

The Millennium, Israel, and the Church

Revelation 20, Romans 9–11, and the three frameworks for thinking about God's one people in Jesus Christ

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← Discipleship School

Where this fits: Lesson 3 of the Pleasant Springs *End Times* series, continuing from [Lesson 1 on the Rapture and the Parousia](#) and [Lesson 2 on the Book of Revelation](#). In this lesson we take up the three questions that divide Christians on the end times more than any others: Is there a millennium? Is there a distinct future for national Israel? And is the Church the New Israel, a separate people from Israel, or something else?

WHY THIS LESSON MATTERS

Two questions sit at the heart of every Christian disagreement about the end times. The first is **the millennium**: what is that “thousand years” in Revelation 20, when does it happen, and who reigns with Christ? The second is **Israel and the Church**: is there still a distinct program for ethnic, national Israel alongside the Church, or has the Church become the true and final Israel in Christ? These two questions are usually linked, because the answers you give to one tend to dictate the answers you give to the other.

Pleasant Springs Church affirms historic premillennialism on Revelation 20, combined with a covenantal reading of Israel and the Church. We believe Christ will return to reign bodily over a renewed creation, that his reign will include the regathering and salvation of ethnic Israel (as Paul

promises in Romans 11), and that the Church is not a parenthesis or a replacement but the fulfillment of God’s one covenant people, now including Gentiles grafted into the olive tree of Israel (Rom 11:17–24). We are not dispensational. We are not strict supersessionists. We believe Christ is the key that unlocks both Testaments, and that “Israel” and “Church” are two chapters of one covenant story whose hero is Jesus.

In this lesson we will lay out the three millennial views, walk through Revelation 20 carefully, survey the four major frameworks for relating Israel and the Church (Dispensational, Covenantal, New Covenant, Historic Premillennial), and read Romans 9–11 with Paul’s audience in mind.

Greek NT (Rom 11:26–27): καὶ οὕτως πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ σωθήσεται, καθὼς γέγραπται· ἥξει ἐκ Σιὼν ὁ ῥυόμενος, ἀποστρέψει ἀσεβείας ἀπὸ Ἰακώβ.

Romans 11:26–27 (ESV): “And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob.’”

PART 1 — THE THREE MILLENNIAL VIEWS

A view on the millennium answers one question: *when does Christ return in relation to the thousand-year reign of Revelation 20?* Three answers have been defended by faithful Christians across the centuries. All three are orthodox. Only one was the position of the first 250 years of the Church.

1. Premillennialism — Christ returns *before* the millennium

Pre- (Latin, “before”) + millennium

The core claim: Christ will return personally, bodily, and gloriously before establishing a literal thousand-year reign over a renewed earth. During this reign Christ will sit on David’s throne, the saints will reign with him, Satan will be bound, and peace will fill the earth. After the thousand years Satan is loosed briefly for a final rebellion, which is decisively crushed, followed by the Great White Throne judgment and the new heavens and new earth.

Two sub-varieties: Historic Premillennialism (the ancient view — Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Ladd) and Dispensational Premillennialism (the modern Darbyite form — pretribulational rapture plus a literal kingdom centered on ethnic Israel).

Key texts: Rev 20:1–6 (read most naturally); Isa 11, 65:17–25; Zech 14; Rom 11:25–27; 1 Cor 15:20–28.

Modern proponents (historic, non-dispensational): George Eldon Ladd (*The Blessed Hope* 1956, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* 1972); Wayne Grudem (*Systematic Theology* 1994); Craig Blomberg; Douglas Moo; J. Barton Payne.

2. Amillennialism — No literal millennium; the “thousand years” is now

A- (Greek negative) + millennium

The core claim: The “thousand years” of Revelation 20 is a symbolic description of the entire church age between Christ’s first and second comings. During this age Christ is already reigning at the right hand of the Father, the martyred saints already reign with him in heaven, and Satan is already bound in the limited sense that he can no longer “deceive the nations” and prevent the gospel from spreading to all peoples (Matt 28:18–20). Christ returns once, in one glorious event, raises all the dead, judges all humanity, and ushers in the eternal new creation.

Key texts: Rev 20:1–6 (read symbolically, as all of Revelation is mostly symbolic); Matt 12:28–29 (the strong man bound); Col 2:15 (Christ disarmed the powers at the cross); John 5:28–29 (one resurrection of all the dead).

Modern proponents: Augustine, *City of God* XX (c. 425) — the founder of the view in its Western form. Then the medieval Western Church; Luther; Calvin; most of the Reformed tradition until the 20th century. Modern: Anthony Hoekema (*The Bible and the Future*, 1979); Kim Riddlebarger (*A Case for Amillennialism*, 2003); Sam Storms; R. C. Sproul; Michael Horton.

3. Postmillennialism — Christ returns *after* the millennium

Post- (Latin, “after”) + millennium

The core claim: The gospel will gradually conquer the world over a long period of time through the faithful preaching of the Church and the work of the Holy Spirit. This will produce an extended age of peace, prosperity, and Christian civilization (the millennium — whether literally 1,000 years or symbolic). At the end of that golden age Christ will return, the dead will be raised, and the final judgment and new creation will follow.

