AMILLENNIALISM - CHURCH IS ISRAEL. There are four major tenants upon which Amillennialism depends. First, it teaches that the church has inherited all of the promises of Israel. Romans 9:6-8 and Galatians 3:29 clearly teach that every Christian and every Jew who believes in Jesus is a descendant of Abraham in a spiritual sense. This is consistent with the promise made to Abraham of the eternal life through his seed - Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:16). That is, one who believes in Jesus obtains spiritual life, not by inheritance but based on faith (Gal. 3:18). Therefore, the amillennialist concludes that all of the promises made to Israel belong to Christians too!

But this ignores the promises of physical blessing that were made to Abraham about being a great nation (Gen. 12:1-3, 22:15-19) and the promise made to King David of an earthly kingdom (2 Sam. 7:12-16). In short, the Amillennialist





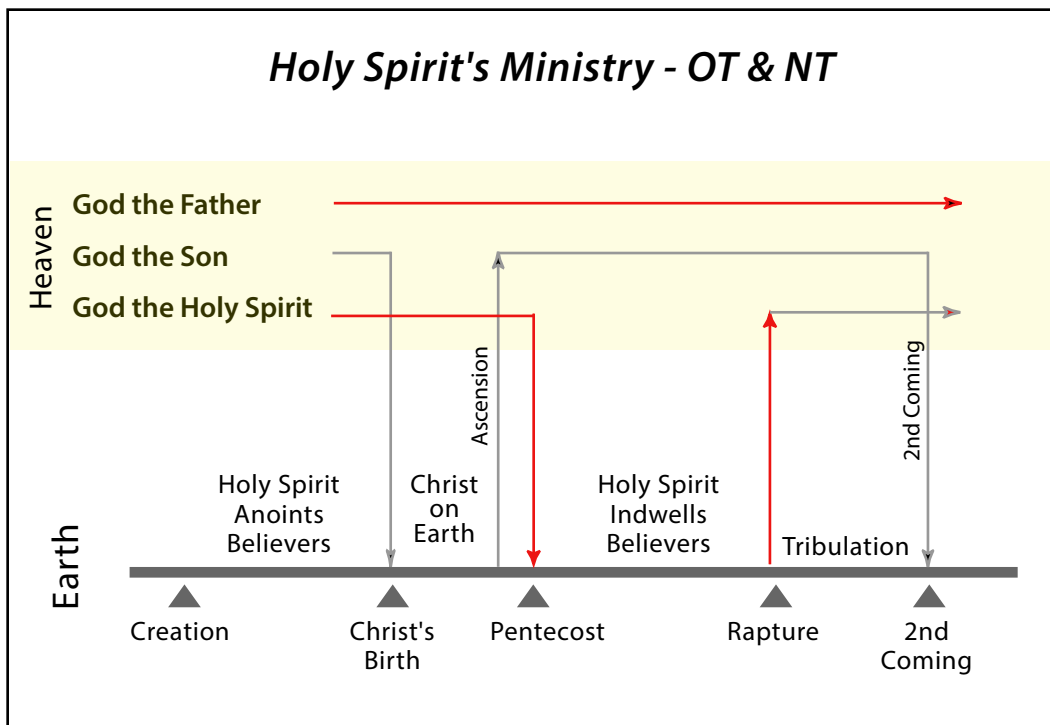
either ignores the promises of a physical, literal kingdom or spiritualizes them away. Amillennialism also explains away Jesus' repeated statements about a future earthly kingdom which will be discussed later.