Key texts: Matt 13:31–33 (mustard seed and leaven — small beginnings that fill everything); Ps 2; Ps 110; 1 Cor 15:25 (“he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet”); Isa 2:2–4; Hab 2:14.

Modern proponents: Jonathan Edwards (*A History of the Work of Redemption*, 1774); Charles Hodge; B. B. Warfield (“The Millennium and the Apocalypse” 1904); Loraine Boettner (*The Millennium*, 1957); R. J. Rushdoony; Ken Gentry (*He Shall Have Dominion*, 1992); Doug Wilson; Keith Mathison.

A historical note: Premillennialism was the dominant position of the first three centuries of the Church. Amillennialism became the dominant view after Augustine (c. 425) and remained dominant in the West for 1,400 years. Postmillennialism flowered in 17th–19th century Britain and America. Dispensational premillennialism is a 19th-century invention (see Lesson 1). Every orthodox Christian tradition has within it defenders of all three.

PART 2 — HISTORIC PREMILLENNIALISM: THE ANCIENT VIEW

For the first 250 years after the Apostles, historic premillennialism was the church’s consensus. Called at the time *chiliasm* (from the Greek *chilia*, “a thousand”) or *millenarianism*, it was not a fringe position. The leading teachers of the second and third centuries taught it as the natural reading of Revelation 20 and the Old Testament prophecies of a messianic kingdom.

Papias of Hierapolis (c. 60–130)

BISHOP OF HIERAPOLIS IN ASIA MINOR • DISCIPLE OF THE APOSTLE JOHN • ONLY FRAGMENTS SURVIVE (QUOTED BY EUSEBIUS)

Earliest named source

Papias reported receiving the premillennial teaching directly from those who knew the Apostles. He taught a literal thousand-year kingdom of Christ on earth, following the bodily resurrection, in which the creation would be renewed to Edenic abundance. Eusebius (*Church History* III.39.12–13) — an amillennialist writing in the fourth century — called Papias “a man of very small understanding” for holding this view, but conceded that he did hold it and that “most of the ecclesiastical writers after him” followed him on this point.

Justin Martyr (c. 100–165)

BORN FLAVIA NEAPOLIS (SHECHEM) • PHILOSOPHER-CONVERT • MARTYRED AT ROME C. 165

Dialogue with Trypho

In his *Dialogue with Trypho* 80–81, Justin wrote: “I and many others are of this opinion, and believe that such will take place... I and others who are right-minded Christians on all points are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be built, adorned, and enlarged, as the prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah and others declare.” Justin’s casual “I and many others” indicates the mainstream mid-second-century view.

Irenaeus of Lyon (c. 130–c. 202)

AGAINST HERESIES V.32–36

Disciple of Polycarp (disciple of John)

Irenaeus devoted the final five chapters of his five-volume *Against Heresies* to defending a literal earthly millennial reign of Christ. He specifically traced this teaching through Polycarp to the Apostle John himself. He argued that a renewed creation with the saints reigning bodily is the only fit consummation for the work God began in Genesis 1; anything less short-circuits the promises. For Irenaeus, a purely spiritual or heavenly fulfillment would hand victory to Gnostic dualism, which denied the goodness of the material world.

Tertullian (c. 155–c. 220), Hippolytus (c. 170–c. 235), Lactantius (c. 250–c. 325), Methodius (d. 311), Victorinus (d. c. 304), Commodian

All of the above held and taught a literal earthly millennium. Lactantius in particular, tutor to Constantine's son, wrote a full account in his *Divine Institutes* VII. The Latin-speaking Western Church of the third century was majority premillennial.

The whole creation is to be renewed, that the saints may have a worthy habitation... This is the truth of the resurrection of the flesh; and our Lord, and the Apostles, and the Prophets have all taught the same thing.

— Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V.32 (c. 180)

Why did the Church eventually move away from premillennialism? A combination of reasons: (1) Origen's (c. 185–253) allegorical hermeneutic moved interpretation from literal to symbolic; (2) Constantine's conversion (AD 312) and the rise of a Christianized Rome seemed, to many, to be the kingdom already arriving; (3) Augustine's decisive *City of God* XX (c. 425) offered a powerful amillennial framework that swept the Latin West; (4) premillennialism became associated with certain extremist sects (the Montanists, later the Anabaptist Münster debacle of 1534) that made it embarrassing to mainstream churchmen.

None of these reasons is a decisive exegetical argument against premillennialism. Pleasant Springs Church believes the ancient view remains the best reading of Revelation 20 and the Old Testament prophetic texts, once we clear away Darby's 19th-century overlay of a separate Jewish kingdom and a pretribulational rapture.

PART 3 — AUGUSTINE AND THE RISE OF AMILLENNIALISM

Augustine of Hippo (354–430)

CITY OF GOD, BOOK XX, ESP. CHS. 7–9 (C. 425)

Founder of Western Amillennialism

In his early years Augustine had been sympathetic to a literal millennium, but by the time he wrote *City of God* he had abandoned it. Book XX of that enormous work presents the amillennial framework that would define the Western Church for the next thousand years. Augustine argued: (1) The “thousand years” of Revelation 20 is a symbolic expression for the whole period between Christ’s first and second comings — the age of the Church. (2) The “first resurrection” in Rev 20:5 is the soul’s spiritual resurrection at regeneration, when one who was dead in sin is made alive in Christ. (3) The “second resurrection” is the one bodily resurrection of all humanity on the last day. (4) The binding of Satan in Rev 20:1–3 refers to what Christ accomplished at the cross, when he disarmed the principalities and powers (Col 2:15) — a real but limited binding: Satan can no longer “deceive the nations” and keep them from receiving the gospel, but he still roams about like a roaring lion (1 Pet 5:8).

The strengths of the amillennial view:

- **One second coming.** It preserves the unity of the end: one coming, one resurrection of all humanity (John 5:28–29), one judgment, one new creation. This is the shape of eschatology throughout the epistles.
- **A fully spiritual reading of Revelation.** It treats Revelation 20 the same way it treats the rest of the book: symbolically, apocalyptically, not as a timeline.
- **It respects the unity of the people of God.** There is no separate literal kingdom for ethnic Israel running in parallel with the Church; there is one covenant people in Christ.
- **It takes seriously the “already” of the kingdom.** Christ is already King. We are not waiting for him to start reigning.

Why Pleasant Springs does not adopt the amillennial position, while respecting it:

- Revelation 20 appears deliberately to distinguish “the first resurrection” (of martyrs who reign with Christ) from a second resurrection (of the rest of the dead after the thousand years). Reading the first as spiritual regeneration and the second as bodily resurrection strains the parallel structure of the text.

- Isaiah 65:17–25, which describes an age when “no more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days... the lion shall eat straw like the ox... they shall not labor in vain,” is not quite the eternal new creation (where there is no more death at all, Rev 21:4) but does describe a glorified earthly age between now and the final consummation.

- Romans 11:25–27 promises a future conversion of “all Israel” which, on a pure amillennial reading, has to be absorbed into the current church age without a distinct moment of fulfillment.

We want these texts to do all the work they appear to be doing. Historic premillennialism lets them.

PART 4 — POSTMILLENNIALISM: THE OPTIMISTIC TRADITION

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758)

A HISTORY OF THE WORK OF REDEMPTION (1774, POSTHUMOUS); *SOME THOUGHTS CONCERNING THE REVIVAL* (1742)

American Postmillennialist

Edwards read the Great Awakening of the 1730s as the leading edge of a gospel triumph that would, in God’s time, fill the earth. The millennium for Edwards was not a literal thousand years following Christ’s return, but an extended future age of Christian civilization produced by the ordinary means of grace — preaching, conversion, the

Lord's Supper, prayer, missions. Edwards expected America in particular to play a providential role.

B. B. Warfield (1851–1921)

PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, 1887–1921 • “THE MILLENNIUM AND THE APOCALYPSE” (1904)

Classical Princeton Postmill

Warfield argued that Revelation 20 describes not a future earthly millennium but the triumphant state of the martyrs *already* reigning with Christ in heaven. The millennium is the current era — specifically, Warfield held, a long future era of gospel success before the return. Warfield's postmillennialism was optimistic about the Spirit's work in history, and it shaped much of Reformed missionary thought in the early 20th century.

The strengths of postmillennialism:

- It takes the Great Commission (Matt 28:18–20) and the promise of the kingdom's growth (Matt 13:31–33) with utter seriousness. The gospel is expected to succeed.
- It generates missionary zeal. If Christ is returning *before* the gospel has filled the earth (as premillennialism says), the work of missions can feel like a delaying action. Postmillennialism makes it the very means of bringing the kingdom to fullness.

Why Pleasant Springs does not adopt the postmillennial position:

- The New Testament seems to predict that the last age will be a time of apostasy and tribulation, not a gospel-won civilization (Matt 24:21–24; 2 Thess 2:1–12; 2 Tim 3:1–5; Rev 13).
- The historical experiment has not borne out optimistic predictions. The 20th century, which Victorian postmillennialists expected to be the golden age of Christian civilization,

was the bloodiest century in human history and saw European Christendom collapse.

- That said, we thank God for the postmillennialist's confidence in the gospel's power. A half-postmill optimism about mission and a half-premill realism about suffering may in fact be the proper biblical posture.

PART 5 — REVELATION 20 VERSE BY VERSE

Every millennial view stands or falls on its reading of this chapter. Let us walk through it.