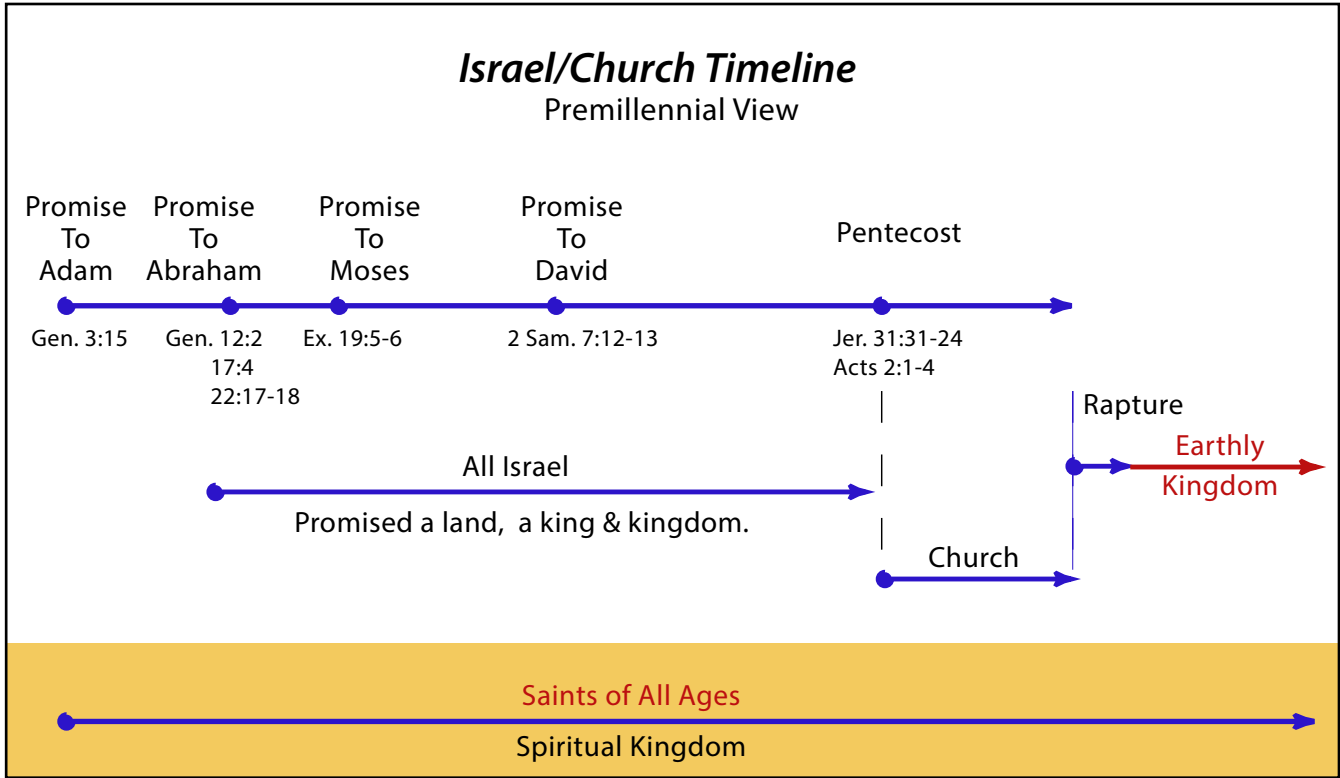
Consequently, the amillennialist sees no distinction between the church and the Old Testament saints of Israel since they believe that the church has existed since Adam and Eve. They look to Ephesians 4:4-6 as support which

teaches,

There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. (NASB) Eph. 4:4-6

That is, there is only one faith, one Lord, and one body.





There is not an Old Testament body and a New Testament body. There is only one body, and it has existed since Adam and Eve. When asked the question, “Did the church begin at Pentecost with the coming of the Holy Spirit?” the amillennialist answers, “No!” and explains that the Holy Spirit was present in the Old Testament and without Him no one can be saved. They also add, “How can anyone be saved without the Holy Spirit?” It is true that the Holy Spirit was present in the Old Testament (Num. 11:1-26; 24:6; Judges 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 15:14; 1 Samuel 10:6-10; 16:13-14; 19:20-23; Ezek. 2:2). It is also true that the Holy Spirit must help the unbeliever understand spiritual truth (1 Cor. 2:14). But this ignores the fact that in the New Testament Jesus said that God the Father was going to send the Helper - the Holy Spirit.