Greek NT (Rev 20:1–3): καὶ εἶδον ἄγγελον καταβαίνοντα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἔχοντα τὴν κλεῖν τῆς ἀβύσσου καὶ ἄλυσιν μεγάλην ἐπὶ τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ. καὶ ἐκράτησεν τὸν δράκοντα, ὁ ὄφεις ὁ ἀρχαῖος, ὃς ἐστὶν Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς, καὶ ἔδησεν αὐτὸν χίλια ἔτη, καὶ ἔβαλεν αὐτὸν εἰς τὴν ἄβυσσον.

Revelation 20:1–3 (ESV): “Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.”

Premillennial: Satan is bound in a real and comprehensive sense, only after Christ's return at the end of the present age. During the millennium Satan has no influence on world affairs. **Amillennial:** Satan is bound in a limited sense (cannot prevent gospel spread) at the cross / resurrection, not in a complete sense. **Postmillennial:** Satan is progressively bound as the gospel advances.

Greek NT (Rev 20:4–6): καὶ εἶδον θρόνους, καὶ ἐκάθισαν ἐπ' αὐτούς... καὶ ἔζησαν καὶ ἐβασίλευσαν μετὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ χίλια ἔτη. οἱ λοιποὶ τῶν νεκρῶν οὐκ ἔζησαν ἄχρι τελεσθῆ τὰ χίλια ἔτη. αὕτη ἡ ἀνάστασις ἡ πρώτη. μακάριος καὶ ἅγιος ὁ ἔχων μέρος ἐν τῇ ἀναστάσει τῇ πρώτῃ.

Revelation 20:4–6 (ESV, selected): “Then I saw thrones... they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were

ended. **This is the first resurrection.** Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection!”

Premillennial: The “first resurrection” is a real bodily resurrection of the martyrs and faithful believers at Christ’s return. They reign with him during the millennium. The “rest of the dead” are raised at the second resurrection after the thousand years. **Amillennial:** The “first resurrection” is the soul’s entrance into conscious fellowship with Christ at death (or at regeneration). The single bodily resurrection of both righteous and wicked happens together at the end. **Weakness of amill here:** the same Greek verb (*ezēsan*, “they came to life”) is used in both v. 4 (of the first group) and v. 5 (of the “rest of the dead”). On the amill reading, the same verb must mean two entirely different things in consecutive verses — a spiritual coming-to-life in v. 4 and a bodily resurrection in v. 5. This is the textual problem that leads many careful amillennialists (e.g., Hendriksen) to wrestle intensely with the passage.

Greek NT (Rev 20:7–10): καὶ ὅταν τελεσθῇ τὰ χίλια ἔτη, λυθήσεται ὁ Σατανᾶς... καὶ ἐξελεύσεται πλανῆσαι τὰ ἔθνη τὰ ἐν ταῖς τέσσαρσιν γωνίαις τῆς γῆς, τὸν Γὼγ καὶ Μαγὼγ...

Revelation 20:7–10 (ESV, selected): “And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle... And fire came down from heaven and consumed them, and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire...”

All three views: At the end of the millennium (however defined), Satan is loosed for a brief final rebellion, which is instantly and decisively crushed. This is the definitive end of evil.

Greek NT (Rev 20:11–15): καὶ εἶδον θρόνον μέγαν λευκὸν... καὶ ἐκρίθησαν οἱ νεκροὶ ἐκ τῶν γεγραμμένων ἐν τοῖς βιβλίοις κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῶν.

Revelation 20:11–15 (ESV): “Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it... And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done... And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

This is the Great White Throne judgment: the final, universal, eschatological judgment of all humanity. All three millennial views affirm this as a singular, future, bodily event. On the

premillennial reading, it happens at the end of the millennium; on the amillennial and postmillennial readings, it happens at the end of the church age.

PART 6 — THE ISRAEL/CHURCH QUESTION: FOUR FRAMEWORKS

Alongside the millennial question, Christians have divided into four main positions on how Israel and the Church relate. This is the question on which Darby's dispensationalism most sharply departs from the historic Christian consensus.

1. Dispensationalism (Darby, 1830)

Israel and the Church are two distinct peoples with distinct programs

Core claim: God has two peoples with two programs: Israel (God's earthly people, with earthly promises of land and national kingdom) and the Church (God's heavenly people, with heavenly promises). The Church age is a "parenthesis" between the 69th and 70th weeks of Daniel 9. In the coming millennium, God resumes his earthly program with Israel, fulfilling the Old Testament land and temple promises literally to ethnic, national Israel.

Proponents: Darby, Scofield, Chafer, Walvoord, Ryrie, Dwight Pentecost, John MacArthur; and in softer form "progressive dispensationalists" like Craig Blaising and Darrell Bock.

Why Pleasant Springs declines: The New Testament nowhere teaches two distinct peoples. Ephesians 2:11–22 explicitly says Christ has made the two (Jew and Gentile) into one new humanity. Galatians 3:28–29 says all who are in Christ are Abraham's offspring and heirs. The "parenthesis" reading of Daniel 9 is an innovation with no precedent before Darby.