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. (NASB) John 14:26

But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you; but if I go, I

will send Him to you. (NASB) John 16:7

Since the Holy Spirit was present in the Old Testament, what did Jesus mean that the Holy Spirit was going to come? We could ask, “Why did Jesus say that the Holy Spirit would come, if He was already present on earth?” What did He mean in Luke 24:49 and in Acts when He said,

And gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, “Which,” He said, “you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” . . . but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you . . . (NASB) Acts 1:4, 5, 8

Jesus has already answered the question with, “. . . the Holy Spirit not many days from now . . .” The Holy Spirit was coming in a new and unique way. Yes, He was present in the Old Testament. Yes, He came upon people in the Old Testament, but He did not permanently live in them. In the New Testament era or the church age, the Holy Spirit lives forever inside the believer, and our assurance is that we are sealed

by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13). He lives within Christians (Gal. 5:25). For a complete study about the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, please visit “The Spirit’s Ministry - Tongues and Prophecy.”

Scripture teaches that the church grows as the Holy Spirit baptizes men and women into the body of Jesus.

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. (NASB) 1 Cor. 12:13

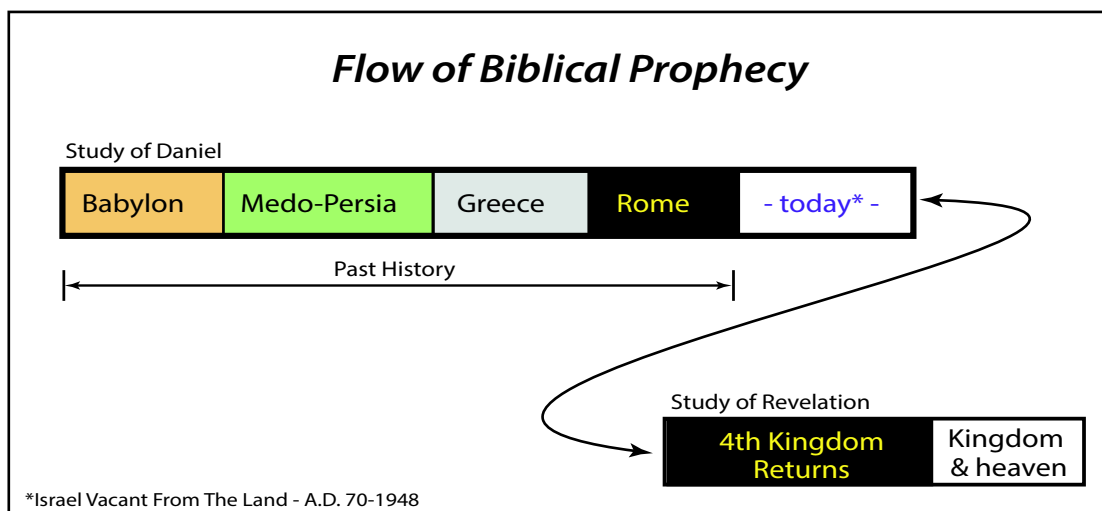
This did not occur until the New Testament. Since the body of Christ is the church. The church did not exist in the Old Testament. The amillennialist has ignored clear literal passages in order to make his theological scheme work.

Any Old Testament person who had put their faith in the coming Messiah went to paradise when they died. They

all of its Old Testament prophetic promises. Consequently, there is no prophetic future for the nation of Israel. This is unfortunate because this view cannot be supported by an objective, literal reading in scripture. One of the most difficult passages for the amillennialist is Romans 11:25-26.

For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery . . . that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in and so all Israel will be saved . . . (NASB) Rom. 11:25-26

Here the Holy Spirit tells us that a partial hardening of Israel will continue until the fullness of the Gentiles is complete. Luke 21:24 says that this period of time started at least with the destruction of Jerusalem. This means that the hardening of Israel had a starting point and has an end point in the



went to heaven and joined the others from all of the ages. The amillennialist misses the fact that there are Old Testament saints and New Testament “church” saints who will live in paradise until God’s spiritual kingdom comes to earth.

AMILLENNIALISM - NO RAPTURE. The amillennialist does not believe in a rapture because he/she believes that there is no future for Israel. They have been replaced by the church. If the church has inherited the promises of Israel, then there is no need for a special kingdom for Israel and there is no need for a tribulation. Therefore, there is also no need for a rapture prior to the tribulation!