2. Covenant Theology (Reformed, 1600s onward)

The Church is the new and true Israel in Christ

Core claim: God has always had *one* people across the Testaments, under *one* covenant of grace administered differently in different eras. Ethnic Israel in the Old Testament was a type or shadow of the true people of God, which is now comprised of all who are in Christ — Jew and Gentile alike. The Old Testament land and temple promises are fulfilled in Christ and spiritualized in the Church; they are not awaiting a second literal fulfillment.

Proponents: The Westminster Confession (1647); the Three Forms of Unity (Dutch Reformed); Calvin; Bullinger; Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants* (1677); modern: Michael Horton, Kim Riddlebarger, Ligon Duncan, R. Scott Clark.

Where it faces pressure: Romans 9–11, especially 11:25–32, seems to promise a future distinct conversion of ethnic Israel, which strict covenant theology sometimes struggles to accommodate. Most modern covenant theologians do affirm this future conversion but read it as the Israel-remnant joining the Church, not as a separate national program.

3. New Covenant Theology / Progressive Covenantalism

The New Covenant of Jeremiah 31 is the frame; Israel fulfilled in Christ, Gentiles grafted in

Core claim: A middle position between dispensationalism and classical covenant theology. The key to biblical theology is the New Covenant prophesied in Jeremiah 31:31–34, inaugurated at Christ’s death (“this cup is the new covenant in my blood,” Luke 22:20). The Church is not a parenthesis, but it is also not a simple replacement of Israel. All Old Testament promises find their yes and amen in Christ (2 Cor 1:20); the Church is the New Covenant people, including a remnant of ethnic Israel and grafted-in Gentiles.

Proponents: Peter Gentry & Stephen Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant* (2012, 2018); Tom Schreiner; Jason Meyer; Douglas Moo (partially). Various Reformed Baptist theologians.

Pleasant Springs finds much to commend here. We believe the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31 is in fact the proper frame for thinking about Israel and the Church.

4. Historic Premillennial + Moderate Covenantal (Pleasant Springs' position)

One people of God in Christ — with a real future for ethnic Israel

Core claim: There is one people of God in Christ across all ages (covenantal). The Old Covenant people (Israel) and the New Covenant people (Church) are not two parallel programs but one olive tree (Rom 11:17–24). Gentiles have been grafted into the one tree; unbelieving ethnic Israel has been cut off from the tree; but at the end, the Deliverer will come from Zion, the hardening of Israel will be lifted, and “all Israel” (the elect remnant of ethnic Israel, gathered at last) will be saved through faith in Jesus Christ (Rom 11:25–27). This salvation of ethnic Israel happens in history, as part of the one people of God, and may be associated with Christ’s premillennial return and the inauguration of the kingdom age described in Isaiah 11 and 65.

Proponents: George Ladd; J. Barton Payne; many Asian and African evangelicals; elements in N. T. Wright (who is not quite premill but is strongly one-people-of-God).

What this means practically: We pray for the salvation of Jewish people not because they belong to a distinct covenant, but because Paul’s heart-cry in Romans 9:1–5 is ours too — they are kinsmen of Jesus according to the flesh, and the promises do not fail. We reject the excesses of both dispensational Christian Zionism (which sometimes baptizes modern state-of-Israel politics as biblical prophecy) and of classical supersessionism (which sometimes implies God is done with ethnic Israel). The gospel is for the Jew first and also for the Greek (Rom 1:16).

PART 7 — ROMANS 9–11: PAUL ON ISRAEL

Author: Paul. **Date:** c. AD 56–57, from Corinth. **Audience:** a mixed Jewish and Gentile Christian congregation in Rome, largely founded by unknown missionaries (perhaps Jews who had heard the gospel at Pentecost, Acts 2). **Occasion:** Paul was preparing to visit Rome on his

way to Spain and wrote this letter — his most systematic theological work — to prepare the ground.

Why Romans 9–11 matters: This three-chapter section is the single most sustained New Testament treatment of the relationship between ethnic Israel and the Church. Every framework above has to deal with it.

Greek NT (Rom 9:1–5, selected): εὐχόμεν γὰρ ἀνάθεμα εἶναι αὐτὸς ἐγὼ ἀπὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου τῶν συγγενῶν μου κατὰ σάρκα, οἵτινές εἰσιν Ἰσραηλῖται...

Romans 9:1–5 (ESV, selected): “For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever.”

Note Paul’s agony. Writing a decade or two after Christ, Paul the Jewish Christian is in anguish that most of his people have rejected their Messiah. The question of Romans 9–11 is not a speculative puzzle; it is Paul’s broken heart for Israel.

Romans 9:6–29 — Paul’s answer begins. “It is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel” (9:6). There has always been a distinction within Israel between physical descendants and true children of promise. Isaac, not Ishmael; Jacob, not Esau. The promises attach to God’s sovereign call, not to physical ancestry alone. God has always had a remnant.

Romans 9:30–10:21 — The present paradox. Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained righteousness (by faith in Christ); Israel who pursued righteousness (by law) has not attained it. Why? Because they have stumbled over the stumbling stone, Christ (9:32–33). “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (10:4). Paul grieves but does not lose hope: “faith comes by hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (10:17).

Romans 11:1–24 — The olive tree. “I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means!” (11:1). Paul himself is an Israelite. There is a present elect remnant. But beyond

the remnant, the partial hardening of Israel is for a purpose: so that the full number of the Gentiles might come in (11:25). Paul uses the beautiful image of an olive tree (11:17–24): Israel is the cultivated tree; unbelieving Israelites are branches broken off; Gentiles are wild olive shoots grafted in; and God is able to graft the natural branches back in when their unbelief ends.

Greek NT (Rom 11:25–27): οὐ γὰρ θέλω ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν, ἀδελφοί, τὸ μυστήριον τοῦτο... ὅτι πώρωςις ἀπὸ μέρους τῷ Ἰσραὴλ γέγονεν ἄχρι οὗ τὸ πλήρωμα τῶν ἐθνῶν εἰσέλθῃ, καὶ οὕτως πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ σωθήσεται, καθὼς γέγραπται· ἥξει ἐκ Σιών ὁ ῥυόμενος, ἀποστρέψει ἀσεβείας ἀπὸ Ἰακώβ.

Romans 11:25–27 (ESV): “Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob; and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.’”

Three main readings of “all Israel will be saved”:

1. All elect, Jew and Gentile together, across history. Calvin’s reading, and some strict covenant theologians. “Israel” in 11:26 = the whole people of God. *Problem:* Paul has been using “Israel” in the preceding verses to mean ethnic Israel specifically.

2. The present remnant of ethnic Israel through the church age. The conversion of Jewish people continues throughout history and reaches its final number at the end. *Problem:* Paul’s language (“this mystery... a partial hardening... until... and in this way”) strongly implies a decisive future moment.

3. A future, large-scale conversion of ethnic Israel at the end of the age, just before or at Christ’s return. This has been the majority evangelical reading since John Calvin’s colleague Theodore Beza, endorsed by Jonathan Edwards, the Puritans, Charles Hodge, Charles Spurgeon, George Ladd, John Stott, and N. T. Wright. Pleasant Springs takes this reading.

Romans 11:30–32 summarizes Paul’s logic: Israel’s disobedience has meant mercy for the Gentiles; the Gentiles’ coming-in will mean mercy for Israel; “God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all” (11:32). Paul ends with a doxology, not a timetable (11:33–36).

PART 8 — THE NEW COVENANT (JEREMIAH 31:31–34)

LXX (Jer 38:31–34 [Heb 31:31–34]): ἰδοὺ ἡμέραι ἔρχονται, φησὶν Κύριος, καὶ διαθήσομαι τῷ οἴκῳ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ τῷ οἴκῳ Ἰούδα διαθήκην καινὴν... δώσω νόμους μου εἰς τὴν διάνοιαν αὐτῶν καὶ ἐπὶ καρδίας αὐτῶν γράψω αὐτούς, καὶ ἔσομαι αὐτοῖς εἰς θεόν, καὶ αὐτοὶ ἔσονται μοι εἰς λαόν.

Jeremiah 31:31–34 (ESV): “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah... I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

This is the seed-prophecy that germinates in the Gospels and blooms in the epistles. Jesus at the Last Supper: “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:20). Paul: “he has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant” (2 Cor 3:6). Hebrews quotes the whole Jeremiah passage at length (Heb 8:8–12) and concludes that the old covenant is obsolete: “What is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away” (Heb 8:13).

Two observations that are decisive for the Israel/Church question:

1. The New Covenant was explicitly made “with the house of Israel and the house of Judah” — that is, with God’s covenant people. When Gentile Christians enter the New Covenant, they are being brought into the Israel of God, not running on a parallel track. This is Paul’s whole point in Galatians 3:29 and Romans 11:17–24.

2. The New Covenant makes one people. If the New Covenant is fully inaugurated now and includes both Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ (which every New Testament writer affirms), then there is no biblical warrant for a separate, parallel, future “earthly” covenant program that runs alongside it.

This is why Pleasant Springs is not dispensational. The Israel/Church distinction that makes dispensationalism work requires treating the New Covenant as if it has a Jewish fulfillment (future, literal, earthly) alongside a separate Christian fulfillment (present, spiritual, heavenly). The New Testament simply does not read this way. One New Covenant; one people of God; one olive tree with Gentiles grafted in and the future hope of the natural branches being grafted back.

PART 9 — THE 144,000 AND THE GREAT MULTITUDE (REVELATION 7, 14)

Two passages in Revelation are frequently cited in this debate. Both come from John’s apocalyptic vision of the redeemed people of God.

Greek NT (Rev 7:4): καὶ ἤκουσα τὸν ἀριθμὸν τῶν ἐσφραγισμένων, ἑκατὸν τεσσαράκοντα τέσσαρες χιλιάδες, ἐσφραγισμένοι ἐκ πάσης φυλῆς υἰῶν Ἰσραήλ.