In short, the church has replaced Israel, and inherited

future. That is, Israel will be “unhardened” at some time in the future. This will occur at the beginning of the tribulation.

After the period of partial hardening has ended, every Israelite that is alive will be saved. The amillennialist does not believe that “all Israel will be saved” and insists that the phrase does not mean “all Israel” but only “some of Israel.” They conclude that “all” does not mean “all” and that it refers to only the elect or those whom God has chosen to be saved. Unfortunately, they conclude without evidence or proof that God has not chosen “all” Israel after the times of the Gentiles has been completed. Their conclusion does not have any biblical support.

If one allows Israel to realize the Old Testament prophetic promises, then an earthly kingdom must occur, the times of the Gentiles includes the tribulation, and the church will be raptured prior to the tribulation as explained in “The Church Is Missing.”

AMILLENNIALISM - KINGDOM IS SPIRITUAL. The amillennialist does not believe that the kingdom is both spiritual and physical. They believe it exists in the hearts of men and women only. They teach that when Jesus ascended into heaven, He sat down next to the Father and started reigning in heaven as king. So the kingdom exists today.

While this is true, it ignores the fact that the kingdom exists now in an invisible, spiritual sense, and it will exist in the future in a physical, literal sense. For example, several Old Testament passages declare that God is already a king of a kingdom. Here is one.

For the LORD Most High is to be feared, a great King over all the earth. (NASB) Ps. 47:2

When Jesus stood before Pilate He said,

Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.” (NASB) John 18:36

Jesus was simply saying that His kingdom already existed. It was spiritual. When the amillennialist is asked, “What kingdom did Jesus establish when He entered heaven? the answer given is that the spiritual kingdom was more fully established. But one must ask, “Was God’s kingdom imperfect or insufficient?”

If the kingdom already existed, why did Jesus offer the kingdom to the Jewish people when He started His ministry?

From that time Jesus began to preach and say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (NASB) Matt. 4:17

We also need to ask, “Why did Jesus not tell His disciples

that the kingdom already existed when they asked Him when it was coming?” Instead He gave this answer,

And so when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority . . . (NASB) Acts 1:6-7

Was Jesus avoiding the question? The answer is that there is a spiritual kingdom for the saints of all the ages. There is also a future earthly kingdom for the Jewish people. That is what Jesus offered the Jews. They lost it because they rejected Jesus.

It is important to remember that all of the kingdoms in Daniel’s prophecy are kingdoms which existed on this planet which are defeated by other kingdoms on this planet. They were real, literal kingdoms and not spiritual ones. Each successive kingdom followed the previous one. The amillennialist misses the point that the next kingdom, an alliance of ten nations, will also be a real, literal kingdom. The last kingdom in Daniel’s prophecy will be a literal physical kingdom too! The last two kingdoms do not exist yet. They are yet future!

AMILLENNIALISM - SPIRITUALIZES SCRIPTURE. The last point we want to explore is that the amillennialist does not interpret scripture literally. He or she changes the clear meaning of biblical passages to make them fit into the amillennial view of the future.

When one uses symbolic interpretation as a primary means of understanding biblical passages, one can make scripture mean almost anything. The amillennialist routinely spiritualizes key passages. They make them symbolic and ignore the context and clear literal meanings. The books of Daniel and Revelation are filled with numbers. Yet, amillennialist or covenant theologians consider them to be symbolic. One must ask, “Why did the Holy Spirit provide us with literal numbers if they have some other meaning?”

A second point of importance occurs with the passage of Revelation 20:1-3.

And I saw an angel coming down from heaven . . . and he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he should not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed . . . (NASB) Rev. 20:1-3

The amillennialist does not accept this passage literally and says that Satan is not bound but hindered. Here is a quote from a well known amillennialist, William Hendricksen.