Revelation 7:4 (ESV): “And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel.”

Greek NT (Rev 7:9): μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοὺ ὄχλος πολὺς, ὃν ἀριθμῆσαι αὐτὸν οὐδεὶς ἐδύνατο, ἐκ παντὸς ἔθνους καὶ φυλῶν καὶ λαῶν καὶ γλωσσῶν, ἐστῶτες ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου.

Revelation 7:9 (ESV): “After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.”

Dispensational reading: The 144,000 are literal ethnic Jews evangelists during the tribulation; the great multitude is the raptured/saved Gentile Church. Two distinct groups.

Idealist/Covenantal reading: The 144,000 ($12 \times 12 \times 1000$) and the great multitude are *two views of one reality*. The 144,000 is the same people of God described from the standpoint of its covenantal completeness (twelve tribes fully assembled); the great multitude is the same people of God described from the standpoint of its ethnic diversity (every tribe, tongue, people, nation). John’s apocalyptic method is to describe the same thing twice from two angles — as he also does with the woman clothed with the sun (Rev 12) and the new Jerusalem (Rev 21).

Pleasant Springs reads with the second, which is also the majority view of ancient and modern scholarship outside dispensationalism. The 144,000 are not a distinct ethnic group saved separately; they are the redeemed, pictured as the true Israel, gathered from every nation.

Evidence for this reading: (a) The list of twelve tribes in Rev 7:5–8 is *irregular*: it includes Joseph and Manasseh but omits Dan and Ephraim, and puts Judah first (the tribe of Christ). This is not a census of ethnic Israel; it is a theological portrait. (b) Rev 14:1–5 describes the 144,000 standing on Mount Zion with the Lamb, singing a new song, having been “redeemed from the earth” and “redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb.” These are the redeemed universally, not a literal ethnic group.

PART 10 — PLEASANT SPRINGS' POSITION SUMMARIZED

WHERE PLEASANT SPRINGS STANDS ON THESE THREE QUESTIONS

On the millennium: We are historic premillennialists. Christ will return personally, bodily, and visibly before a real reign over a renewed earth. During that reign the martyrs and faithful saints will reign with him. Satan will be bound, then briefly loosed for a final rebellion, then cast forever into the lake of fire. The Great White Throne judgment follows, and then the new heavens and new earth. We hold

this view tentatively and respectfully; we believe amillennialism and postmillennialism are also orthodox, and we worship with brothers and sisters in both traditions.

On Israel and the Church: We hold a historic-premillennial covenantal view. There is one people of God across all ages, now united in Jesus Christ under the New Covenant inaugurated at his cross. The Church is not a parenthesis between Israel's old and new programs; it is the New Covenant people itself, with Gentiles grafted into the olive tree of Israel. Unbelieving ethnic Israel has been cut off in this age; but Paul's clear promise (Rom 11:25–27) is that “all Israel will be saved” — a future, large-scale turning of ethnic Israel to their Messiah, likely at or near Christ's return, as the natural branches are grafted back into their own olive tree.

On the 144,000: It is a symbolic portrait of the one redeemed people of God, twelve times twelve times a thousand — the fullness of the tribes of spiritual Israel — which is the same reality as the innumerable multitude from every nation (Rev 7:9). One people, two descriptions.

What we are not: not dispensational (we do not teach two distinct peoples of God or a pretribulational rapture); not strict supersessionist (we do not teach that God is finished with ethnic Israel); not postmillennial (we do not expect a pre-Return Christian golden age).

What we ask of our members: hold your view humbly, respect those who differ, love your Jewish neighbors, pray for the salvation of all Israel, trust the Lord of the millennium to sort out what we cannot, and keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, who was, and is, and is to come.

Greek NT (Eph 2:14–16): αὐτὸς γάρ ἐστιν ἡ εἰρήνη ἡμῶν, ὁ ποιήσας τὰ ἀμφοτέρα ἐν καὶ τὸ μεσότοιχον τοῦ φραγμοῦ λύσας... ἵνα τοὺς δύο κτίσῃ ἐν αὐτῷ εἰς ἓνα καινὸν ἄνθρωπον ποιῶν εἰρήνην.

Ephesians 2:14–16 (ESV): “For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility... that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace.”

THE MILLENNIUM, ISRAEL, AND THE CHURCH IN ONE PAGE

The three millennial views answer one question: when does Christ return in relation to the millennium? *Premill*: before. *Amill*: there is no literal millennium; Christ reigns through the church age. *Postmill*: after a long age of gospel triumph.

The four Israel/Church frameworks answer another: how do Israel and the Church relate? *Dispensational*: two distinct peoples. *Covenantal*: one people; Church is the true Israel. *New Covenant Theology*: one people under the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31. *Historic Premillennial Covenantal*: one people, with a real future conversion of ethnic Israel at Christ's return (Pleasant Springs' position).