. . . we conclude that here also in Revelation 20:1-3 the binding of Satan and the fact that he is hurled into the abyss to remain for a thousand years indicates that throughout this present gospel age the devil's influence on earth is curtailed. He is unable to prevent the extension of the Church among the nations . . . By means of the preaching of the Word as applied by the Holy Spirit, the elect, from all parts of the world, are brought from darkness to light. In that sense the Church conquers the nations, and the nations do not conquer the Church . . . Within a comparatively brief period Christianity spreads throughout southern Europe . . . During the centuries that followed it is proclaimed everywhere so that the ends of the earth hear the gospel of the crucified One and many bend the knee before Him. The church has become international . . . the church is powerful . . . Only the individual who lacks the historic sense . . . can fail to see the glories of the millennial age in which we are now living . . . The church exerts a tremendous influence upon almost the entire complex of human life. In that sense - not in every sense - the devil is bound (Hendricksen, William, *More Than Conquerors*, Baker Books., Grand Rapids, 1998. p. 188-190).

They believe we are living in the kingdom today. Now from a premillennialist.

Some maintain that this binding took place at [the start of the early church]. In that case the dark ages were part of the Millennium . . . Peter was inspired to say that Satan "walks about" (1 Peter 5:8) on the earth, while he was bound in the Abyss! Some assert that the binding took place at the

conversion of Constantine. But that was the beginning of all that has led to the corruption and apostasy in the church [The Roman Catholic Church has been a major force for evil in the world, especially during the Dark and Medieval periods]. Others hold that . . . Satan is bound now. Such can never read newspapers, which teem with little else than the most awful evidences to the contrary, both in crimes in the world and of corruption in the church (Bullinger, E. W., *Commentary of Revelation*, Kregel, Grand Rapids, 1989. p. 610-611).

Finally, from another premillennialist.

Amillennialists argue that Satan is already bound, since they believe we are in the millennium now . . . Many postmillennialists and amillennialists believe that Satan is presently bound, because otherwise it is difficult to see how the church could usher in the millennium . . . But Satan did not keep the Gentile nations from the knowledge of the truth before his alleged binding at the Cross. The Egyptians heard about the true God from Joseph, and from the Israelites . . . The Assyrians of Nineveh not only heard the truth from Jonah, but also repented (Matt. 12:41). The Queen of Sheba heard about the true God from Solomon (1 Kings 10:1-9); the Babylonians from Daniel and his Jewish friends and the Persians from Esther, Mordecai, and Nehemiah. Further, in what sense is Satan restrained from deceiving the nations in the present age, since he blinds the minds of unbelievers (2 Cor. 4:4), "is now working in the sons of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2), and holds unbelievers captive (2 Tim. 2:26) in his kingdom (Col. 1:13)? (MacArthur, John. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Rev. 12-22. Revelation*, Moody Press, 2000 p. 235-236.)

We should also add that Satan motivates us to lie (Acts 5:3). He tries to take advantage of us (2 Cor. 2:11). He is an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). He attacks Christians (Eph. 4:27; 2 Cor. 12:7). He hinders ministries (1 Thess. 2:18). He tries to lead us astray (1 Tim. 5:15). He is called the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4) and he prowls about after us. He is the ruler of this world (John 12:31; 14:30) and he is the prince of

the air (Eph. 2:2). Satan is not hindered today! He is aggressively active.

CONCLUSION. When one spiritualizes scripture, one can come to almost any conclusion. The amillennialist does not accept plain, clear statements about the church, Jesus' promise about the coming of the Holy Spirit, Jesus' statement about the coming kingdom, the binding of Satan, the flow of the kingdoms in Daniel, or the literal meaning of a 1,000 year kingdom on earth. He or she must explain them away, change the plain sense of the passage, ignore clearly defined symbolic explanations or spiritualize them.

This is a great lesson for us. When we come to scripture, we must be careful to not change the meaning in order to make it mean what we want it to say. We must be willing to change what we believe and not scripture. In conclusion, the kingdom is spiritual today and in the future, it will come to earth and be a literal, physical, 1,000 year kingdom.

This has been a different study. It has not been our goal

to insult or be unloving to those of another viewpoint. It has been our desire to provide you with some insights into other views and to accurately present what scripture says about each one. God asks us to accurately interpret scripture and we trust that we have.

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth. (NASB) 2 Timothy 2:15

God also calls you to check out what we teach and we pray that you will.

Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so. (NASB) Acts 17:11