Revelation 20 describes a thousand-year reign of Christ with his saints, after Satan is bound, preceded by the first resurrection (of the martyrs, at Christ's return), followed by Satan's brief release and the Great White Throne judgment. Pleasant Springs reads this chapter most naturally as a real, future, earthly reign — the historic premillennial reading.

Romans 9–11 is the heart of the Israel/Church question. Paul teaches one people of God in Christ (covenantal), a partial present hardening of ethnic Israel (11:25), and a future “all Israel will be saved” (11:26) — a real ethnic-Israel conversion as the natural branches are grafted back into their own olive tree.

The New Covenant of Jeremiah 31, inaugurated at Christ's cross and celebrated at every Lord's Supper, is the proper frame. One covenant, one people, Jew and Gentile together, under one Messiah.

Brothers and Sisters in Every View

Faithful Christians have held all three millennial views and all four Israel/Church frameworks. Augustine was amillennial. Jonathan Edwards was postmillennial. Charles Spurgeon was historic premillennial. Darby and Scofield were dispensational. None of these men is our enemy. We teach what we teach because we believe the text of Scripture most naturally reads this way, and

we are willing to explain ourselves and be corrected. But we remember Paul's own doxology at the end of his great Israel/Church discussion:

Greek NT (Rom 11:33–36): ὁ βάθος πλούτου καὶ σοφίας καὶ γνώσεως θεοῦ· ὡς ἀνεξεραύνητα τὰ κρίματα αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀνεξιχνίαστοι αἱ ὁδοὶ αὐτοῦ.

Romans 11:33–36 (ESV): “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!... For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”

PRAYER

Faithful God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, we thank you that your promises have not failed. You have grafted us, Gentile branches, into the olive tree of Israel, that we might share in the root that sustains us. Keep us from arrogance toward the natural branches that are now broken off, remembering that they are branches of our own tree, and that you are able to graft them back in. Teach us to love Jewish people as your covenant kinsmen according to the flesh. Hasten the day when the Deliverer comes from Zion and all Israel is saved. And bring us at last, Jew and Gentile together under one Messiah, to the city that has no temple because the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple, and the nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Come quickly, Lord Jesus. Amen.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read Revelation 20:1–6 slowly. Does the text seem to describe one future event or two? Does the “first resurrection” read most naturally as a bodily resurrection parallel to the second, or as spiritual regeneration? What does the text itself say?

2. Read Romans 11:17–24 (the olive tree image). If the natural branches (ethnic Israel) have been broken off, and Gentile branches have been grafted in, what does Paul say about the possibility of the natural branches being grafted back in? What does this imply for how Christians should relate to Jewish people today?

3. Dispensationalism teaches that there are two distinct peoples of God — Israel and the Church — with two distinct programs. Read Ephesians 2:11–22. How does Paul describe what Christ has done between Jew and Gentile? Is this one people or two?

4. The New Covenant of Jeremiah 31 is explicitly made “with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.” Hebrews 8 quotes this and applies it to the Church. Are these two separate covenants or one? What does Hebrews 8:13 say about the old covenant?

5. Pleasant Springs teaches historic premillennialism. What attracts you to this view, and what worries you about it? If you were pressed by a friend to defend an amillennial or postmillennial reading instead, could you do it fairly?

FURTHER READING

- **On the millennium (comparative):** Darrell L. Bock (ed.), *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, Zondervan, 1999 — Craig Blaising (dispensational), Kenneth Gentry (postmill), Robert Strimple (amill)
- Robert G. Clouse (ed.), *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, IVP, 1977 — the classic four-view book, still widely used
- **Historic premillennial:** George Eldon Ladd, *The Blessed Hope*, Eerdmans, 1956 — and *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, Eerdmans, 1972
- Craig L. Blomberg and Sung Wook Chung (eds.), *A Case for Historic Premillennialism*, Baker Academic, 2009

- Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 2nd ed., Zondervan, 2020 — ch. 55 defends historic premillennialism
- **Amillennial:** Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, Eerdmans, 1979 — the modern standard presentation
- Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, Baker, 2003 (rev. 2013)
- Sam Storms, *Kingdom Come: The Amillennial Alternative*, Mentor, 2013
- **Postmillennial:** Loraine Boettner, *The Millennium*, P&R, 1957
- Kenneth L. Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, ICE, 1992 (rev. 2009)
- Keith A. Mathison, *Postmillennialism: An Eschatology of Hope*, P&R, 1999
- **On Israel and the Church:** Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, Baker, 1993
- Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 2nd ed., Crossway, 2018 — major statement of progressive covenantalism
- O. Palmer Robertson, *The Israel of God: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, P&R, 2000 — Reformed covenantal
- N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, Fortress, 2013 — sections on Romans 9–11 and covenant
- **Romans 9–11:** Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, rev. ed. 2018 — the best English-language commentary
- John Piper, *The Justification of God*, Baker Academic, 1983/2008 — close study of Romans 9
- **On the early church’s premillennialism:** Charles E. Hill, *Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Millennial Thought in Early Christianity*, 2nd ed., Eerdmans, 2001

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